Dissimilar Distrust among Populists: A quantitative analysis into the relationship between populist individuals and their respective trust in international organisations

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A quantitative analysis into the relationship between populist individuals and their respective trust in international organisations

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Abstract: Populism has been on the rise across liberal democracies and has been closely linked with the erosion of democratic institutions and standards. However there have also been links made between populism's effect on an individual's trust in institutions. Considering the contemporary importance of international organisations and the rise of populism, we seek to understand the effect populism has on trust in international organisations. We make use of the European Values Study to our two hypotheses. We find that populists are predicted to have a lower degree of trust in the European Union and United Nations compared to non-populists. Moreover, we find that populists' trust in international organisations is expected to increase when a populist party is in government, compared to only being in opposition. Our findings suggest that populism poses a challenge to the continued legitimacy of international governmental organisations, and policymakers should seek to continue fostering greater public confidence.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

Populism, as a term, has gained widespread popularity and recognition in mainstream discourse across the globe. It has become increasingly prevalent as political parties, and their leaders, amplify populist rhetoric, resonating with segments of the population. Concurrently, there has been a notable surge in distrust toward governmental institutions, resulting in populism emerging as a significant challenge that institutions must grapple with in their pursuit of effective and efficient policy change (Mauk, 2020; Moynihan, 2021; Rockman, 2019; Vitale & Girard, 2022). The essence of populism lies in its opposition to bureaucratic structures perceived as disconnected from the will of the people (Mudde, 2004). Consequently, populism generates a heightened sense of distrust, particularly within highly politicized institutions. This phenomenon has permeated almost all liberal democracies worldwide, exerting an ever-increasing influence. In Europe, populism has not only permeated mainstream discourse but has also reached the governmental level in certain states, such as Hungary and Poland, where leaders have successfully enacted legislation that (aim to) fundamentally reshaped public bureaucratic institutions (Bauer & Becker, 2020).

The impact of populism extends beyond domestic institutions; it also poses a significant risk to International Organizations (IOs). The escalating distrust of IOs jeopardizes the legitimacy they have gradually, and delicately, accumulated over the past few decades, limiting their autonomy, and complicating the process of policymaking and implementation. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has shed light on the crucial importance of IOs' legitimacy and public confidence, with the World Health Organization (WHO) serving as a notable example. Recent research has demonstrated that distrust in the WHO can lead to increased engagement in conspiracy theories (Eberl et al., 2021), disregard for medical advice (Ehrke et al., 2023), vaccine hesitancy (Recio-Román et al., 2021), and even loss of life (Charron et al., 2022). However, the significance of confidence in institutions extends beyond the realm of public health. Long-standing distrust of the European Union (EU) within the United Kingdom (UK) has been linked to the decision to exit the political union in early 2020 (Olivas Osuna et al., 2021). Similarly, the Trump Administration in the United States (US) implemented several measures aimed at diminishing the autonomy of institutions operating under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN) (Haas, 2020). Nevertheless, we find that the literature on populism's relationship with public trust in institutions is a relatively understudied topic of yet, even more so in the case of international institutions.

Given the contemporary significance of populism and its potential implications for IOs, our research endeavours to answer the following question:

> *What is the effect of populism on an individual's trust in international organizations?*

This question arises from our aspiration to understand whether populists exhibit noticeable differences in trust compared to non-populists. More specifically, we aim to explore not only whether populists have lower levels of trust but also how different contextual factors may influence their relative confidence in IOs. In addition to our two main hypotheses, we make use of four control variables to deepen our understanding of the relationship between populism and an individual's trust, considering variables such as age, political affiliation, quality of government, and the influence of the urban rural divide.

To investigate our two hypotheses, we rely on the European Values Study (EVS) cross-sectional dataset, thus focusing our analysis specifically on Europe, particularly member states of the EU. The findings from our study indicate that populists are predicted to exhibit lower levels of trust in IOs compared to non-populists. Furthermore, we observe that populists residing in states with populist governments are expected to have heightened trust compared to their peers in states where populist parties are in the opposition.

The structure of this thesis is as follows: In Section 2, we review the literature on populism, its theoretical relationship with public institutions, and an individual's trust in those institutions. This literature review forms the basis for formulating our research question. Section 3 defines the concepts used in our study and employs existing research to develop our two hypotheses deductively. In Section 4, we present the operationalisation of each variable included in our analysis and outline the specific methods used to test both hypotheses. Section 5 lays out the process of each test. The findings are discussed in Section 6. Concluding with the implications, limitations, and future academic and policy recommendations in Section 7.

2. Literature review

2.1 The emergence of populism

Since the end of the Second World War, democracies began forming up in all corners of the globe, ostensibly cementing the fate of democracies as the sole viable mode of governance and, in turn, the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). In reality, Fukuyama's neo-liberal pipe dream bore little fruit, instead liberal democratic standards have been on the backfoot since the turn of the 21st Century. Democratic standards have gradually been eroded through a phenomenon recognised as democratic backsliding (Bauer & Becker, 2020, p. 19; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Rockman, 2019). Democratic backsliding more often than not has been especially prominent in states where populist rhetoric has entered government and enabled such erosion of standards to occur (Bauer et al., 2021). This perceived recent surge in the breakdown of democratic standards in certain states has made both populism and democratic backsliding especially salient topics in academic circles, but also in the wider media. So much so, the former concept was Cambridge Dictionary's word of the year in 2017 (Cambridge Dictionary, 2017). Accordingly, recent

political science literature has been placing an increasing focus on the phenomenon of the two concepts, even describing populism as the contemporary political "populist Zeitgeist" (Mudde, 2004, p. 542), and possibly the "most important phenomenon in contemporary politics" (Peters & Pierre, 2019, pp. 1521 & 1540). Further compounding this notion, the non-profit Freedom House has stated that an 18-year anti-democratic transformation has been identified across several former consolidated liberal democracies in both the European and Asian continents (2022, p. 2). The true global nature of this phenomena becomes apparent as it has emerged in different pockets of the globe, from the EU member states Hungary and Poland, to Turkey and the US, to Brazil, Venezuela, and India. Despite the growing prevalence of populism, it continues to suffer from a fuzzy and disputed definition (Bauer & Becker, 2020; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1668). Nevertheless, the general understanding of populism has largely followed the definition employed by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, who describe it as a thin-centred ideology which attaches itself onto established political views, such as conservatism or liberalism (2018, p. 1669). In essence, populism is often concerned with secondary policies or societal matters alongside existing cleavages within a polity. The thin nature of the populism concept is due to the fact that it is premised on the idea of the *pure* people against the *corrupt* elite (Bauer et al., 2021), where its protagonists claim to follow and represent the "volonté générale" (Drápalová & Wegrich, 2020, p. 643). More generally, populist leaders tend to advocate against the status quo, claiming to be the only ones capable of bringing about necessary change to repair the damage caused by contemporary liberal democratic order.
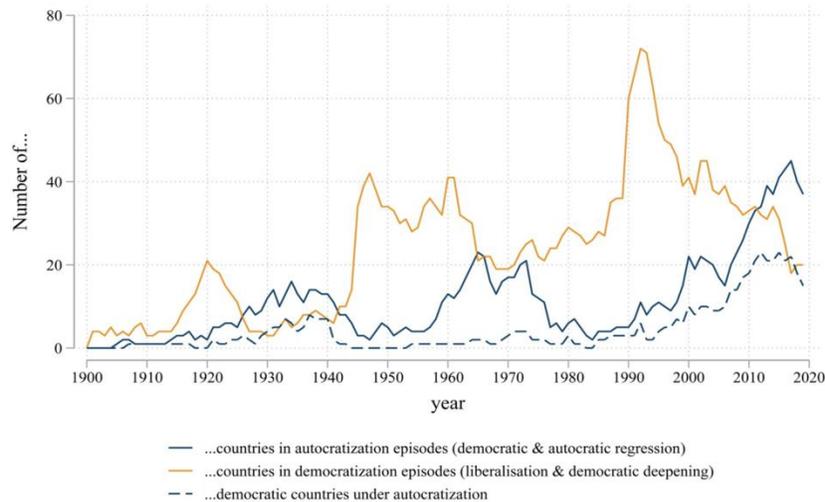
The distinction between the two groups, the pure versus the corrupt elite, by definition would suggest populism to be an anti-pluralist ideology. The anti-pluralist nature of populism is the antithesis of one of the principal values inherent to democracies (Bauer & Becker, 2020, p. 20; Bauer et al., 2021). Populism's violation of one of the core tenets of liberal democracy has been linked to a decline in democratic standards (Mudde, 2004). Subsequently the terms populism and democratic backsliding have often been employed together to describe a similar phenomenon. Regardless of their similarities, the concepts are distinctive and can act as an explanation for one another but do not necessarily describe the same process. Democratic backsliding has been described as the new accepted and more subtle manner to carry out coup d'états (Bermeo, 2016; Bauer et al., 2021). Bermeo explains illiberal actors have moved away from carrying out traditional coups in favour of more subtle and less blatant attacks on democratic norms (2016, pp. 6-8). Subtlety has become more favourable as blatant disregard of liberal norms may make the state undesirable vis-à-vis its (liberal) trading partners. Furthermore, the subtlety of democratic backsliding has also led to the phenomenon being carried out incrementally. To that end, Haagard and Kaufmann found polarisation gradually increased over the course of 10 years prior to a populist actor entering government, suggesting democratic backsliding gives rise to populism, but also vice versa (2021, p. 31).

Political science scholars have attempted to clear up the theoretical vagueness as to how populism became so prominent as well as democratic backsliding. Attempting to explain the rise of populism, the economic anxiety thesis, for example, interprets the rise of illiberal and anti-globalist sentiment through the perspective of material winners and losers (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p 1672). As state governments lowered their trade barriers and gained access to bigger and more competitive markets, wealth ensued. However, the thesis claims not all participants within the economy have been able to benefit from the wealth accumulated over the course of globalisation. Instead, liberalisation has led to increased levels of economic inequality between those participating in the open economy and those unable or unwilling.

Alternatively, the cultural backlash thesis explains globalisation to have given rise to anti-pluralist and strong nativist sentiments. The ease of travel and perceived shrinking of the world has led to greater connectivity between states and societies; however, this has also meant a shift from previously homogenous populations to increasingly diverse polities. Nevertheless, both theses give too narrow of an explanation for a complex and context-specific phenomenon, such as populism, because it exists in various forms and has emerged in contrasting contexts. For example, Bauer and Becker argue populism comes in many guises (2020, p. 22). Specifically, they explain how it can either be personality driven or based on a movement; concentrated within a region or encompassing the entire nation; working within the existing structures of the democracy or outside. Alternatively, Rockman (2019) argued backsliding has occurred as elected officials have become less eager to accept electoral defeat and leave office, so they seek to attain greater power through executive aggrandisement (Bermeo, 2016; Green, 2019). The prosperity and continued growth of authoritarian states, most notably China, can also be understood as an explanation for the rise of populism and backsliding (Bauer et al., 2021, p. 1). China's increasing threat to the US' unipolarity on the world stage has weakened the image of the liberal democracy model and its perceived supremacy over other modes of governance, specifically authoritarianism.

The new uptick in research on populism and backsliding does not mean these are recent phenomena. Populist rhetoric can be dated back to the late 19th century (Simon & Moltz, 2021, p. 1008). More recently, consolidated European liberal democracies such as Austria, Italy, and France each suffered from some form of backsliding at some point throughout the early 2000s (Kelemen & Blauberger, 2016, p. 317). Boese et al. highlighted the increasing trends toward autocratisation since the beginning of the 20th Century, concluding the rate of democratisation has sharply fallen since the end of the Cold War (2021, p. 1206). Figure 1 displays how the number of states going through autocratisation episodes, especially democracies, are on an incremental rise since the 1990s, compared to the fall in number of countries going through a democratisation episode. Freedom House (2022) describes the former states as hybrid regimes because of their mix of both democratic and autocratic values.

Figure 1
Number of countries experiencing autocratisation and
democratization since 1900

(Boese et al., 2021, p. 1206)

As further research has improved our understanding related to the recent emergence of populism and democratic backsliding it becomes increasingly evident both phenomena require and lead to considerable change at the institutional level of a respective state (Bauer & Becker, 2020, p. 19). Importantly, mechanisms exist, within the EU for example, which can prevent or diminish the extent of backsliding. In the cases of Hungary and Poland, the EU has already fined both states for their inability to adhere to the democratic standards expected of the Union member states Parker, 2022). Taken together, we distinguish both populism and backsliding as separate phenomena, but appreciate the complimentary effects both can have on each other. However, our particular focus is on populism, as we seek to understand its effect on individuals, not institutions.

2.2 Public administration: populism's friend or foe?
Populists' notorious anti-elitist sentiment coupled with their general disdain toward the status quo can directly place public administration in its crosshairs. The impacts populists have had on their democracy is clear, democratic standards are eroded through backsliding. What is less clear is their effect on the democracy's existent and necessary bureaucracy.

In order for a democracy to function, it requires institutions and an efficient bureaucracy to carry out the government's business. The government's reliance on institutions, arguably places public administration as a prime target for populist parties and leaders. Bauer et al. argue democracies have an obvious relationship with bureaucracies (2021, p. 3), as such populists are forced to interact with the public administration to enact policy change (p. 6). As Stoker puts it, populist by their very nature want to alter the status quo, which notably includes bureaucracy (2021, p. 247). Despite the public administration literature on the effects of populism on bureaucracy still being

in its initial stages, the relationship has been largely acknowledged and accepted (Bauer &
Becker, 2020). Nevertheless, a significant part of the literature has primarily focused on popu-
lism and its effect on the American Civil Service (Bauer & Becker, 2020; Drezner, 2019; Hol-
libaugh et al., 2019; Moynihan, 2021; O'Leary, 2010; Peters & Pierre, 2019). This is concerning
because an American-centric approach to populism's effect on bureaucracy omits the possible
effects the concept has in different countries with distinctively different governmental and bu-
reaucratic structures. As democracies may be different so would the populism they suffer (Bauer
et al., 2021, p. 7). However, the American case is still a useful example for the potential effects
of populism. More importantly, a rising enclave of Public Administration (PA) researchers have
been expanding their focus to account for the effects on bureaucracy outside of the US.

In the case of Europe for example, Meyer-Sahling and Toth (2020) highlighted the case of popu-
lism's effect on the public administration of Hungary, which according to the authors is consid-
ered to be the paradigm case of democratic backsliding in Central and Eastern Europe (p. 94).
The authors point to Hungary's falling score on the Liberal Democracy Index (LDI) over the
course of the 2010s to explain the mass purges in Hungarian civil service and the increase in po-
litical appointments. The Hungarian top-level bureaucratic structure expanded to four times what
it was by the fall of the Soviet Union, with a 100% turnover rate in 2010, strongly suggesting
Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has heavily altered the composition of bureaucratic staff to his pref-
erences (p. 107). Bermeo identifies similar levels of executive aggrandisements in Turkey
through President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's unprecedented centralisation of power (2016, p. 11).
She also points to the strategic manipulation of elections and its rules, as well as a reduction in
press freedom as tools used in weakening executive checks (p. 13). Independent media is an im-
portant target of populists aside from public administration, as it may be a source of legitimacy
in conflict with the populist agenda (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021, p. 39; Rockman, 2019). In es-
sence, independent media can be a source of conflict for populists when the former does not
share similar views as the latter. The institutional reform Turkey experienced meant it had transi-
tioned from a parliamentary system to a presidential one (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021, p. 35), in
which approximately 150,000 civil servants were dismissed (Moynihan, 2021, p. 176). In a
broader context, Rockman describes executive aggrandisement as the process in which (populist)
leaders "seek to enhance executive power, eliminate checks and balances, expand their mandate,
attack democratic institutions, and engage in the suppression of a free press, civil liberties and
political rights" (2019, p. 1550). Bauer and Becker identify five mechanisms at the disposal for
populists when attempting to influence their respective bureaucracy: the centralisation of struc-
ture and resources, the politicisation of staff and norms, and the reduction of accountability
(2020, p. 20). Their article further notes that, in the past, fascist governments in Europe also cen-
tralised and reduced the autonomy of their institutions, reshuffling both budgets or staff and
overhauling bureaucratic norms (p. 23). It is important to note however, that as Drezner points
out in the context of the US, head of governments and states have always sought to create new

institutions and dismantle old ones (2019, p.723). The crucial difference is the adherence leaders show to the established democratic norms of achieving these ends.

Populism then may pose a threat to the existence of institutions especially those which benefit from and rely on pluralism and the inclusion of experts (Wood et al., 2022, p. 312). Expertise is especially seen as unfavourable to certain populists as they perceive it as an obstacle to meet their desired results, as experts may argue against the populists' objectives. As such populists tend to place loyalty in a higher regard than anything else (Peters & Pierre, 2022). This was recently exemplified by the Trump Administration (Moynihan, 2022, p. 177). In such cases, patronage systems have been able to form, in which the shift toward loyalty-based appointments may open the door to certain forms of abuse, like corruption (Bauer et al., 2021). Oliveros and Schuster, upon analysing bureaucrats from the Dominican Republic, found that not only do political appointments increase the likelihood of corruption, but the appointees also perform worse compared to their merit-based counterparts (2017, p.3). In the American case, Trump notoriously maintained a small circle made up of close friends, family members and allies (Bauer et al., 2021) favouring a hands-on approach, micromanaging the many different institutions of the US Civil Service (Stoker, 2021) Moreover, populists may place a great deal of their attention on short-term goals disregarding the long-term viability of their respective objectives (Rockman, 2019).

Interestingly, populists do not disregard all forms of experts or elites, instead they filter out the disloyal from the obedient, creating a group of yes men (p. 10), as populist leaders and their cronies often lack the bureaucratic experience themselves that is required in policymaking (Peters & Pierre, 2019). As a result, populists enlist the help of technocrats to achieve change. Technocratic populism has been recorded in multiple instances and has been a popular instrument among populists once in government (Drápalová & Wegrich, 2020, p. 643). This has the ultimate benefit of aiding populists from navigating through the complex channels of institutional reform, posing a threat to contemporary liberal democratic institutions. The complexities populists face when seeking to change the status quo often come from the safeguards for pluralism inherent to many of the institutions fundamental to democracies (Bauer & Becker, 2020). This is even more the case in parliamentary systems which are often less centralised in regard to decision-making than their presidential equivalents (Peters & Pierre, 2022; Drezner, 2019, p. 723). At the same time, public administrations may be a greater obstacle to populist than they may initially realise, as radical change is notoriously difficult in modern bureaucracies. This can be explained by the existence of path dependencies (Bauer & Becker, 2020, p. 22), in essence the fate an institution has created for itself over the course of its existence. As Drezner puts it "almost by definition, bureaucrats [and in turn bureaucracies] are uncomfortable with radical deviations from their standard operating procedures" (2019, p. 723). Rockman explains path dependence occurs as bureaucracy represents the past, present, and future due to its institutionalisation through the

accumulation of policy and regulation over the course of its existence and maintains long-term objectives through the use of experts (2019, p. 1567).

Scholars have also presented how civil servants within institutions may choose to act as obstacles to populist changes in public institutions. O'Leary, for example, has explained civil servants may wish to work against their directives in secret, defining the action as guerrilla government (2010, p. 8). Adding to the concept of guerrilla government, Hollibaugh et al. claim civil servants may choose to show dissent through failing to comply with the rules, advising their supervisors against policies or becoming whistle-blowers (2019, p. 66). The authors do note, however that they fail to find a preference amongst the civil servants for which dissent mechanisms they are more likely to choose (p. 71). Additionally, the reasons for dissent are debated, although O'Leary stated there to be a range of predictors, most notably altruism or pettiness (2010, p. 8). Recent prominent examples of guerrilla government were the actions taken by several senior officials under the Trump Administration who obstructed multiple policy changes, as well as blew the whistle on certain actions being carried out by the Administration which went against the established bureaucratic norms (Hollibaugh et al., 2019, p. 64). For example, the widely universal objection made by over a hundred institutions to abstain from signing Schedule F, a policy which would have given the executive (Trump) greater privileges to dismiss top officials within the American Civil Service (Moynihan, 2021, p. 174). Nevertheless, evidence has also suggested that although dissent may occur, principled bureaucrats do not engage in guerrilla government for an extended amount of time (Schuster et al., 2021). This is particularly the case if the dissenter perceives their actions as unsuccessful or not worth the repercussions. Moreover, Stoker (2010) identified that bureaucrats may simply refrain from getting involved in the politics of policymaking and return to being pure technocrats. All in all, bureaucracies can be affected by populism on both a macro institutional-level but also on a micro individual-level.

Figure 2

Analytical framework for populist effect on bureaucracy and administrative response

Political level

General approaches to the bureaucracy

| Sidelining | Ignoring | Using |

↓

Administrative reform strategies

| Structures | Resources | Personnel |

| Norms | Accountability |

↑ ↓

| Working | Shirking | Sabotage |

Reactions of the bureaucracy

Administrative level

(Bauer et al., 2021, p. 17)

Taken together, past literature on the one hand has indicated that populists may work with or reduce the mandate of existing institutions, or outright ignore them. In the cases of the US, Switzerland, Peru and Hungary, Bauer and Becker found evidence that such policies can have a profound impact on bureaucracy (2020, p. 28). On the other hand, public administration can respond by submitting to their new leaders or dissenting by either slacking or directly going against directives. Importantly, Bermeo has pointed out that despite democratic backsliding and its adverse effects on public administration, states are unlikely to outright dismantle entire institutions (2016, p. 14). Figure 2 illustrates how populists may choose to approach the bureaucracy and, vice versa, how the institution and its civil servants may wish to respond. Populism's ambiguous multi-level relationship with public administration should be a source of concern. However, what the overwhelming literature has pointed to, is the effect populism has on institutions, including

backsliding. Far less attention has been placed on the effects of populism at the individual level, creating a relative gap in the relevant academic field. However, some insight has suggested that populism inevitably influences the public's perception of bureaucracies, especially if they are particularly salient (Simon & Moltz, 2022, p. 997). The confidence the public hold toward governmental institutions is an essential requirement for their long-term survival.

2.3 Public trust is legitimacy

PA scholars have long pointed out that institutions require trust to function effectively, to the extent that trust has been largely understood as a critical aspect for democratic governance (Askvik, 2007; Newbold, 2011; Simon & Moltz, 2022, p. 997). Putnam's (1993) seminal work characterised public confidence as sine qua non (absolutely necessary) for institutions to maintain their legitimacy. As a result, trust in public administration has been the focus of a voluminous number of articles. In 2005 the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) acknowledged the importance of trust for institutions (Bouckaert, 2012). Bouckaert highlights how public trust has become a key driver but also objective of policy, even more so at times of crisis. (p. 92). Adding to the importance of trust, Simon and Moltz, found it was statistically related to organisational performance (2022, p. 998). Earlier, Chanley and colleagues found trust to be a good indicator for the health of a democracy (2000, p. 240). Past research has presented findings on the determinants of trust in public administration. For example, Van de Walle and Migchelbrink (2020) find that institutional quality is a strong indicator for trust. In essence, an institution which is transparent and accountable is perceived to be of greater quality, thus garnering greater trust (Bruno, 2017). Regarding political participation, Hooghe and Marien (2013) found a positive relationship between increased trust in the political system and voting in elections. Overwhelmingly, the existing literature on trust and public administration highlights the existing relationship between the former and good governance.

Since the turn of the Century, however, trust in bureaucracy has been on a steady decline (Rockman, 2019). In the US, Moynihan found there to no longer be a consensus on the standing or role of civil servants (2022, pp. 174). Alongside these findings, the author further noted civil servants are increasingly seen as antagonistic by the public (p. 175). Also focusing on the US, Chanley et al. (2000) found trust in bureaucracy to have steadily fallen. The authors explain, as economic conditions worsened and politicisation increased, the public has fallen out of favour with their civil servants. For example, across the pond the EU has gone from a permissive consensus to a constraining dissensus (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). Simply put, there is no longer a universal agreement between politicians, as well as the public, regarding policymaking. Although the effect may not be as big as previously stated (Down & Wilson, 2008). Overall increased politicisation of government action has led to greater division in opinions on how to move forward, and in turn a fall in grace for civil servants.

Acknowledging the fall in grace the American bureaucracy has had with its public, Moon (2003) argues the underlying causes to be corruption, inefficiency and a lack of transparency and accountability. Once more, the articles' focus on the US, may not make the findings widely generalisable, however they do shed a telling light onto the recent perception of public administration in a liberal democracy, whilst giving cause to engage in research outside of the States. Pursuing this cause, Mitsch et al. (2021) laid their focus on Europe highlighting a divergence in political trust in the rural and urban regions of the continent. Their article indicates since 2010 rural voters have less political trust compared to their urban counterparts. Moreover, their findings were only partly dependent on respondents' political alignments, suggesting regional cleavages to be a cause in falling trust. Whilst conceptualising it as political disappointment, Seyd (2015), indicated how distrust has gradually emerged as citizens' expectations are not being met leading to citizens negatively perceiving the competence of civil servants. Overall, public administrations have had to increasingly contend with politicisation and legitimacy concerns associated with low trust, making institutions especially vulnerable.

Distrust of bureaucracy has become a tool for populist leaders and parties. In Latin America for example, Doyle (2011) found existing low trust in institutions meant voters favoured outsiders, who claimed to crusade against the institutional status quo. Populist leaders, in turn, stylised themselves as the only viable solutions to the public's discontent. Mauk (2020) found this to be true in political systems with poor institutional quality. The author also points out trust in public administration is not negatively affected by the election of populists, but only in broken systems. In essence, political systems with poorer quality of government garnered greater trust. Following the same premise, Hajdinjak (2022) identified three mechanisms through which populism can have a positive effect on public trust. She argues populists can improve trust through ideological congruence. Essentially, supporters of electoral winners are expected to trust institutions more. Additionally, populists in government may enact the change sought out by populist voters, in turn positively affecting their trust. Lastly, active participation of populist parties in policymaking can result in public trust from their voters due to their inclusion. Ultimately, the author concluded that populists not only ride the wave of discontent but also fuel it (p. 402). Populism may ride and fuel the discontent through its anti-elitism rhetoric which adversely taps into public trust (Geurkink et al., 2019, p. 251).

An exemplary illustration of populism adversely affecting public trust was identified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ehrke et al., in analysing compliance attitudes in Europe to pandemic regulation, found trust to be a crucial factor (2023, p. 79). The importance of public trust for regulatory compliance is even more prevalent at times of crisis. The authors found respondents with populist grievances to have less trust in institutions, in turn were less willing to comply with regulation. Elsewhere, Simon and Moltz investigated public confidence in merit-based institutions in the US and found right-wing populists to have reduced trust in the civil service (2022, p. 46).

Importantly, however, the authors highlight how populist attitudes can simultaneously have a negative and positive effect on public trust, suggesting the perceived representation of populist grievances can improve the trust of populist voters, whilst eroding the trust of non-populists. Like Hajdinjak (2022), the article by Simon and Moltz (2021) concludes that populism can have short term positive effects on public trust, dependent on poor pre-existing democratic quality.

To sum up, earlier research has not only acknowledged the emerging trend of populism, but also highlighted its possibly adverse consequences on democratic standards, and its public institutions. Additionally, there has been an increasing amount of literature on the effects of populism at the individual-level, most notably in a domestic context. Unfortunately, another gap in the literature arises regarding IOs, as scholars have principally focused on national public administrations. Yet due to globalisation, IOs have become a common staple in international governance, highlighting cooperation between states. More explicitly, Weiss & Thakur argue IOs have been pivotal in shaping global governance and are increasingly necessary for states to join if they wish to continue developing at a similar pace as their peers (2010, p. 1). As such, IOs such as the UN, and the EU have become crucial pillars in modern politics. Yet their distance, may sometimes make them appear less relevant or important, Hurd suggests, IOs should not be seen in a separate way than other political institutions on the domestic level (2018, p. 13). He argues one should relay equal importance to IOs as we do to the institutions at home. Then, similar to domestic institutions, IOs also rely on public confidence for survival. Some argue public confidence is even more important for IOs, as it serves them to remain relevant in a continuously crowded stage, develop new norms and rules, and maintain compliance (Tallberg & Zürn, 2019, p. 582). We understand IOs to be a crucial part of contemporary politics, whilst sharing similar traits with domestic institutions we can expect populism to also effect IOs, whether that be structurally or at an individual level. Yet due to the current gap in the literature, we know little about these relationships. As such, the objective of this thesis is to add to the literature on populism's influence on public trust, yet with a particular focus on international institutions. The research question for the analysis is as follows:

> *What is the effect of populism on an individual's trust in an international organisation*?

Specifically, we seek to understand how populists and non-populists differ in their trust toward IOs, but also shed light as to how populists may contrast in trust amongst themselves depending on certain cases. We do this because the literature has pointed to the relationship between populism and domestic institutions whilst, at the time of writing, researchers have placed less interest on IOs. Moreover, most of the populism literature in PA has focused on the effects populism has on and within institutions, ignoring the potential effects populism may have on the vital yet fragile relationship between the institutions and the public they serve.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Understanding the concepts going forward

It is important to understand what previous scholars have discussed and found related to the concepts discussed in the research question, however it is equally as important to ensure our understanding of the concept is clearly defined to avoid any confusion before diving into the analysis. The subsequent sub-sections will add clarity to the terms discussed thus far, deductively establishing our hypotheses based on existent theories related to our research question.

3.1.1 Populism

Cas Mudde's (2004) definition of populism as the pure versus the corrupt has long been disputed and labelled as too broad and lacking specificity (de la Torre & Mazzoleni, 2019). Over time, updated conceptualisations have attempted to avoid the thin definition employed by Mudde (Olivas Osuna, 2020; Peters & Pierre, 2020). Acknowledging its complex nature, Peters and Pierre (2020) argue populism's existent definition cannot be a one size fits all model, instead it must distinguish between ideological and organisational populism. The former being separated by left-wing, right-wing, and centrist populism, with each distinction having their own critiques and focus. Organisational populism is characterised as either charismatic or institutional, with the first being related to personalistic leaders with strong anti-institution rhetoric. The latter, institutional populism, is described as leaders who seek reform whilst working with the existent bureaucracy. Left wing populists are understood to hold grievances toward current economic order, domestically and internationally. Meanwhile they advocate for greater social equity. Right-wing populists hold strong nativist views, opposing immigration and integration. Alternatively, centrist populists hold strong anti-corruption and establishment views. Charismatic populism under the organisational dimension, is personalistic and against the institutional status quo. Otherwise, institutional populism seeks radical change, however through the use of existing institutions. Following the same idea, Olivas Osuna (2020) studied populisms through four dimensions: ideational, performative, regional and organisational. The two articles emphasize the importance of moving beyond Mudde's narrow definition to expand our understanding of the types of populism present in very distinct polities as it can occur that non-populist can be defined as populist under Mudde's conceptualisation. As a result, Mudde's definition remains useful for a broad understanding of the concept, yet important distinctions are necessary when analysing populism to fully understand its effects and variations. Contrarily, Fieschi and Heywood (2004) do not distinguish between left- and right-wing populism. Instead, they argue there to be traditional right-wing populist or furbizzia (entrepreneurial) populist. Describing the former as opposed to the current system yet actively work within it, whilst the latter is similar to Peters and Pierre's (2020) definition of ideological populism.

The defining of populism has been varied, but nevertheless complex, yet as Aslanidis pointed out, researchers may often fall for certain biases when discussing populism (2017, p. 267). The author argues although these biases may be both explicit and implicit, it is thus important to employ a clear and concise conceptualisation. Importantly, our general understanding of populism must not be normative, it should instead follow an objective sense of the term, appreciating populism as a researcher, not as an individual with potentially institutionalised biases favourable to liberal democracies. Furthermore, it is useful to distinguish between populism and other political ideologies, such as nativism or Euroscepticism (Rooduijn, 2019; Vulović & Palonen, 2022), as the latter ideologies can be embedded in populism yet not the sole or primary concerns.

Taken together, populism will be understood as a combination of Mudde's interpretation of a pure versus elite movement, in which the leaders claim to represent the volonté générale and oppose the status quo, but also the favoured use of direct democracy. Whilst also appreciating the distinctions presented by Peters and Pierre (2020) and Olivas Osuna (2020) to distinguish between left- and right-wing populism. Our definition of populism, thus is precise and clear, acknowledging the multifaceted alterations of populism researchers have identified as well as the similarities, as pointed out by Mudde, across cases making the concept such a global phenomenon.

3.1.2 Trust in institutions
The importance of the publics' trust is, as illustrated in Section 2.3, an essential function of democracies, and it has become a critical component of liberal democracy's continued existence. Studies which have conceptualised trust largely agree that the phenomenon is relational (Klemsdal & Kjekshus, 2019; Levi & Stoker, 2000). In short, trust is not achieved through direct action, instead it occurs when one actor lowers their guards and becomes vulnerable to another party, which can in turn harm and betray the trustee. Kang and Park (2017) define trust as confident expectations. As a result, they understand trust as a "belief in the virtuous intentions of another party based on the party's past conduct" (p. 117). The authors also note the distinction between trust and distrust, highlighting that both views can be held toward an entity. Moreover, trust is not conditional, as a result it is based on the calculation of consequences and expectancies. Scholars have pointed to diverse types of trust. Fieschi & Heywood (2004) for example argue there can be particularised trust, in which an individual trusts another if they believe the latter has the former's best interest in mind. Alternatively, one can trust another entity if the latter is impartial, thus predictable. That means, if we can predict an individual or institution's actions, we are more inclined to trust them as they follow a predictable route. The concept of trust can be dichotomous, in the sense that one either trusts or does not trust, alternately one can also trust to a degree. Trust, specifically related to institutions, is maintained and established through numerous mechanisms, such as transparency, accountability, integrity, responsiveness, competence, and impartiality (Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Trust is not latent either, it can be influenced. As

Uslaner (2017) points out, in reviewing studies of trust in both a social and political context, increased levels of trust are influenced by numerous factors. Namely, social, economic, and political factors. Yet importantly, the literature reviewed by the author overwhelmingly pointed toward the cruciality of trust in institutions for the functioning of democracies.

In relation to politics and public institutions, and principally the research question posed above, trust is understood as the belief that institutions work on the behalf on the public (Geurkink et al., 2019) and deliver on the latter's normative expectations (Hetherington, 1998), even in the absence of scrutiny (Hooghe et al., 2011). Importantly, public trust can be influenced by a range of factors and is notoriously fragile with politicised institutions. Furthermore, trust, especially in political contexts, is often used synonymously with confidence (O'Doherty, 2022). Moving forward, institutional trust is simply understood as trust. Specifically, the confidence the public has in institutions, which in our case are IOs. Further, although trust can be dichotomous, we define the concept as a scale. Basically, an individual can have degrees of trust in IOs, such as no, a little, a lot, or full confidence.

3.1.3 International public institutions
Public bureaucracies have been studied and defined since the late 20th Century (Wilson, 1887). As a result, on a domestic level, we have come to understand public institutions as governmental structures which carry out the elected representatives' work and acts as the enforcers of the rules and regulations of the land. PA scholars have long focused on the bureaucracies of domestic institutions to understand how they operate. However, as the modern world has become inextricably international and interdependent, nation states have had to coordinate with one another to efficiently execute public policy (Bauer & Ege, 2016, p. 2). Naturally, International Relations (IR) scholars noted the emergence of IOs, to which PA scholars responded with analyses of the IOs inherent bureaucracies (Barnett & Finnemore, 2012, p. 16). Observing IOs as bureaucracies enables us to better grasps their processes, such as autonomy, power, and dysfunction (p.3), but also the importance of trust in the institutions

IO has become somewhat of a catch-all term, which includes any organisations which functions at the international level (Park, 2017, p. 317). There are, however, two clear distinct types of IOs, intergovernmental organisations (IGOs), which include a minimum of three states supporting the creation of a secretariat (Barnett & Finnemore, 2012, p. 177), or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) made up of non-state actors. Our focus will be on the former IO type; IGOs. We focus on IGOs as they have become synonymous with modern governance (Knill & Bauer, 2016, p, 950), in the sense that IOs are increasingly relied upon in contemporary policymaking, in both domestic and multilateral contexts. But more importantly IOs have been granted varying degrees of autonomy (Bauer & Ege, 2016). Examples of IGOs include the WHO, the UN, and the EU. It should be important to note that IOs can also exist within another, for example the UN is

arguably the most recognisable IO for many. Yet under the UN umbrella there are many more IOs, such as the WHO, the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the UN's International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF).

Subsequently, for the remainder of this paper, international institutions will be understood as the intergovernmental organisations, which carry out the duty of their member states providing a public good to the citizenry. We will use the terms international institutions, IO and IGO interchangeably. Although, scholars following a more International Public Administrations (IPA) approach would concentrate their analysis on the bureaucracies and processes of the IOs (Christensen & Yesilkagit, 2019). The specific body would be of little familiarity to average citizens, as such our focus is placed on the public's trust in the IOs as a whole.

3.2 What does theory tell us?
The review of literature covering populism, as well as its conceptualisation, point to the strong anti-elitism values inherent to the thin-centred ideology. As a result, populist theory expects individuals with populist attitudes to show a greater level of distrust toward institutions. Trust has been identified as a strong indicator for voting for populist parties or leaders (Geurkink et al., 2019). Vice versa, populist parties and leaders can also increase distrust amongst their supporters (Rooduijn et al., 2016). According to scholars of philosophy, populists are characterised by generalised dispositional distrust (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2023), further suggesting a strong association between populism and trust in institutions. Populism, as defined, has unfavourable attitudes regarding pluralism and elitism, objecting the status quo. As well as, understanding IOs as established pluralist structures mostly comprised of elites at the helm, one can logically expect an individual with populist attitudes to have lower trust in international institutions compared to an individual with non-populist attitudes. Moreover, as Webb explained in the context of the United Kingdom (UK), populist prefer direct democracy (2013, p. 767), a mechanism international institution do not have, as most decision-making is delegated to their administrations. In relation to the COVID-19 pandemic Recio-Román and their colleagues (2021; 2022) found that populist individuals showed greater hesitancy toward vaccination due to a greater distrust in medical institutions. In the US, Lee et al. (2022) indicated that US President Trump supporters who engaged in pandemic related conspiracy theory, indicated a greater distrust in the American national public health agency and the WHO. Theory suggests that populists show some form of distrust toward IOs, and a greater extent of distrust compared to their non-populist peers. Therefore, to answer the research question presented above, the primary hypothesis of the analysis is as follows:

> *H1: Populist respondents have lower trust in international organisations compared to non-populist respondents.*

Interestingly, as both Hajdinjak (2022) and Kołczyńska (2022) point out individuals with populist attitudes may show greater trust toward international institutions if they feel more

represented. Specifically, Hajdinjak finds populists can boost trust through ideological congruence, regime outputs and representation (2022, pp. 400-401). For example, if a populist is in government, whether that be in a junior or senior position, research suggests populists will have greater confidence in the institutions once they feel represented. Thus, building off the first hypothesis we further expected that:

> *H2: Populist respondents from states in which populist are in government have higher trust in international organisations compared to populist respondents in states where their party is in the opposition.*

Alongside our second hypothesis, we control for several variables based off additional research regarding our topic. For example, the quality of a state's democracy is also linked to the trust populist have in their institutions. As numerous scholars have pointed out quality of governance is an important predictor for trust (Newton, 1999). Klingemann (1999) indicated political trust dropped in the 1990s due a decline in economic performance and quality of governance. Studying the support for Brexit in the UK, Olivas Osuna and their colleagues (2021) found economic and social factors to be strongly related to supporting the leave campaign. Similarly, Algan and his fellow authors (2017) found crisis driven economic insecurity to influence populism and institutional distrust in the EU, especially in states hard-hit by the 2008 economic crisis and the subsequent Eurocrisis, such as Spain, Italy, and Greece. Macroeconomic performances such as GDP and unemployment are identified as the most influential effects on trust according to van Erkel and van der Meer (2015), being notably sensitive at times of crises. As such, Mauk (2020) pointed out populist may have improved trust toward their institutions if the state suffers from corruption and overall poor democratic quality. Taken together, these findings suggest institutional trust may increase for individuals with populist attitudes if populists are in government and the quality of governance is poor. As such we believe it to be appropriate to control for quality of government when testing our hypotheses.

Populism comes in different guises (Bauer & Becker, 2020, p. 22). As a result, scholars have argued there can be clear distinctions between left-wing and right-wing populism. The former being best described as primarily focusing on nativist principles (Petsinis, 2019, p. 214), whilst the latter is discontent with the development of globalisation and seeks to amend institutional injustices (ECPS, n.d.; Otjes & Louwerse, 2013, pp. 61-62). Along those line, scholars have pointed at right-wing populist as particularly distrusting of institutions (Moynihan, 2021; Simon & Moltz, 2021). For example, McLaren (2007) indicated individuals with strong nativist attitudes were more likely to distrust European institutions. Also studying political trust in the EU, Grönlund & Setälä (2007) found party affiliations to be an influential variable in determining trust in parliaments. With reference to the pandemic, Charron and their co-authors (2022) indicated right-leaning individuals to have lower trust in public health institutions, and thus suffering

greater mortality rates during the virus outbreak. Appreciating the evidence suggesting a variance in trust between left-wing and right-wing populists, we also control for this in our analysis

We further believe age and the urban rural divide can influence our hypotheses. In the case of age, it has been indicated that younger individuals may have less trust in institutions due to a higher consumption of media (Webb, 2013). This is because media itself can also influence trust, however this relationship is relatively complex and shaped by the sources and nature of the content in the media (Moy & Hussain, 2011, p. 230). Media has been especially prevalent in swaying trust with the increased polarisation of institutions due to their perceived deficient performance (Miller & Listhaug, 1990; Miller & Listhaug, 1999). Related to the urban rural divide, previous research has indicated that place of residence may influence an individual's trust toward international institutions (Mitsch et al., 2021; Olivas Osuna et al., 2021). For instance, in the case of Brexit, Olivas Osuna and his colleagues (2021) indicated greater area deprivation led to greater distrust of intuitions, thus, according to their study, voting for Brexit. On this topic, Mitsch and others (2021) identified a trend in which rural residents showed less trust toward institutions compared to their urban peers.

Taken together we expect populists to have less trust in IOs compared to non-populists. The relationship is inversed, however, in cases where populist parties are in government. Moreover, we control for quality of government, left-right political affiliations, age, and the rural urban divide, as we expect these variables to influence the outcomes of our hypotheses.

4. Research design

4.1 Data selection

To test our two hypotheses, survey data from the EVS is employed. More specifically, the latest version of the EVS' Wave 5 integrated dataset released in 2022 (EVS, 2022a). This version includes data from 54.438 respondent spread over 36 states, most of which are in the EU (EVS, 2022b). Respondents of the survey are asked a variety of questions to provide insight into their personal life, as well as the general values and beliefs of citizens across Europe. Concretely, it studies their views on topics such as politics, families, work, and religion (EVS, 2018a). The fifth wave of the study consists of interviews carried out between 2017 and 2021, conducted in-person over the course of one hour (EVS, 2018b). Altogether, the dataset contains appropriate variables to answer the research question posed but has also been employed in numerous analyses evaluating the political trust of European citizens (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Hajdinjak, 2022). A similar dataset also exists, the World Values Survey (WVS), which includes data from a greater selection of countries, and is carried out at shorter intervals. Nevertheless, we chose the EVS as we want to particularly pay attention to populism within the EU.

The original dataset includes 59.438 cases and 474 variables. Most of the variables in the dataset, although insightful, are of little relevance to the two hypotheses outlined above. Thus, only the appropriate variables will be retained in the data file used for the analysis. The dependent variable (DV) of the research question, trust in IOs, is understood through the variables measuring the respondent's confidence in an institution. The study asks this question regarding several institutions such as the respondent's country of residence's respective civil service [v122], the EU [v124], the UN [v125], the respondent's national parliament [v121] and government [v131]. The data is measured on a scale of one to four. Respectively, a great deal of confidence to no confidence at all. To explicitly test trust in IOs between populist and non-populist respondents (*H1*), the variables *v124* and *v125* are used. As they measure an individual's confidence in the EU and the UN respectively, which are both IOs. They are the only IOs mentioned in the EVS questionnaire, however the EU and the UN can be considered as the most recognisable organisations to Europeans, as they have become increasingly politicised (Hooghe & Marks, 2009).

The independent variable (IV) for our first hypothesis is populism, this is operationalised by a respondent's answer to the question; which political party appeals to them the most [v174_cs]. The answers provided are country-specific, more importantly they include traditional and popular parties, as well as fringe movements. Parties and movements were classified as either populist or non-populist according to the classification of the parties per European country by *The Popu-List* classifications (Rooduijn et al., 2019). A close cooperation between journalists and academics, the list, provides classifications for parties from 31 states in Europe, categorising them as either right- or left-wing, populist, and/or Eurosceptic, as long as the party has one seat in the national parliament or received 2% of the vote in a national legislative election (PopuList, 2020). The number of states covered by the EVS and PopuList slightly differ, as a result only the parties of states included in the list were able to be coded as populist parties or non-populist. Subsequently, of the 36 countries included in the EVS dataset, the data from 25 states is utilised. The states included in the study are; Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK. Each state, according to the PopuList, has at least one populist party, for example the *Podemos* party in Spain or *Rassemblement Nationale* in France, and as such make these states suitable cases for our analysis. In total, 66 political parties were coded as populist.

Following the principal research question of the thesis, we further expect populists to have higher trust for IOs if they are represented in government, whether that be in a senior or junior position (*H2*). A state is operationalised as having a populist government according to the data provided by PopuList in classifying political parties, as well as the year in which the interview took place. The month and year in which the series of interviews were conducted for each state is provided as a variable in the original dataset. Therefore, if a populist party entered government

following the interview process, the government is not coded as populist [Pop_Gov]. Moreover, in the case of changing coalitions, for example in 2017 the Lithuanian cabinet had already witnessed two coalition changes since its formation in 2016, yet it is considered as a non-populist government, as the populist party only joined the coalition following the interview period. The sum of countries with populist governments at the time of the EVS interview is 10, including states like Hungary, Poland, and Italy.

Alongside the populist government IV in *H2* we control for five additional variables. First, quality of government [QoG] is operationalised according to the data provided by Gothenburg University's *Quality of Government Institute* report. Utilising the quality of government data by the institute (Dahlberg et al., 2023) in conjunction with data from the International Country Risk Guide (The PRS Group, 2023), states are coded as either poor or high depending on their cumulative score. Each state's score is provided on a 0 to 1 scale, with 1 denoting a perfect positive score in terms of quality. The values are provided in six decimals. In essence, the higher a state's value means its respective government has less corruption compared to countries with lower scores. For example, North Korea has a score of 0.277778, denoting inferior quality with high corruption, whereas New Zealand's high quality of governance and low corruption means the island-nation scores 0.944444 in the report. Secondly, respondent's political leaning is also assessed and coded in the original EVS dataset set [v102]. The variable is measured on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 means a respondent fully leans toward the left on the political spectrum and 10 indicates they are very right leaning. Moreover, this variable is self-assessed by the respondents, providing a more precise picture of the individual's political leaning. Measuring the political leaning of a respondent on a scale, enables the respondent to distinguish not only the degree to which they associate themselves to a political leaning, but also allows them to assess themselves as centrists with no clear leanings to either side. The third control variables are the respondents' age. For this we make use of the age variable included in the initial EVS file. The variable is provided as a scale in which each respondent notes their respective age at the time of their interview. As the variable is measured on a continuous scale, we can more accurately infer the potential effect age has on trust in IOs among populists.

Finally, our fourth control variable denotes whether a respondent is from a rural or an urban area. The respondent's locality is operationalised through the EVS variable measuring the population size of the town where the interview was conducted [v276_r]. The variable is coded as either: 1 (population under 5.000), 2 (population between 5.000 and 20.000), 3 (population between 20.000 and 100.000), 4 (population between 100.000 and 500.000), and 5 (population of 500.000 or more). Although the variable does not directly the population of the respondent's locality, we assume both to be similar. Moreover, the control variables will be used in a second model for *H2*, as such they will not directly affect our main tests.

Overall, after matching the states included in the EVS dataset with the states' parties classified by the PopuList, we are left with 25 states, and around 31.482 respondents, however some will be excluded over the course of the analysis due to missing values. For the DV, trust in IOs, we make use of the two variables *v124* (EU) and *v125* (UN). We provide a general overview of the distribution of answers selected for both variables by both populist and non-populist respondents in Table 1. The remaining variables are all IVs. Of the 31.482 respondents, there were 6.675 who claimed a populist party appealed to them the most. As mentioned toward the beginning of this section, there are 10 states which, at the time of the interview, had a populist government, either in a junior or senior capacity. Thus the 15 remaining states had no populist party in government whatsoever at the time. The QoG of the states included in the dataset are all relatively high compared to the global average. Sweden and Finland scored the highest values included in the dataset, specifically 0.972222. On the other end of the spectrum, Romania had the lowest score of the countries included: 0.388889. The distribution of scores accorded to each country is shown in Figure 3. Figure 4 displays the distribution in political leaning between all respondents. Finally, the distribution in the ages of the respondents as well as their location's corresponding population size are shown in Figures 5 and 6, respectively.

Table 1

Trust in the IOs

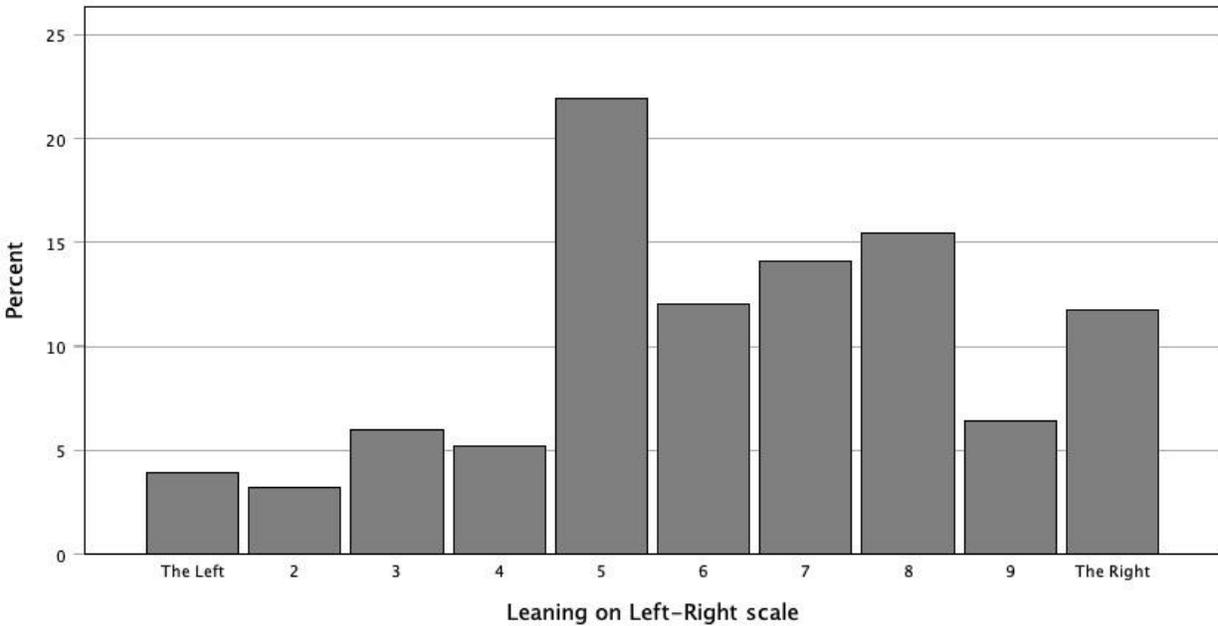|		Non-Populist		Populist	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Trust EU	A great deal	1680	6.8	265	4.4
	Quite a bit	10426	42.0	1641	27.2
	Not very much	9754	39.3	2535	42.0
	None at all	2947	11.9	1595	26.4
	Total	24807	100	6036	100
Trust UN	A great deal	2417	9.7	373	6.2
	Quite a bit	12001	48.4	2206	36.5
	Not very much	8143	32.8	2387	39.5
	None at all	2246	9.1	1070	17.7
	Total	24807	100	6036	100

Figure 3

Quality of Government
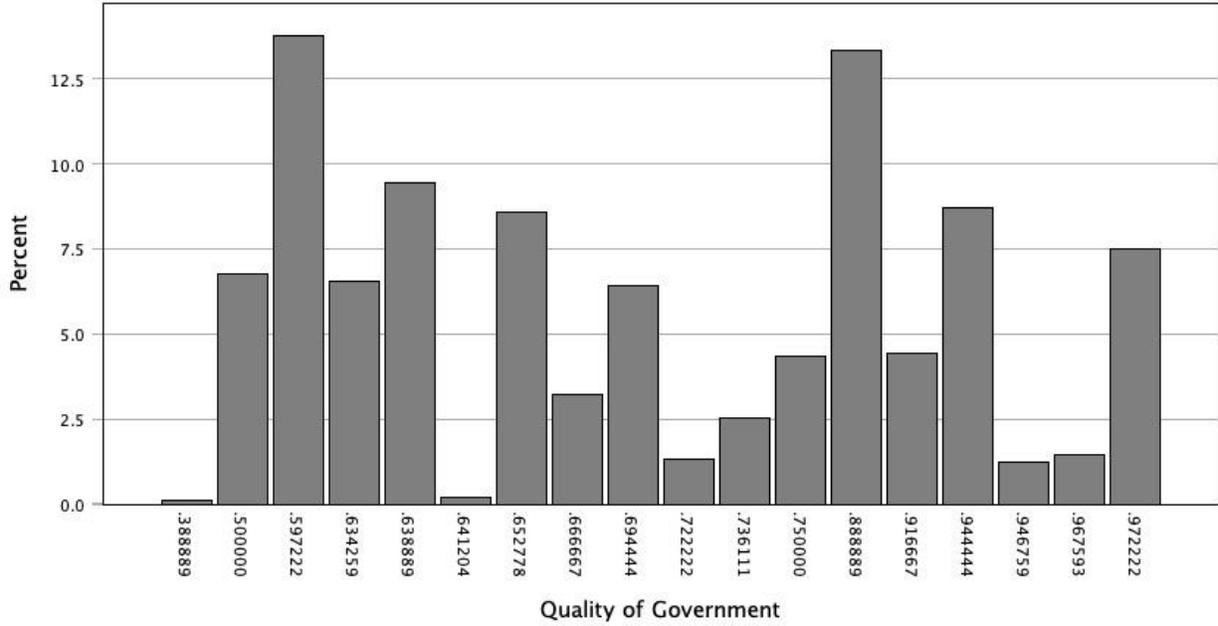
Note. Indicates spread of QoG scores as a percentage of all populist respondents

Figure 4

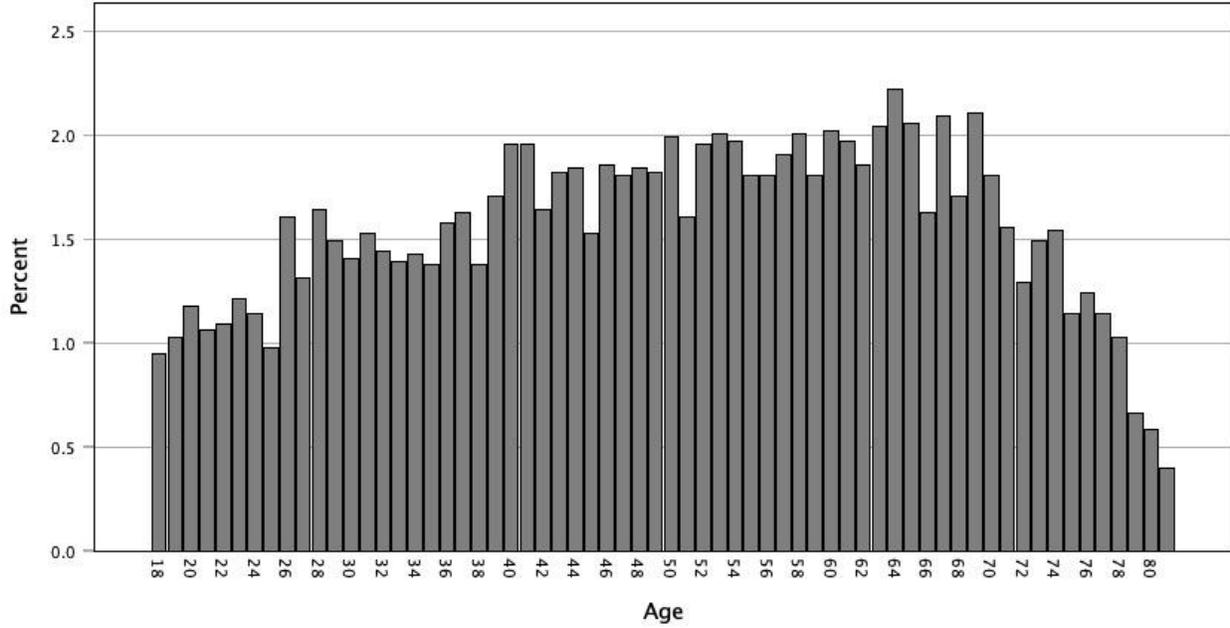*Leaning on Left-Right scale*

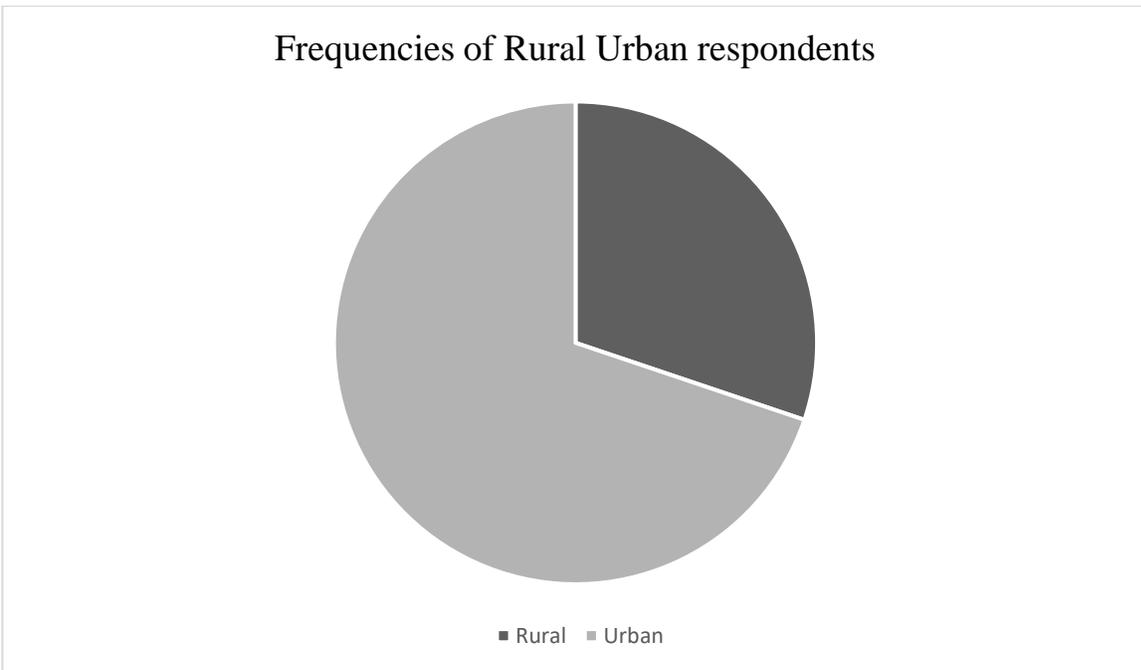*Note.* Indicates spread of left/right scores as a percentage of all populist respondents

Figure 5

Age

Note. Indicates spread of ages as a percentage of all populist respondents

Figure 6

Rural/Urban

Frequencies of Rural Urban respondents

■ Rural   ■ Urban

Note. Indicates spread of urban rural divide as a percentage of all populist respondents

4.2 Method of analysis

The data presented in the sub-section above will be incorporated to perform a large-*N* quantitative cross-sectional comparison between populists across Europe and their confidence in both the EU and the UN. As such, our unit of analysis is at the individual level, as we measure data collected directly from ESV respondents. Moreover, the data, unchanged, includes a mix of ordinal, continuous and multinominal variables, however due to the necessities of certain statistical tests some variables will be transformed.

For *H1*, we want to compare the trust in IOs between all the respondents from the 25 states selected, specifically controlling for whether they are populist or not, according to the party that appeals to them the most in their country. To do this we make use of an independent samples t-test. A t-test is suitable for our first hypothesis as it can determine if a difference exists between the means of the groups included in our dichotomous IV. More exactly the test indicates whether the difference is statistically significant. The first assumption of the t-test expects the DV to be continuous. Despite our DV being ordinal, we proceed with the t-test and measure the DV as a scale. The IV of a t-test is assumed to be categorical, which our populist variable is. Additionally, the test expects the groups to have an independence of observation, meaning there is no relationship between the individuals in each group. The three remaining assumptions of the t-test will be further discussed in the analysis section. Briefly, however, they include a normality of distribution of the DV, the absence of significant outliers, and homogeneity of variances. The final assumption is violated; however, we interpret the results of the *equal variances not assumed* output provided by SPSS when performing an independent samples t-test. Ultimately, we make use of the t-test as it provides us with an effect size, which determines whether a relationship can be expected in a real-world setting. The effect size is especially important in the context of our analysis.

Testing for the influence of a populist government on a populist's trust in IOs (*H2*) is done with The use of a hierarchical multiple linear regression. We do this so we can first test our IV for populist government's relationship with trust in IOs by itself in a first model. With the second model including our control variables. This test is specifically employed as it allows us to add variables in steps and can indicate how each IV predicts our DV. As such we can predict our main IV's effect on trust in IOs, as well as verify the variance explained by our control variables. The test assumes we have a continuous DV, and all our IVs are either continuous or nominal. Our DV, however is an ordinal variable, as such it must be re-coded into a scale variable. After this, our variables fulfil the primary assumptions of the test. Moreover, the regression further expects there to be an independence of errors, a linear relationship between the IVs and the DV, homoscedasticity and a normal distribution of errors. We return to this these final assumptions in the following Section.

5. Analysis

Prior to conducting the hypothesis tests cited above, the variables from the EVS datafile had to be recoded into a more appropriate version. For this, IBM's 29th iteration of its SPSS Statistics software was employed throughout the analysis, each step of the analysis is outlined below. The syntax of each process is included in the Appendix document separate of the thesis.

First off, the respondents' party appeals variable [v174_cs] was recoded into a new variable [Populist]. The variable is coded as either *1*, denoting the respondent as being populist, or *0*, non-populist. This was done by selecting all the country-specific political party codes which corresponded to the parties designated as populist under the PopuList classification. Moreover, the missing values, which either meant the respondent simply had no preference toward any of the parties present in their country or there was no answer, were removed from the dataset. Again, the missing values were mostly country-specific codes, as such they had to be filtered out individually. Specifically, the filtered-out values from the *Populist* variable were deleted from the dataset as an additional form of cleaning up the set.

The DV was also modified into a more fitting variable. The variables measuring confidence in the EU [v124] and the UN [v125] were recoded to invert their scales. That is to mean, the original scale of both variables was reordered to denote *1* as no confidence at all, *2* not very much confidence, *3* quite a bit of confidence, and *4* a great deal of confidence in either of the corresponding organisations. Furthermore, the missing variables of the original variable, which included cases in which, akin to the *Populist* variable, the respondent either did not know, or no answer was recorded for the case, were removed from the dataset. Importantly, the removal of whole respondent, when they had a missing value for only one of the two variables ensure the values are paired. The new variables are titled [Trust_EU] and [Trust_UN] respectively.

5. 1 Populist trust in organisations

Following the recoding of the variables required to test *H1*, the independent samples t-test was run to measure the significance in difference of trust in IOs between populist and non-populist respondents. The assumptions of the t-test regarding outliers and normal distribution were first verified and validated. No outliers were found in the data, as assessed by the inspection of a box-plot, in the tests carried out for both trust in the EU the UN of the populist respondents. Confidence scores were also normally distributed for both variables, as indicated by each of their Q-Q plots. As both assumptions were met, the requirements of the t-test were fulfilled, allowing for the test to be carried out. Importantly, however, Levene's test for equality of variances indicated a breach in the assumption of homogeneity of variances ($F = 11.15$, $p = <.001$). Nevertheless, as the dataset is relatively packed, the assumption can be easily violated, as such the *equal variances not assumed* output was followed for the interpretation of the results. For trust in the EU, the independent samples t-test for equal variances not assumed yielded the following result; *t (df*

= 10020.96) = -29.474, $p < 0.001$), indicating that populist respondents and non-populist reposndents had a significant difference on their levels of trust in the EU. In particular, populist respondents reported a lower mean of trust ($M = 2.10$, $SD = 0.84$) compared to non-populist repsondents ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 0.79$). Finally, there is a significant large effect and the difference between populist and non-populist respondents; Cohen's $d = 0.8$.

Conjointly, the independent samples t-test for equal variances not assumed for trust in the UN showed a statistically significant difference between the views of populist and non-populist respondents, with a t-value of -24.87 and degrees of freedom equal to 10096.98 ($p < 0.001$). Specifically, the populist respondents exhibited a lower average trust score ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.83$) than the non-populist respondents ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.79$). This difference represented a substantial effect size, with Cohen's d = 0.8. Like trust in the EU, the assumption of equal variances was found to be violated as per Levene's test ($F = 43.93$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the variance of trust levels differed significantly between the two groups, however as mentioned we make use of the *equal variances not assumed* output. Interestingly both populist and non-populist respondents, on average, had higher trust for the UN compared to the EU. We thus reject the null hypothesis for *H1*.

5.2 Populist governments and trust in IOs
The variable stating whether a respondent's country had a populist government or not [Pop_Gov] was created by recoding the original country code variable [country], where the value of each state was transformed to either 1 standing for a populist government, or 0 denoting the opposite. As mentioned previously, there are a total of 10 countries out of 25 which had a populist govern-ment at the time of the interviews. Thus, for *H2* a hierarchical multiple regression was con-ducted. The test was performed to predict trust in the EU and UN based on whether a government was populist or not among populist respondents, while controlling for quality of government, the indvidiuals left/right political affiliation, their age, and whether they live in a rural or urban area. We also met the additional assumptions for the test. There was independence of residuals, as assessed by a Durbin-Watson statistic of 1.910. There was linearity as assessed by partial regression plots and a plot of studentised residuals against predicted values. There was homoscedasticity, as assessed by visual inspection of a plot of studentised residuals versus un-standardised predicted values. There is no evidence of multicollinearity, as assessed by tolerance values greater than 0.1. There were no studentised deleted residuals greater than ± 3 standard de-viations, no leverage values greater than 0.2, and values for Cook's distance above 1. The as-sumption of normality was met, as assessed by a Q-Q plot.

Model 1 on the one hand found a significant regression equation ($F (1, 5384) = 12.47$, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .002. States with a populist government indicated signficantly higer levels of trust in the EU in comparision to non-populist governments among populist respondents ($b = .09$, *SE*

= .03, , β = .05, $p < .001$). On the other hand, Model 2 significantly added to the explanation of variances of the DV for the EU (*F change* (4, 5380) = 108.12, $p < .001$), with an R^2 of .077. In particular we find that populist government is no longer a statistically significant predictor for trust in the EU (b = -.03, *SE* = .03, β = .02, p = .265). However, we find that the control variable quality of government was a statistically significant predictor (b = -1.54, *SE* = .08, β = .26, $p <$ .001). The control variable political affiliation according to the left right spectrum also appeared to be a significant predictor for trust in the EU (b = -.04, *SE* = .01, β = .12, $p < .001$). Also, statistically significant was the control variable age (b = -.002, *SE* = .001, β = .03, p = .018). On the contrary our control variable denoting whether a respondent was urban or rural was not statistically significant (b = .04, *SE* = .02, β = .02, p = .151.). The results are displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Hierarchical Multiple Regression Predicting Trust in the EU From Populist Government, Quality of Government, Age and Urban/Rural

	Trust in the EU			
	Model 1		Model 2	
Variable	B	β	B	β
Constant	2.07**		3.55**	
Populist Government	0.09**	0.05	-0.03	-0.02
Quality of Government			-1.54**	-0.26
Leaning on Left-Right Scale			-0.04**	-0.12
Age			-0.002*	-0.03
Urban Rural			0.04	0.02
R^2	.002		.077	
F	12.47**		89.19**	
ΔR^2	.002		.074	
ΔF	12.47**		108.12**	

Note. Model = "Enter" method in SPSS Statistics; B = unstandardised regression coefficient; β = standardised coefficient; R^2 = coefficient of determination; F = ratio of variances; ΔR^2 = Adjusted R^2; ΔF = change in *F; N* = 5386. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .001$.

Regarding trust in the UN, the assumptions for the hierarchical regression were also met. Subsequently, Model 1 also found a significant regression equation (F (1, 5384) = 4.25, p = .039), with an R^2 of .001. States with a populist government indicated signficiantly higher levels of trust in the UN among populists in comparison to those in states with non-populist governments (b = .05, SE = .03, β = .03, p = .039). Model 2 only slightly added to the explanation of variances of the DV for the UN (F *change* (4, 5380) = 12.72, p < .001), with an R^2 of .01. Similar to trust in the EU, populist government was no longer the best predictor for distrust in the IO (b = .02, SE = .03, β = .01, p = .45). The control variables using for the UN DV, however, generated different results than those for trust in the EU. Quality of government was a statistically significant predictor for trust in the UN (b = -.45, SE = .09, β = -.08, p < .001). Meanwhile, leaning on the left-right scale was not statistically significant (b = .01, SE = .01, β = -.02, p = .10). The control variable for age was statistically significant (b = -.003, SE = .001, β = -.05, p < .001). Finally, the rural urban control variable was also a significant predictor for trust in the UN (b = .06, SE = .03, β = .03, p = .019). All results for Trust in the UN are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Multiple regression results for Trust in the UN

| Variable | Trust in the UN | | | |
| | Model 1 | | Model 2 | |
	B	β	B	β
Constant	2.28**		2.70**	
Populist Government	0.05*	0.03	0.02	0.01
Quality of Government			-0.45**	-0.8
Leaning on Left-Right Scale			-0.01	-0.02
Age			-0.003**	-0.05
Urban Rural			0.06*	0.02
R^2	.001		.010	
F	4.25*		11.03**	
ΔR^2	.001		.009	
ΔF	4.25*		12.72**	

6. Discussion

6.1 Answering the research question

In order to address the research question at the core of this thesis, which investigates the impact of populism on an individual's trust in an IO, we conducted an analysis that encompassed a total of two hypotheses. The complexity of the results necessitates a comprehensive interpretation. Nevertheless, we can now provide a preliminary response to the research question.

The independent samples t-test was performed for *H1*, which posited that populist respondents would exhibit lower levels of trust in international organizations compared to non-populist respondents. The results of the t-test unequivocally supported our hypothesis, indicating that non-populist respondents, on the whole, displayed a greater degree of trust in IOs when compared to populists. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, paving the way for us to delve into answering our research question.

Based on our findings, we can infer that populism indeed exerts an influence on an individual's level of trust in an IO. Specifically, the t-test conducted for *H1* revealed that populism is associated with a heightened sense of distrust. Moreover, the statistical significance and substantial effect size (Cohen's *d*) observed in both the EU and UN contexts lead us to expect that this relationship would persist in real-world settings, under the assumption that other factors remain constant. Notably, the results also indicate an interesting disparity in trust levels between the two IOs, regardless of an individual's populist affiliation. However, it is evident that non-populists consistently scored higher in terms of overall trust.

Our findings closely align with prior research on populism, which had already anticipated this relationship. The literature on populism emphasizes its inherent conflict with the status quo and its critique of concentrated power among political elites (Mudde, 2004; Stoker, 2021). Furthermore, core characteristics of populism are believed to erode trust in institutions (Geurkink et al., 2019, p. 251). Thus, it was reasonable to expect that populists would exhibit greater distrust in institutions, as has been observed within national contexts concerning governments and civil service (Simon & Moltz, 2021, p. 1008; Vitale & Girard, 2022, p. 548). Further adding to our assumption, from a psychological standpoint, populists are characterized by a pervasive disposition of generalized distrust (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2023), indicating a lack of trust overall. Our findings are not only consistent with the theoretical expectations of populist literature but also parallel previous findings from related analyses, thereby lending further legitimacy to our results.

However, what remains particularly intriguing is the distinct variation in trust levels observed between the EU and UN. We will delve into this disparity later in this section. Subsequently, we will interpret the results for second hypothesis, contextualizing it within the theoretical framework outlined in Section 3. Additionally, we will discuss the implications and limitations of our analysis and findings in the following section. Moreover, in Section 7 we will provide recommendations for future research endeavours aimed at expanding our understanding of the effects of populism on governments and citizens. These insights are essential for policymakers who must acknowledge and strive to mitigate the potential risks associated with populism within a polity.

6.2 Representation matters

The hierarchical multiple regression conducted for our second hypothesis examined the relationship between populist respondents' trust in IOs and their representing in government. The statistically significant results from Model 1 for both the EU and the UN suggest we can thus reject the null hypothesis for *H2*. In essence, populist respondents were predicted to have a higher level of trust in both the EU and the UN when a populist party was in government compared to respondents in states where populists were in the opposition.

It is important to note, however, that although populist respondents showed a greater degree of trust in the EU and UN when a populist party was in government, the difference in trust scores was only marginally higher. In other words, regardless of their representation, populists tended to display a relatively low level of trust in IOs overall, never responding with a remarkably high degree of trust in either IO. This phenomenon can be attributed to the inherent scepticism and distrust that populists often hold towards institutions. Nonetheless, the presence of populist representation in government seemed to slightly alleviate this general distrust, resulting in a modest increase in trust levels.

These findings align with our theoretical framework and are consistent with existing research. For instance, Mauk (2020, p. 46) suggests that populist leaders and parties have the potential to enhance trust in government and institutions, albeit primarily in the short term. Similarly, Hajdinjak (2022) explores how populist parties and leaders can improve trust levels once in government through three distinct mechanisms. Firstly, voters tend to exhibit greater confidence in the political system if they supported the electoral winners, as they perceive their interests and concerns being represented. Additionally, populist parties may implement policy reforms that address the specific grievances of their voters, thereby fostering trust and support.

In summary, our findings demonstrate that representation plays a significant role in shaping populist respondents' trust in IOs. While the presence of populist representation in government led to

a slightly higher level of trust, the overall level of trust among populists remained relatively modest. This can be attributed to the inherent distrust populists harbour towards institutions. Nonetheless, our results provide empirical support for the notion that representation matters in influencing trust dynamics and contribute to the existing body of research on populism and trust in institutions.

The Model 2 for the regression test of each of our DVs, that is when the control variables were included, did indicate certain variables may be better predictors for trust in IOs compared to populist governments. For trust in the EU and the UN, we found that quality of government were significant predictors both times. As such, we infer that both control variables have a stronger effect on trust in IOs compared to a populist being in government, as such they appear to be better predictors than our populist government IV.

6.3 An issue of proximity?
In our analysis, we distinguished between trust in the EU and trust in the UN, utilizing both DVs independently of each other in separate analyses for each hypothesis. This decision was primarily driven by our curiosity for how results may vary depending on the IO. However, the results have strongly indicated that Europeans, in general, tend to have greater trust in the UN compared to the EU. This relationship persisted even when focusing solely on populist respondents, suggesting that populists, as a group, exhibit higher levels of confidence in the UN relative to the EU. While there is limited literature available to explain this phenomenon specifically, Geurkink et al. (2019, p. 250) have suggested that individuals may have greater confidence in institutions with limited public access, such as central banks. While we do not claim that the UN is an IO with low public access, it likely has less visibility and public exposure compared to the EU. Additionally, as Hooghe and Marks (2009) have explained, the EU has become increasingly politicized, which may contribute to higher levels of distrust in this IO. While the UN is also subject to politicisation, Europeans may be more exposed to news and information concerning the EU compared to the UN due to its geographic and political proximity, potentially leading to a greater sense of distrust in the EU. Moreover, an updated study may indicate reduced trust in the UN, as the data was collected before the pandemic.

7. Conclusion
In conclusion, our comprehensive analysis aimed to delve into the intricate relationship between populism and an individual's trust in the EU and the UN, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics at play. Our findings substantiate the prevailing notion that populists tend to exhibit lower levels of trust compared to their non-populist counterparts when it comes to these IOs. Moreover, our research indicates that populists who are represented in government, thus confirming both of

our hypotheses. We conclude this thesis by briefly discussing the implications and limitations of our research, along with recommendations for academics and policy makers.

Over time, numerous studies have consistently demonstrated the decline in trust the public has in institutions, signalling a concerning trend (Chanley et al., 2000; Rockman, 2019). This erosion of trust has been observed across different societies, and even civil servants are increasingly perceived as antagonistic and untrustworthy (Moynihan, 2021, p. 174). However, trust in institutions plays a pivotal role in the functioning of democracies and the overall stability of a polity (Simon & Moltz, 2021, p. 998). Thus, the prevailing decline in confidence among the public poses a significant challenge for institutions and policymakers.

However, our analysis has revealed an even more pronounced level of distrust among the sampled respondents in Europe. This finding underscores the urgency in addressing the continued growth of populism and the rise of populist parties, as they pose an elevated threat to the legitimacy and effectiveness of international institutions. The heightened distrust among populists has far-reaching implications for the functioning of these institutions. A prominent example can be seen in the context of the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK, where deep-rooted mistrust in the EU ultimately led to the country's official departure from the Union in January 2020 (Olivas Osuna et al., 2021).

Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the potential consequences of declining institutional confidence among populists. Several studies have demonstrated a positive correlation between populist distrust in institutions and engagement in pandemic-related conspiracy theories, indicating a propensity for misinformation and scepticism (Eberl et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022). Populists have also shown tendencies towards non-compliance with crucial public health measures, such as mask-wearing and social distancing regulations, thereby undermining collective efforts to mitigate the impact of the pandemic (Ehrke et al., 2023). Furthermore, lower levels of vaccine uptake among populists have been observed, leading to concerns about public health and the effectiveness of vaccination campaigns (Recio-Román et al., 2021).

It is essential to note that our analysis encompasses 25 countries, each with the presence of populist parties. Notably, at the time of the interviews conducted for the European Social Survey, 10 of these countries had populist governments. This indicates not only the increasing prominence of populism among voters but also its influence in both domestic and foreign policy decision-making. Examining foreign policy specifically, populist theory posits that populists tend to exhibit anti-pluralist and potentially nativist tendencies, which may have negative implications for international relations (Löfflmann, 2022). Therefore, scholars in the field of IR must anticipate the potential shifts in foreign policy associated with populism and develop a nuanced understanding of the role populism plays in the international system.

These findings have significant implications for scholars in the field of PA, as well as Political Science in general. They shed light on the challenges faced by international institutions in gaining and maintaining legitimacy among their populist publics. Furthermore, the degree of distrust observed among populists is influenced by a range of factors, necessitating further research and investigation. Understanding the complex dynamics and implications of populism on institutional trust and democratic governance is crucial for formulating effective strategies and policies. Overall, these findings contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of populism in Europe, particularly within the context of the EU, and highlight the pressing need to address the underlying concerns and restore trust in institutions.

In conducting our analysis, we sought to align our operationalisations for each concept with previous studies on populism and confidence in government. However, it is important to acknowledge that certain aspects of our operationalisations may be subject to criticism. For instance, while the variables utilised to measure trust in IOs are similar to those employed in prior research utilizing the EVS (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Hajdinjak, 2022), our operationalisation for populism—specifically, the determination of whether a respondent is populist or not—may present analytical challenges and may not remain relevant over time. The inherent nature of populism makes it difficult to operationalise, particularly when relying on existing survey data. In our approach, we classified respondents as populists based on their affinity for the political party that aligns most closely with populism, as defined by the PopuList classification. However, it is worth noting that mere attraction to a party does not necessarily imply populism, and there may be individuals attracted to non-populist parties who could be considered populist under alternative operationalisations. For instance, a recent study examining the relationship between populism and engagement in COVID-19 conspiracy theories (Eberl et al., 2021) utilised a more intricate operationalisation, incorporating multiple variables in their dataset to identify populists. Unfortunately, given the time constraints of our thesis, we were unable to employ such a comprehensive approach.

Turning to our control variable for denoting an individual as either a rural or urban respondent, we encountered limitations in the EVS dataset. Although the dataset did not offer an ideal variable, we recoded a variable that measured the size of the town where the survey interview took place, assuming that it would reasonably correspond to the respondents' rural or urban residence. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that this operationalisation may not capture all rural populists present in the EVS file. Despite these limitations, we believe that our chosen approach provided some valuable insights and contributed to a better understanding of our expectations. It is also worth mentioning that we are content with the operationalisations employed for our remaining IVs, as they appear to effectively capture the intended variables.

While it is necessary to consider the limitations stemming from our operationalisations, it is worth noting that the extensive sample size in our dataset mitigates some of the concerns related to generalisability. This is particularly evident in the case of H1, where the output indicated a significant effect size. Consequently, we contend that our findings possess a certain degree of generalisability within the context of populism in Europe and the presence of populist parties in each state between 2017 and 2020. Our findings provide an approximate understanding of the relationship between populism and institutional distrust while also shedding light on the complexity of the concept and the varying levels of confidence among different populists. Moreover, these findings, coupled with the growing body of literature on populism, hold significant implications for researchers and policymakers seeking to comprehend and address this phenomenon effectively.

While we are content with the generalisability of our findings, there is certainly room for improvement in our analysis. Future research should strive for a more precise operationalisation of populism, akin to the approach undertaken by Eberl et al. (2021), to ensure a comprehensive representation of populism within the data sample. Furthermore, it is crucial to expand our understanding of populism beyond its conceptual vagueness and delve into its multifaceted real-life implications for government and society as a whole. Exploring which specific forms of populism exhibit heightened distrust toward institutions would be particularly valuable. For instance, Lavrinenko (2020) highlighted the contrasting populist rhetoric in the Czech Republic and Hungary, with the former demonstrating greater trust in established governmental structures compared to the latter's nativist populist approach. Investigating such nuances can enrich our comprehension of populism's intricate relationship with institutional trust.

Another fruitful avenue for future research lies in adopting a longitudinal approach to more effectively test the hypotheses proposed by Mauk (2020) regarding the short-term positive effect of populist governments on the confidence of populists in government. Mauk's contention that this boost in trust may be transient warrants further examination to ascertain its validity.

In line with Rooduijn's (2019) argument, prospective research should strive to maintain a normative stance toward populism, as it is crucial to avoid biases that may influence the analysis. Aslanidis (2017) similarly emphasized the importance of avoiding normative judgments and ensuring a clear definition of the concept. By adhering to these recommendations, researchers can enhance the robustness and objectivity of their analyses in the study of populism and confidence in IOs.

The significance of further research on the relationship between populism and confidence in IOs cannot be overstated, particularly in the context of shaping future foreign policy decisions, particularly when decision-makers themselves identify as populist. Understanding how populism

interacts with institutional trust in the realm of international affairs will enable policymakers to navigate these dynamics more effectively. Therefore, continued exploration of this topic is crucial for informing evidence-based foreign policy strategies.

The need for policy-related change has thus become increasingly apparent, and the findings along with the implications of our analysis aim to solidify this point. As previously mentioned, the presence of populism in government is likely to bring about a shift in the foreign policy of certain states and influence future multilateral negotiations. As argued by Vitale and Girard (2022), the rise of populism should serve as an incentive for institutions to actively seek and gain greater trust. The crisis of trust has prompted various suggestions from both the public and private sectors on how to rebuild it.

We believe that trust can be enhanced through two primary channels: the government or the IO itself, and the media. Governments and IOs have recognized the importance of public trust (Bouckaert, 2012) and have made commendable efforts, as seen in the case of the EU, to improve trust levels. However, they must continue to reinforce their legitimacy in the eyes of the public. This can be achieved by demonstrating greater transparency in the decision-making process and ensuring accountability when mistakes occur. The von der Leyen Commission, for example, has faced challenges in gaining trust throughout the course of the pandemic. Another persistent source of distrust stems from the broader media landscape, particularly social media platforms. Policymakers should continue to exert pressure on social media companies such as Meta (formerly Facebook) and Twitter to take more decisive action against the spread of misinformation. Enacting laws that prevent or penalize organizations claiming to be news sources from disseminating malicious fake news would be a step in the right direction.

Furthermore, it is crucial to recognize that distrust has grown over the decades due to numerous factors, including potential economic and cultural inequalities and the proliferation of diverse news sources promoting different narratives. In response, we recommend that governments and IOs place a greater emphasis on minimizing inequality and addressing it equitably when it arises. Moreover, they must actively seek to foster trust by effectively displaying their successes, articulating their vision for the future, and, most importantly, highlighting their indispensability in today's world order.

By addressing these recommendations and undertaking proactive measures to rebuild trust, governments and IOs can create a more favourable environment for policymaking and strengthen the legitimacy of international institutions. Building trust with the public is essential for fostering effective governance, ensuring the stability of democratic systems, and addressing the challenges faced by the international community.

In summary, our study sheds light on the intricate interplay between populism and trust in international institutions. The implications of populism's impact on trust extend beyond individual perceptions, posing challenges to the very foundations of democratic governance. The findings underscore the imperative for continued research, policy development, and public engagement to foster trust, strengthen democratic resilience, and navigate the complex terrain of populism in contemporary politics.

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