

The Emotional Underpinnings of Citizens' Populism: How Anger, Fear, and Sadness Affect Populist Attitudes

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Abstract

This paper explores the dynamics between negative emotions elicited by the economic crisis and populism. We theorize different expectations regarding the relationship between anger, fear and sadness on the one hand, and populist attitudes on the other. Anger is expected to be the main emotional driver of populism. This is because perceptions of injustice, moral judgements, blame attribution, and controllability are defining components of this negative emotion and at the same time fundamental elements of populist rhetoric. Feelings of fear and sadness, conversely, are expected to have negative or no effects. Our results, based on a three-wave panel from Spain, reveal that differences in anger have a significant influence on populist attitudes both across and within individuals. Fear and sadness show minor or non-significant effects. The paper discusses the implications of these findings.

Introduction

Populist movements have often been depicted as highly emotionally charged episodes (Fieschi 2004). The anxiety provoked by far-reaching societal change, for example, has been recurrently associated with populist upsurges. Similarly, anger against the establishment has become a hallmark of the anti-austerity protests with strong populist tones that we have seen in the wake of the economic crisis, such as those held by the Spanish and Greek *Indignados*. Perhaps most notably, the recurrent image of the “losers of globalization” voting out of fear and rage has infused both journalistic and scholarly accounts of support for Trump, Brexit, and the radical right, while expressions such as “status anxiety”, “cultural anxiety”, or “angry white men” have become common currency. Indeed, emotions have been shown to be related to a broad array of political attitudes and behaviors (see, e.g., Brader and Markus 2013; Demertzis 2014; Neuman et al. 2007; Redlawsk 2006). However, despite these and analogous widespread characterizations, the alleged link between populism and citizens’ emotions has barely been subject to systematic empirical scrutiny in the burgeoning literature on populism, which rarely delves into the analysis of discrete emotional reactions (see Demertzis 2006).

This paper attempts to fill this gap by assessing the relationship between citizens’ emotions and mass support for populism in the wake of the financial crisis. Informed by research on the psychology of emotions, we explore the relationship between three different negative emotions typically generated by the crisis (anger, fear, and sadness) and populist attitudes. The case of Spain serves as a relevant scenario to test the intuitions that lie at the core of this paper. Two examples may serve to illustrate these. It is hard not to connect Spaniards’ widespread feelings of irritation and frustration with the rise of the political protests called the 15M or the *Indignados* (the indignant) that took place in 2011. As previous analyses have emphasized, the role of emotions was crucial in explaining the emergence of the 15M movement (Alvarez et al. 2015), with moral outrage and anger being prevalent emotions motivating these protests (Likki 2012; Perugorria and Tejerina 2013). Eventually, this process of social mobilization served to engender a left-wing political party called Podemos (“We can”).

While anger characterized the upsurge of the *Indignados* movement and its subsequent institutionalization in the form of the political party Podemos, fear could have been a constraining factor for this party's success in the 2016 general elections. Polls consistently predicted an excellent result for Podemos, which was expected to overtake the Socialist party and lead the opposition. Spanish citizens were called to vote on June 26, only 48 hours after the result of the Brexit referendum was known. On June 24 the Spanish stock market IBEX fell 12%. While the consequences of the Brexit vote were still to be seen and felt fully, the result of this referendum came as a shock and provoked uncertainty. Although there is no data reflecting the emotional reaction of Spanish citizens to this event, one might well expect that Brexit triggered feelings of anxiety and fear. Participation in the June 2016 elections fell almost 4 percentage points compared to the previous election in December 2015; the Popular Party (PP) increased its number of votes and seats, and Podemos fell short of its own expectations, losing over one million voters. While this electoral result may of course have many alternative explanations, one might also consider to what extent fear may have demobilized Podemos voters.

While we leave the relationship between economic hardship and emotions out of the scope of this paper (see Davou and Demertzis 2014), our analysis will allow us to assess to what extent variations in the levels of negative emotions (anger, fear, sadness) are related to changes in the levels of populist attitudes both across individuals and over time. Drawing on appraisal theories of emotions, we hypothesize that populist attitudes are primarily related to feelings of anger. We argue that the appraisal pattern of anger – the perception of a frustrating event as being certain, externally caused, and unfair – bears a close resemblance to some of populism's defining components, particularly its strong moral outlook and external attribution of blame. Using an online panel survey carried out in Spain between 2014 and 2016, we make separate estimations of the effects of distinct negative emotions both between and within individuals. Our findings support the expectation that anger, not fear or sadness, is the emotional reaction that most strongly correlates with support for populism.

The rest of the article continues as follows: we start by reviewing research on the origins and consequences of emotional reactions. Next, we elaborate our expectations

regarding the relationship between populism and emotional reactions to the crisis. Following the description of the data and methods to be used, we then report the results of the empirical analysis, which are discussed in the concluding section.

The Distinct Antecedents and Consequences of Discrete Negative Emotions

Most extant work on the influence of emotions on political judgment and behavior has been largely guided by the theory of affective intelligence advanced by Marcus and MacKuen (Marcus et al. 2000; 1993). This theory conceives emotions as structured along the dimensions of enthusiasm and anxiety; these are in turn connected with the disposition system and the surveillance system, respectively. Feelings of enthusiasm are triggered by situations in which personal goals are being met. They reinforce individuals' existing preferences and encourage them to follow habitual patterns of behavior. In contrast, feelings of anxiety are activated when personal goals are under threat or have already been frustrated. As a result, normal routines are interrupted, reliance on predispositions is relaxed, and attention is diverted toward contemporaneous information. Emotions thus serve an adaptive function, as they adjust cognitive processing and behaviors according to environmental requirements.

Affective intelligence belongs to the family of dimensional theories of emotions, as it distinguishes two orthogonal dimensions on the basis of their valence. The disposition system concerns positively-valenced emotions, encompassing affective states of enthusiasm with varying degrees of arousal, such as happiness, hope, gratitude, and pride. In contrast, the surveillance system is defined by negative emotions with varying degrees of anxiety, such as sadness, fear, anger, and shame. This approach acknowledges the fact that emotional experiences with the same valence tend to correlate, i.e. feelings of anger, fear, or sadness appear to co-occur when their levels are measured across individuals and situations.

However, the case can be made that there might exist relevant differences as to the antecedents and consequences of distinct emotions within the same valence dimension. Not all individuals react equally to identical negative stimuli, and their different reactions may produce different effects on preferences and behavior. Indeed, the

original theory of affective intelligence has been revised in later developments to integrate a new dimension of emotions, aversion, tapping feelings of anger, disgust, contempt, and hatred (MacKuen et al. 2010; Marcus et al. 2000). Like anxiety, aversion comprises a set of “negative” affective states—i.e., it is brought about by goal-inconsistent event—yet it is nonetheless aligned with the disposition system, like enthusiasm. This is because aversion is triggered in situations of known, recurrent threat, while anxiety arises in conditions of possible but uncertain risk. Because the disagreeable event that is being confronted is already familiar, states of aversion promote commitment to one’s predispositions and reliance on learned strategies, rather than the reconsideration of previous convictions and a search of new information—which are typically encouraged when anxiety is evoked.

Other theoretical approaches allow finer-grained discrimination between negative (or positive) emotions. In particular, cognitive appraisal theories have greatly contributed to the understanding of the origins and consequences of discrete emotions (Frijda et al. 1989; Lazarus 1991; Roseman 1996; Smith and Ellsworth 1985). The basic tenet of appraisal theories is that people’s reactions to stimuli depend to a large extent on the conscious and preconscious interpretations that each individual makes of a situation. The assumption is that cognition and affect do not constitute separate systems, as posited by early psychological paradigms, but are intimately interrelated. Thus, the way in which people appraise the environment in connection with their personal goals ultimately determines which particular emotion is aroused.

Although scholars have not reached an agreement on the list of appraisal dimensions that explain the emergence of the most recurrent distinct emotions, a number of themes recur in their proposals. For example, in one of the earliest attempts to list them, Smith and Ellsworth (1985) included six dimensions (pleasantness, anticipated effort, certainty, attentional activity, responsibility, and control) that account for 15 positive and negative emotions. Lazarus (1991) identified three primary appraisals (goal relevance, goal congruency, and type of ego involvement) and three secondary appraisals (blame or credit, coping potential, and future expectations) to predict ten emotions. And Roseman et al. (1996) were able to differentiate 17 different emotions from seven components (unexpectedness, situational state, motivational state, probability, control potential, and agency).

Not all dimensions, however, are relevant for distinguishing between any pair of emotions. In the case at hand, anger, fear, and sadness may be distinguished on the basis of three main dimensions: *certainty*, concerning whether the (negative) event is certain to happen or not; *responsibility*, which refers to whether the situation is caused by some identifiable actor or by circumstances beyond anyone's control; and *efficacy*, regarding one's ability to influence the event.

