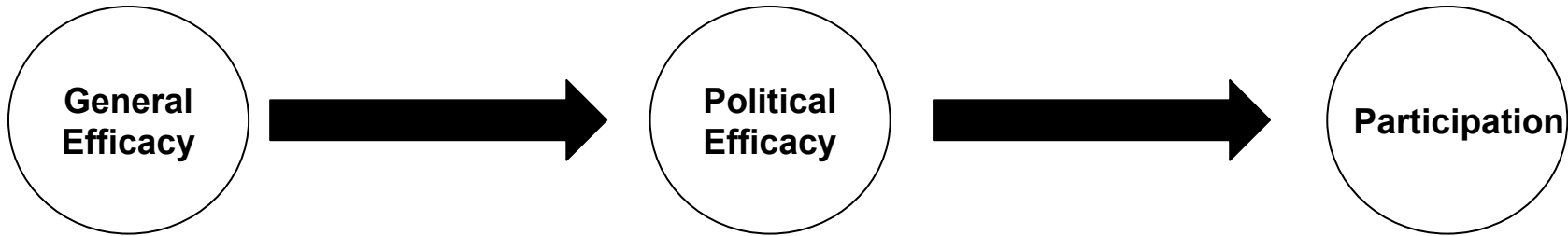# The Psychological Underpinnings of Populist Attitudes

Bruno Castanho Silva, Erin K. Jenne, and Levente Littvay

Team Populism Conference, Dubrovnik, Croatia, 2017.
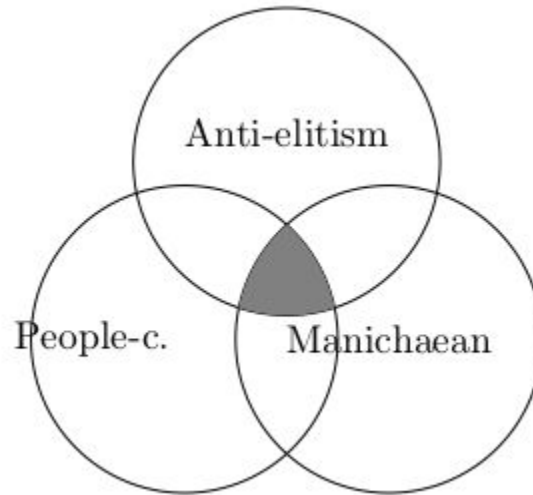
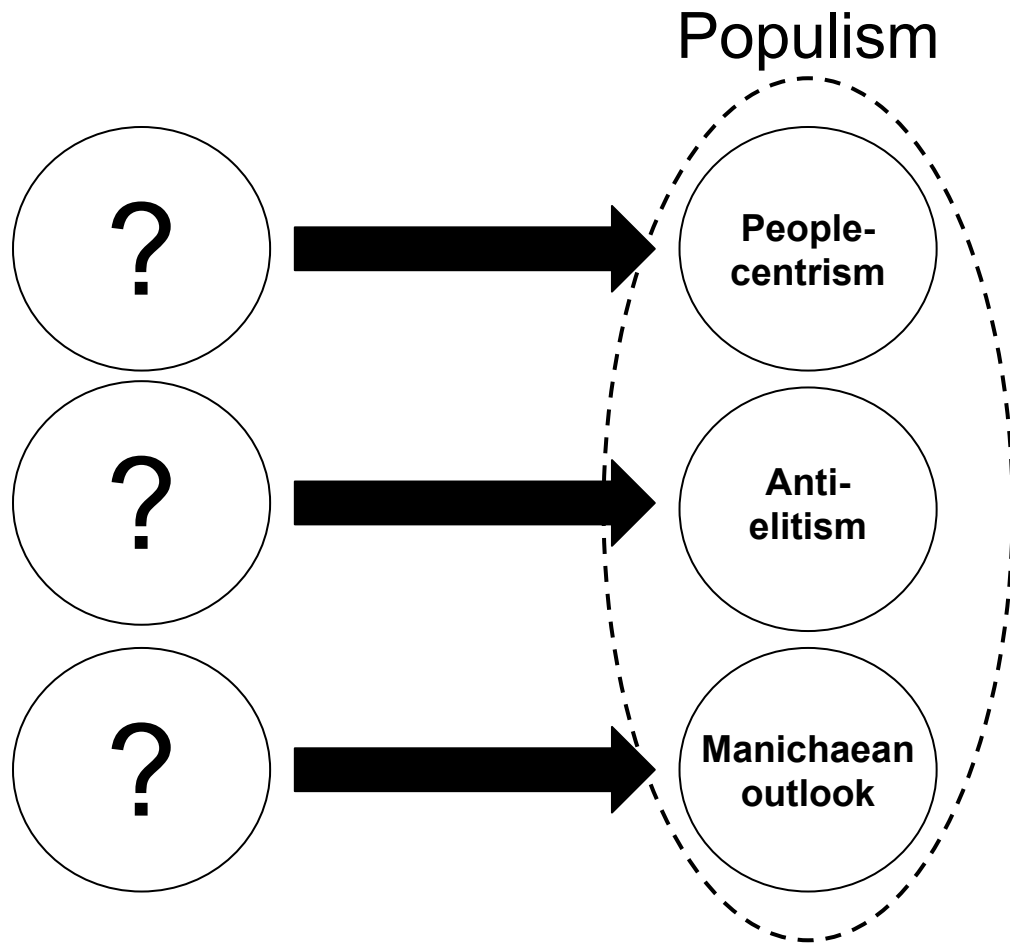CEU | CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Where from?