Anger is likely to arise if a threat to personal rewards is certain to occur or has already materialized as a consequence of deliberate or negligent behavior by an external agent that is in control, and hence blameworthy; but at the same time it is also accompanied by the sense that one has some capacity to deal with the situation. Crucially for our argument, anger is a moral emotion: it is heightened by the perception of an event as unfair or illegitimate, as a demeaning offense against one's self-esteem (Lazarus 1991; see also Smith and Ellsworth 1985; Weiss et al. 1999). Contrarily, fear is caused by a highly uncertain threat. As a consequence of the very uncertainty regarding the likelihood and nature of the danger being faced, fear is usually linked to appraisals of situational control (the perception that the situation is the result of circumstances and that no specific agent can be blamed for it) and low efficacy (the individual has no clear idea of how the threat can be prevented).¹ Sadness is also associated with situational control and low coping potential, but, unlike fear, it is characterized by the certainty of an irrevocable loss and the person's inability to restore the harm (Lazarus 1991).

Do these distinct appraisal patterns translate into different responses to negative stimuli? A large body of research suggests that they do, and the effects are also visible in the political realm, even if some findings remain inconsistent across studies, and differences between "similar" but discrete emotions are in some cases hardly discernable (Angie et al. 2011; Brader and Marcus 2013). Much of the research in this field has focused on the contrast between anger and fear—or the more encompassing aversion and anxiety—as their respective patterns of appraisal are the opposite of one another in the aforementioned key dimensions.

¹ Although some authors have indicated important differences between the two, the terms anxiety and fear are often used interchangeably, as are anger and the more encompassing aversion.

The fact that anger entails a harm or offense that is perceived as unfair and deprecating and that there is certainty about who is to blame, along with the sense that one has nonetheless some control over the situation and the risks are low, typically triggers a behavioral approach. Anger motivates us to take action against the responsible agent, promoting a corrective response. The style of the angry citizen is confrontational rather than deliberative, such that new considerations are forestalled in favor of prior convictions. Accordingly, anger has been found to boost political participation (Valentino et al. 2009; Valentino et al. 2011; Weber 2013) and protest (van Troost et al. 2013), to foster support for punitive and aggressive policies (Cassese and Weber 2011; Gault and Sabini 2000; Huddy et al. 2007; Lerner et al. 2003; Petersen 2010), and to heighten superficial information processing and reliance on prior convictions (Huddy et al. 2007; MacKuen et al. 2010).

In contrast, the sense of uncertainty governing states of fear usually translates into increased vigilance, information search, and more attentive and systematic processing in judgments, in an effort to avoid harm and reduce uncertainty. Fearful individuals tend to favor conciliation, prevention, protection, and other risk-averse behaviors. Research on the political consequences of fear has found it to promote citizens' political learning, to encourage a more careful and less automatic processing of information in decision-making (Brader 2006; Huddy et al. 2007; MacKuen et al. 2010; Marcus et al. 2000) and to enhance support for precautionary and protective measures (Lerner et al. 2003; Nabi 2003).

Unlike anger and fear, sadness is a low-arousal emotion, which might explain why its political implications have received little attention to date (Brader and Marcus 2013). Given their similar appraisal patterns, the effects of sadness appear to closely parallel those of fear as to the enhancement of reflection, effortful information processing, behavioral withdrawal, and support for compassionate policies, particularly when compared to anger, although results tend not to be clear-cut and are sometimes inconsistent across studies (Small and Lerner 2008; Weber 2013). One distinctive feature of sadness reported in some analyses is that it motivates individuals to change the circumstances, which may result in a preference for high-reward decisions, even if they entail higher risk (Lerner et al. 2004; Raghunathan and Pham 1999).

An important strand of research in emotions extends the influence that affective states have on judgments and decisions beyond the specific situations that have elicited them, and into normatively irrelevant domains. Scholars have thus found that *incidental* emotions may influence subsequent behaviors even when these are unrelated to the source of the affective state (Forgas 1995; Schwarz and Clore 1983). Furthermore, research within the Appraisal Tendency Framework contends that emotions not only arise from cognitive appraisals but also prompt the interpretation of future events in line with the patterns of appraisal that characterize those emotions (Lerner and Keltner 2000; Lerner and Keltner 2001). That is, emotions give rise to an implicit predisposition, or appraisal tendency, so that people feeling a particular emotion tend to perceive (unrelated) situations in terms of the appraisals matching those of the emotions: “angry people will view negative events as predictably caused by, and under the control of, other individuals. In contrast, fear involves low certainty and a low sense of control, which are likely to produce a perception of negative events as unpredictable and situationally determined” (Lerner et al. 2015: 807).

Emotions of Crisis and Populism

Although populism has been a highly contested concept, a growing consensus appears to have emerged recently around an ideational definition and a minimal set of core features. These have been succinctly conveyed by Mudde (2004: 543) who defines populism as a “thin-centered ideology” that “considers society to be separated into two relatively homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”. Moving in the same direction, Stanley (2008: 102) further decomposes populism into four “distinct but interrelated” constitutive elements: (1) the existence of two homogeneous groups, the people and the elite; (2) the praise of the people and the denigration of the elite; (3) the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite; and (4) the idea of popular sovereignty. Accordingly, populism is conceived of as a Manichean outlook that sees politics as the struggle between the worthy people’s common sense and the harmful, self-serving power elite—a view that

is deeply suspicious of any constitutional restraints to the democratic principle and hence advocates for the absolute primacy of popular sovereignty.

A moment's reflection should reveal a number of connections between populism, thus defined, and the core theme of anger, its pattern of appraisals, and related tendencies—but not with those of fear or sadness. To begin with, we have seen that blame attribution is central for the emergence of anger. More specifically, feeling anger about the country's economy entails a certainty about the controllability of the economy and that responsibility can be ascribed to a particular external agent. Several works have provided empirical evidence in support of this assumption. For example, Conover and Feldman (1986) find that feelings of anger and disgust toward national economic conditions can be clearly differentiated from those of fear and uneasiness. Their results show that these distinct emotions have disparate effects on evaluations of presidential performance, and that feelings of anger/disgust tend to have a higher influence on evaluations than feelings of fear/uneasiness. They suggest that causal attributions play an important role in explaining both the structure and the distinct consequences of people's emotional reactions to the economy: the angry perceive the economy as controllable and hold the government accountable, whereas the fearful do not. More pertinently, Steenbergen and Ellis (2006) show that aversion (which includes anger) toward the president is influenced by evaluations of the president's leadership, but only for those voters who believe that the economy is controllable, and who hence hold the executive responsible for its situation. Likewise, Wagner (2014) argues that the type of emotion that eventually arises will be determined by the possibility of identifying the agent responsible for the threat and the possibility of holding this agent accountable. He demonstrates that British voters were more likely to experience anger rather than fear if they attributed the responsibility for the financial crisis to an external actor, particularly if this actor was an institution accountable to them. Thus, when citizens feel angry about the economic situation of the country, they are implicitly placing blame on an identifiable agent other than themselves.

Attribution of responsibility is also notably present in populist movements, whose discourse is dominated by a blame-shifting rhetoric (Vasilopoulou et al. 2014). As Hameleers et al. (2016: 2) put it, “populism is inherently about attributing blame to others while absolving the people of responsibility”. Populism typically emerges as a

result of the perceived *unresponsiveness* of the political system to *frustrated* popular demands (Panizza 2005). The responsibility is laid on the establishment, which is characterized as a unified bloc in opposition to the like-minded people, hence conveniently conveying the picture of an external actor who prevents the in-group from attaining its goals. Like anger, populism therefore entails a causal interpretation, by which an outside agent is blamed for damage to one's goals.

Second, both anger and populism are concerned not only with the responsibility for a negative event but also with the legitimacy of blame attribution. That is, the causal attribution is accompanied by a normative judgment. As mentioned above, a crucial condition for anger to be aroused is that the outcome is perceived as unfair and unjust, the frustration of one's perceived legitimate rewards. The negative event should not have happened on moral grounds, and indeed could have not happened, since the experience of anger implies that those who are blamed are perceived to be in control of their actions and capable of having acted otherwise. Consistently, Steenbergen and Ellis (2006) find moral considerations to be a primary driver of aversion toward President Clinton; and Capelos (2013) demonstrates that anger, rather than anxiety, is distinctively elicited by low-integrity candidates. Anger, as noted by Petersen (2010), pertains to the domain of morality and rule violation, while fear operates in the domain of hazards; intentionality is particularly relevant for the moral domain.

Morality also pervades the populist discourse: the wickedness of the elite is set in contrast to the benevolence of the people, and their relationship is defined in antagonistic terms. Indeed, populism has been described as “a Manichaeian outlook that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring minority” which can be ultimately understood as “a way of interpreting the moral basis or legitimacy of a political system” (Hawkins 2010: 8, 15). In as much as it is intrinsic to anger, moral evaluation constitutes a key component of the populist belief system.

Finally, and somewhat more speculatively, populist attitudes might also be viewed to resonate the characteristic consequences of anger on cognitive processing and action tendencies. Even though it is not a defining component of populism, the use of simple and strong language has been identified as a typical aspect of the populist communication style (e.g., Bos et al. 2010). This style might seem more likely to appeal

to the angry voter, who is more prone to following superficial considerations and first impressions; this is in contrast to the deep, thoughtful processing of contemporaneous information associated with fear and sadness – reflection which would oftentimes lead to a more nuanced and less categorical outlook. For example, research shows that, in an effort to reduce heightened levels of uncertainty, anxiety leads people to put their trust in experts (Albertson and Gadarian 2015); this is at odds with populism’s suspicion of elitism and its admiration of ordinary people’s common sense. The confrontational rhetoric of populism likewise suggests the influence of feelings of anger, typically leading to an aggressive response, rather than those of fear or sadness, which would more likely promote avoidance, withdrawal, or acceptance. In this direction, populist attitudes have been found to be positively related to political engagement and participation, particularly among the young and those with lower levels of income (Anduiza et al. 2016).

Indeed, the understanding of anger conveyed by appraisal theories is reminiscent of certain characterizations of the populist upsurge, and most evidently of Betz’s notion of *ressentiment*, or resentment. In examining the conditions that explain the emergence of populist radical-right parties, he notes that populist politicians mobilize mainly by appealing to the emotions that are triggered by grievances: “Populist rhetoric is designed to tap feelings of *ressentiment* and exploit them politically” (Betz 2002: 198). Like anger, Betz’s depiction of popular resentment involves an intense sense of frustration, an illegitimate harm, the identification of a responsible agent, and the desire to retaliate. Resentment, in this conventional interpretation, is mostly equivalent to moral anger—an “emotional opposition to unequal and unjust situations”, which entails legitimate blame attribution and promotes action against the offender (Demertzis 2006: 105).²

In sum, we expect feelings of anger elicited by the economic crisis to heighten individuals’ populist attitudes. By contrast, the appraisal pattern of fear, being the reverse image of that of anger, might result in a negative influence on manifestations of

² The term has been given diverse meanings in the relevant literature. The use of the French form, *ressentiment*, typically accompanies Nietzschean-like interpretations where resentment comes along with resignation and passivity, as compared to the feeling of efficacy and retaliatory action implied in the generic use (see Demertzis 2006).

populism. Expectations about the relationship with sadness are much less clear-cut. On the one hand, the accompanying appraisals of situational responsibility and low efficacy would make us think that sadness undermines support for populism, but its alleged influence on resolution and risk acceptance may work in the opposite direction.

Data and methods

Our data come from an online panel survey of young and middle-aged Spanish residents. The sample was selected from an online pool set up through active recruitment of potential subjects on commercial online services and websites. Quotas were used to ensure a balanced representation in terms of gender, education, size of municipality, and region. Specifically, our analysis focuses on the waves conducted consecutively in May 2014, May 2015, and May 2016—the ones for which all the required measurements were included in the questionnaires. Overall, the three waves yield a sample of 1,529 respondents. The panel is unbalanced due to attrition and wave nonresponse: 38 percent of the respondents participated on all three occasions and 28 percent did on any two occasions, while 34 percent were observed only once (average $T = 2$).

Our dependent variable is a measure of the individual's degree of populism, independent of support for particular populist parties. As implied in the conceptualization posited above, populism is ideologically ubiquitous in nature, meaning that it is rarely manifested in isolation but is attached to fully-fledged ideologies on either side of the left-right spectrum. A direct measure of populist attitudes helps us to better discern the correlates of populism from those of other ideological features that might occur with it, while also allowing us to capture more nuanced variations in individuals' degree of populism, which would otherwise be masked by using a measure of vote choice.

Following the growing agreement around the definition of populism, in recent years several indicators have been suggested for measuring populist attitudes at the individual level (Elchardus and Spruyt 2016; Rooduijn 2014; Stanley 2011). We adopted the six-item measure proposed by Akkerman et al. (2014), itself developed from previous work

by Hawkins and colleagues (Hawkins et al. 2012; Hawkins and Riding 2010). The six statements, displayed in Table 1, are designed to tap the core ideas that make up the populist discourse, namely: people-centrism, anti-elitism, the antagonism between the people and the elite, and the primacy of popular sovereignty. Respondents' agreement with each of the statements was measured using a seven-point scale, running from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". The internal consistency of the resulting composite scale (the average score across all items) is good, ranging from 0.71 in 2014 to 0.81 in 2016.

[Table 1 about here]

To measure emotional reactions to the crisis, respondents were asked to report how much, on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "very much" to "not at all", the situation of economic crisis made them feel anxiety, rage, powerlessness, fear, and sadness. The average levels displayed in Table 2 indicate that all these emotions were felt widely over the whole period, but rage and powerlessness consistently obtained the highest scores, while anxiety and fear obtained the lowest, with sadness staying in between the two clusters. The average pairwise correlations between the expressed emotions across waves (2013 through 2016), shown in Table 3, indicate that, while all the items are positively correlated, those between rage and powerlessness, on the one hand, and between fear and anxiety, on the other, clearly stand out. Based on these results, as well as on the semantic content of the terms, we constructed a scale of anger combining the rage and powerlessness items, and a scale of fear combining the fear and anxiety items.³ Our measure for sadness relies solely on that one item.

[Tables 2 and 3 about here]

In addition to emotional reactions, our model includes controls for respondents' gender, age, education (less than secondary, first level of secondary, second level of secondary,

³ Given that, in spite of the correlational evidence, powerlessness has rarely been used as a measure of anger in the literature, we replicated our analyses using rage as the sole indicator of anger. The results, displayed in Table A2 of the supplemental appendix, show that both the between and within effects of anger (i.e., rage) remain positive and statistically significant. Other conclusions are also substantially unaffected by this alternative operationalization of anger.

university), employment status (unemployed), and income (coded in deciles of the national income distribution). In order to account for the (markedly leftist) leaning of the populist movement in Spain, ideological orientation is also added as a predictor, using a measure of self-placement on an 11-point left-right scale. The last control variable is precisely support for Podemos, operationalized as a dummy variable that identifies respondents who mention this party as the one they feel closest to.⁴

The fixed-effects model is generally the preferred choice for the analysis of panel data (Allison 2009). Fixed-effects estimators control for unobserved individual, time-invariant heterogeneity that may be correlated with the explanatory variable and use only within-person variation to estimate the effects of the independent variables. That is, they assess the association between changes in the explanatory variable and changes in the outcome variable *within* individuals, thus controlling for permanent characteristics that vary across individuals. Consequently, fixed-effects estimators avoid the (often unrealistic) random-effects assumption that the observed predictors in the model are uncorrelated with the unobserved time-constant heterogeneity. However, they do so at the cost of ignoring all between-person variation.

In order to allow for the effects of stable characteristics to be estimated, we use a within-between random effects model for the analysis of the populist attitudes indicator; this has several advantages over conventional fixed- and random-effects models (Bell and Jones 2015). The within-between random effects model uses variation occurring both within and between individuals to estimate the coefficients of the independent variables but, unlike the conventional random-effects approach, it simultaneously estimates separate within- and between-person effects, rather than producing a weighted average of the two. This is accomplished by including the person-specific means of time-varying predictors (representing their between effects) and the individual deviations from these (representing their within effects), along with any time-constant predictors, in a random-effects model:

⁴ See Table A1 of the supplemental appendix for the basic descriptive statistics of all the variables included in the analyses. It should be noted that, given the short span of the panel data being analyzed (2014-2016), within-person variation is smaller than that observed across individuals, particularly in some of the control variables. This makes the estimation of the within effects less precise.

$$y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + \beta_2\bar{x}_i + \beta_3z_i + v_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

Here, subscript i denotes individuals and t denotes occasions, y_{it} is the dependent variable, x_{it} is a series of time-varying independent variables, and z_i is a series of time-constant independent variables that only vary between individuals. β_1 represents within effects, while β_2 and β_3 represent between effects.

As far as our key independent variables are concerned, this specification allows us to separate the impact of transient emotional reactions to the crisis from that of more enduring emotions, be they lasting sentiments toward the crisis or general affective traits, understood as tendencies or personal dispositions to experience particular emotional states (Ben-Ze'ev 2001). “Typical” or “hot” emotions are characteristically brief, intense, unstable, and specific. The within effects of our emotional scales may be thought as capturing such transient episodes, which are unusual deviations from one’s typical affective tendencies, while between effects can be interpreted as the influence of more persistent individual differences in feelings toward the economic crisis, due either to the development of specific sentiments toward it or to a chronic disposition to react in a certain affective manner.

Results

Table 4 contains the results of the within-between random effects models of populist attitudes. The dependent variable, the scale of populist attitudes, is coded from 1 (lowest level of populism) to 7 (highest populism). All independent variables except age (in years) have been rescaled to range from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 1. As noted above, between effects represent the estimated effects of the average values of the independent variables for each individual, while within effects represent deviations from these average values for each observation of each individual. This allows us to assess the overall effects of being more or less angry, fearful, or sad, as an individual (between effects), and the effects of changing levels of anger, anxiety, or sadness through time within the same individual (within effects).

[Table 4 about here]

The results of model 1, which includes only the socio-demographic controls and left-right self-placement, show that age has a positive effect between but not within individuals, indicating that *being* older is associated with higher levels of populism but *becoming* older does not have a significant effect (at least not in the relatively brief time span of our panel). Being more educated is associated with lower levels of populism when comparing across individuals, but within-person increases in attained education have a positive effect on populist attitudes. Being on the left of the ideological spectrum comes with higher levels of populism. This, in fact, is the variable with the largest coefficient in this baseline model. Yet, within-person changes in ideological self-placement do not significantly affect levels of populism. Finally, income and unemployment appear to be unrelated to differences in populist attitudes both across and within individuals.⁵

Model 2 adds the emotional reactions to the crisis. The results show that, in line with our expectations, feelings of anger are consistently positively associated with populist attitudes. The within effect indicates that, controlling for the effects of all time-constant differences between individuals, increases in an individual's level of anger are associated with increases in levels of populism. The between effect is also statistically significant, and substantially stronger: those that have a persistent tendency to experience higher levels of anger tend to also display higher levels of populist attitudes. The influence of fear and sadness is much smaller, confined to the between estimate, and only significant at the $p < 0.1$ level. As expected, individuals with higher average levels of fear tend to express lower levels of populism, whereas individuals with a persistent tendency to be sad about the crisis tend to score slightly higher on the populist attitudes scale.

⁵ The estimated within-effects of certain socio-demographic variables require an idiosyncratic interpretation. Given that age changes in nearly the same way for all respondents, the corresponding within coefficient is basically capturing the average effect of the passage of time (i.e., a trend effect). As for education, most of the change occurs among the younger respondents in college at the time of the survey; consequently, the within effect of education is most likely reflecting that this group was highly involved in the *Indignados* movement and has shown a strong and increasing support for Podemos.

Finally, model 3 includes support for Podemos as a predictor of populist attitudes. Some works suggest that pre-existing partisan preferences may induce emotional reactions (Ladd and Lenz 2008). It might be argued that this endogeneity is likely to affect emotions toward partisan actors themselves, more than those elicited by separate (if not totally unrelated) objects or events, such as the economic crisis. Yet this additional control, which taps into voters' sympathy toward the most prominent populist actor in Spain, provides a strong robustness check of the influence of emotions on individual populist attitudes. The estimates in Table 4 indicate that Podemos supporters tend to be significantly more populist than other voters, but that inter-individual changes in support for Podemos over time are unrelated to levels of populism. Conclusions regarding the influence of emotions prove robust to the inclusion of this additional control. Both the between- and within-person effects of anger remain largely unaffected when support for Podemos is taken into account. The changes in the estimated effects of the other emotions are also negligible, although the between effect of sadness (unlike that of fear) becomes undistinguishable from zero. The most noticeable change is a decrease in the between coefficient for left-right placement, which suggests that its effects are in part mediated by partisan preferences.

Discussion

This paper has examined how individual levels of populist attitudes are related to emotional reactions to the economic crisis. Following the insights gleaned from recent research in emotions, in particular cognitive appraisal theories, we hypothesized that discrete negative emotions toward the economic crisis would have differentiated effects on populist attitudes. We have argued that populism is intimately linked to the appraisal pattern of anger and its cognitive and behavioral consequences. In line with our expectations, the empirical analysis has showed that populist attitudes are indeed influenced by feelings of anger. Differences in the average tendency to experience anger are positively associated with individual levels of populism, and also within-person deviations from typical states of anger are consequential for populist attitudes.

By contrast, we found only inconclusive evidence that people with a disposition to experience fear toward the economic crisis are on average slightly less likely to embrace

a populist stance. Results pointing to a similarly moderate positive between-person effect of sadness are even less conclusive. Neither fear nor sadness appears to account for over-time changes in populist attitudes.

The empirical evidence provided in this paper does not intend to serve as the basis for strong causal claims. If the posited sequence holds, then, anger elicited by appraisals of responsibility and illegitimate harm would be driving populist attitudes. However, the causal status of the relationship between appraisal and emotion is far from clear.

Researchers have found that emotions can cause cognitive appraisals as much as the other way round (e.g., Lerner and Keltner 2000): incidental anger might thus predispose people to assess unrelated events in terms of unfairness and external responsibility.

Furthermore, populist discourse may itself amplify feelings of anger and resentment, by emphasizing injustice and outward blame (Moffitt 2015). Given these limitations, the present study's main contribution is in showing that populism is an expression of anger, rather than of fear or sadness.

In addition, we should consider how the strong left-wing position of the party holding the most distinct populist profile in Spain (Podemos) may be affecting our findings and the extent to which these can be generalized to other ideological varieties of populism. Indeed, in our results, individuals on the left are consistently more populist. However, our theoretical framework leads us to expect that anger is connected with right-wing populism in the same way as it is with left-wing populism, through the emphasis on appraisals of blame and injustice. Previous work has considered resentment in connection to the populist radical right (Betz 1993) or in relation to anti-welfare populism (Hoggett et al. 2013). Symbolic racism in the US has been shown to be more strongly connected with anger than with anxiety prompted by threats of resource redistribution (Banks and Valentino 2012), by virtue of a responsibility appraisal that ascribes lack of motivation as an explanation for black people's disadvantages. Thus, although our data do not allow us to make inferences beyond the Spanish case, the interpretation of our results regarding the primacy of anger is consistent with other expressions of populism, and our expectations are by no means confined to the Podemos phenomenon and other left-wing populist movements. Future research should be carried out to establish if our findings also apply to emotions induced by situations

other than the economic crisis, such as immigration or terrorism, which are particularly connected with the populist radical right.

Moving forward, the results of this study have likely implications for the persistence of populism. On the one hand, our findings do not support the often-heard claims that anxiety is a crucial determinant in populist support—and suggest that, if anything, anxiety might actually hinder populism to some extent. On the other hand, given the cognitive and behavioral consequences of anger, we should expect populist individuals to be less likely to engage in effortful information processing, more likely to be politically active, as well as more willing to support risky, unconventional, and eventually radical policies. Angry citizens may be less likely to carefully scrutinize populist parties and candidates, so efforts to combat fake news and “post-truth” politics may not reach them easily. Rather, fighting situations that are perceived as unfair or morally outrageous may help to diminish the emotional state that is the most fertile ground for populism.

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Table 1. Measurement of populist attitudes

	2014	2015	2016
The politicians in the Spanish parliament need to follow the will of the people	5,7	5,5	5,7
The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions	5,4	5,1	5,2
The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people	4,8	5,0	5,0
I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician	4,8	4,7	4,6
Elected officials talk too much and take too little action	5,9	5,9	6,0
What people call “compromise” in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles	4,0	4,2	4,4
<i>Populist attitudes scale</i>	<i>5,1</i>	<i>5,0</i>	<i>5,1</i>
(N)	(1,071)	(1,014)	(1,040)

Note: Average scores as measured on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Table 2. Emotional reactions to the economic crisis

	2013	2014	2015	2016
Rage	4.2	4.0	4.0	4.0
Powerlessness	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.0
Fear	3.6	3.5	3.5	3.4
Anxiety	3.4	3.3	3.3	3.3
Sadness	3.9	3.8	3.8	3.8
(N)	(1,757)	(1,071)	(1,014)	(1,040)

Note: Average scores as measured on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

Table 3. Average correlations between emotions

	Rage	Powerlessness	Fear	Anxiety
Powerlessness	0.71			
Fear	0.44	0.53		
Anxiety	0.48	0.52	0.65	
Sadness	0.51	0.53	0.54	0.47

Note: Average Pearson's correlation coefficients across four waves between 2013 and 2016.

Table 4. Within-Between Random Effects Models of Populist Attitudes

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Between	Within	Between	Within	Between	Within
Anger			1.26** (0.15)	0.49** (0.13)	1.24** (0.15)	0.49** (0.13)
Fear			-0.24+ (0.13)	-0.04 (0.13)	-0.25+ (0.13)	-0.04 (0.13)
Sadness			0.22+ (0.13)	0.13 (0.10)	0.20 (0.13)	0.13 (0.10)
Female	0.06 (0.05)		-0.02 (0.05)		0.01 (0.05)	
Age	0.01** (0.00)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01+ (0.00)	0.02 (0.02)	0.01* (0.00)	0.02 (0.02)
Education	-0.15* (0.07)	0.54* (0.21)	-0.12+ (0.06)	0.49* (0.21)	-0.12* (0.06)	0.49* (0.21)
Unemployed	0.10 (0.07)	0.10 (0.06)	0.05 (0.07)	0.09 (0.06)	0.06 (0.07)	0.09 (0.06)
Income	-0.08 (0.15)	-0.03 (0.16)	0.08 (0.15)	0.01 (0.15)	0.07 (0.15)	0.01 (0.15)
Left-right	-1.40** (0.14)	-0.18 (0.18)	-1.06** (0.14)	-0.13 (0.18)	-0.85** (0.14)	-0.13 (0.18)
Podemos supporter					0.47** (0.08)	0.02 (0.06)
Constant	5.40** (0.15)		4.40** (0.17)		4.24** (0.17)	
Observations / individuals	3,100 / 1,524		3,100 / 1,524		3,100 / 1,524	
Variance components						
Individual	0.54		0.49		0.47	
Residual	0.48		0.47		0.47	
χ^2 (df)	129.57** (11)		300.93** (17)		338.77** / 19	

Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

+ $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$