- Populism seen as attitudes, or dispositions (Hawkins et al. 2012, Hawkins, Carlin, Littvay and Rovira Kaltwasser *forthcoming*);
- Political attitudes are manifestations of more deep-seated psychological characteristics;
- What are those fundamental psychological characteristics associated with populist preferences?

General Efficacy → Political Efficacy → Participation

Littvay, Weith and Dawes 2011, SSQ

What it Is

- Populism sits at the intersection of three kinds of discourses, or attitudes:

Some are straightforward

People who see politics in black and white, as a struggle between good and evil

    probably see everything in the world more black and white

People who blame their problems on the elites

    probably blame others for their problems

CEU | CENTRAL
EUROPEAN
UNIVERSITY

Batteries tested:

blame: do you blame others in general for bad things;

general efficacy: can I influence my life;

anomie: world too complex / DK how to function in world / things change too fast

declinism: (social) too much moral decay, (rules) rules and regulations are bad

relative deprivation: I never get what I deserve (from government - clean streets)

belief in just world: to yourself and others in outcomes and processes

Batteries tested (cont.)

catastrophism: Everything is terrible

dogmatism: I am sure and everyone else is wrong

belief in pure good & evil: There is pure good/evil in the world

Australian sheep-goat: belief in supernatural (god, esp, aliens, Universe, etc.)

CEU CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Data

Amazon MTurk sample

- 722 respondents who are resident in the United States.
- 51.4% female, 48.6% male;
- mean age = 37.
- Median income: $45,000 - $49,999;
- 77.6% are white, 6.9% are black, 5.8% are Hispanic, and 4.8% Asian.
- 41.8% have a bachelor's degree, 21.9% did not earn any higher education degree, and 13.6% have an associate degree.

Measurement of Populism

a) The three components separately, each with three indicators.
b) It's a configural concept: take factor scores for each observation in each of the three constructs, standardize to range between 0-1, and multiply all three.
    i)   Single value of populist attitude for each individual.

Predictors of each component:

- **People-centrism:** Belief in pure good; Dogmatism (-);
- **Anti-elitism:** Belief the world is just (-); Belief in pure evil; Internal self-efficacy;
- **Manichaean outlook:** Relative Deprivation; Belief the world is just (-); Dogmatism
- Model fit is acceptable: χ^2: 2009.609***, *df = 1286.* CFI: .911, TLI: .898, RMSEA: .028, SRMR: .065

Predictors of Aggregate Populist Attitudes

- **Relative Deprivation;**
- **Belief in Pure Evil;**
- **Internal self-efficacy;**
- **Dogmatism;**
- **Belief in a Just World (-)**
- Model fit is acceptable: χ^2: 1402.877***, *df = 1286.* CFI: .911, TLI: .898, RMSEA: .028, SRMR: .065

Conclusions

- Psychological correlates are mostly of two kinds:
- Certainty in the correctness of one's beliefs
    - High self-efficacy and dogmatism;
- Perception of an unfair and evil world:
    - Belief in pure evil; relative deprivation; belief in an unjust world.
- Breaking down into populist attitudes components, people-centrism is mostly associated with other positive attitudes.

CEU | CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Thank you

New Scale (Castanho Silva et al forthcoming)

Ppl1. Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people.

Ppl2. Politicians don't have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.*

Ppl3. The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics.

Ant1. The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.

Ant2. Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.*

Ant3. Quite a few of the people running the government are crooked.

Man1. You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.

Man2. The people I disagree with politically are not evil.*

Man3. The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed.

CEU : CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY