

## Populist Attitude and Voting in Pakistan: Insights from a National Survey

Fizza Batool<sup>1\*</sup> and Amir Ahmed Farooqui<sup>2</sup>

1-Central European University, Hungary

2-Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science, and Technology, Pakistan

\*Corresponding Author: [batoolf@ceu.edu](mailto:batoolf@ceu.edu)

### ABSTRACT

The electoral success of the Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) – a populist party – in Pakistan prompts scholarly interest in the dynamics of populist voting. While existing literature offers qualitative insights into PTI appeals, a quantitative assessment of public attitudes towards populism and their correlation with voting behaviour remains absent. This paper aims to address this gap and presents the results of the first populist survey in Pakistan. By empirically measuring populist, pluralist and elitist attitudes among Pakistani voters and examining their relationship with voting behaviour, the study contributes some understanding of factors driving support for populist forces in Pakistan. The study also highlights the limitations of the scales, when applied in Pakistan, and suggests modification for future empirical studies on populist attitude.

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## INTRODUCTION

The 2018 elections in Pakistan marked an important juncture in the country's political history, highlighting the growing influence of populist discourse on public voting decisions. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI), a right-wing populist party operating as a fringe opposition party since 1996, won the majority seats in a province and centre. Founded by Imran Khan, a sportsman-turned-politician, the party has been challenging the dominance of Pakistan's traditional political parties—the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP)—for over a decade. Its initial platform centred on anti-elitism directed at both civil and military institutions, with a strong stance against a military government's decision to involve Pakistan in the US-led War on Terror (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021). Over time, particularly after the party's electoral defeat in the 2013 general elections, Khan gradually shifted towards a more right-wing discourse, drawing on conservative and nationalist themes (Batool (2023a). His rhetoric increasingly emphasised the vision of a Riyasat-e-Medina. Because Medina was the first Arab city where an Islamic government was established, the slogan has elements of both nostalgia and religious morality. He started framing the political elite not just as economically corrupt but also morally inferior to “the people” and disloyal to the country (Faiz, 2022). Meanwhile, he started aligning more closely with the military and projecting it as the only reliable institution in the country, even though the military had ruled over the country for most of its history. This shift culminated in the PTI's electoral success in 2018, where it secured 149 out of 342 seats in the National Assembly, leading to Khan's appointment as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

The electoral success of the PTI in Pakistan prompts scholarly interest in the dynamics of populist voting in the hybrid democratic context. While existing literature offers qualitative insights into PTI appeals (Batool (2023b), (Yilmaz et al., 2023), a quantitative assessment of public attitudes towards populism and their correlation with voting behaviour remains absent. This paper aims to address this gap and presents the results of the first populist survey in Pakistan. By empirically measuring populist, pluralist and elitist attitudes among Pakistani voters and examining their relationship with voting behaviour, the study contributes some understanding of factors driving support for populist forces in Pakistan. Also, because the study builds on the rich body of populist research conducted in Europe, the United States, Latin America, and other parts of Asia, it situates Pakistan within the broader global discourse on populism and offers valuable comparative insights to understand how shifts in socio-political realities influence populist voting.

Pakistan is an excellent case to test the validity of populist attitude measures developed in Europe. The political realities of the country differ significantly

from those of European democracies. It is an illiberal democracy that has remained under military dictatorships for most of its political history. This struggle between democratic forces and the non-democratic “establishment” and the liberal and illiberal institutions in Pakistan offers new scenarios to study the relationship of populism with democracy and pluralism. The elitist attitudes in the country might also be influenced by their perception of different elite groups, as those opposed to politicians might support the military elite or meritocracy. As per previously conducted studies, the voting decisions of Pakistanis are influenced by performance (Mohmand, 2019), patronage (Batool (2023b), (Khan, 2021) and religious affiliation (Khan, 2021), and we can test how populist attitudes link with these other factors.

### Defining Populist Attitudes

Although populism received greater prominence in the 21st century in both scholarly and popular literature, the focus of the discussion remained mostly on populist leaders and parties. It is only recently that academics have shifted their attention to the demand side of populism, looking at how the general population reacts to the populism of political leaders. A major advance on this topic was made by Hawkins and Riding (2010), who introduced a new scale to measure populist attitudes in public. Since then, several such scales have been developed ( e.g. Akkerman et al., 2015; ) (Oliver & Rahn, 2016; Schulz et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2018; Stanley, 2011) and tested in different contexts (Balta et al., 2022; Bos et al., 2021; Zanotti & Rama, 2021).

Most scales developed to measure the populist attitude among voters have emphasised that it is a set of ideas or a discourse rather than some actions and can exist at the mass level, either with activation or as an intrinsic personality trait (Hawkins et al., 2012). Drawing from theoretical works on populism, mostly from the ideational school of populism (Mudde, 2004), these empiricists have identified some key features or dimensions of the populist attitude to develop items for their scale. For instance, Hawkins et al. (2012), who did the seminal work on measuring populism, developed four items of populist attitude: Manichean view of politics as a struggle between good and bad, support for a general will of the people, criticism of elites and that people should make policy instead of politicians. Stanley (2011) defined populism as comprised of four beliefs: the homogeneity of “the people” and “the elite”, an antagonistic relationship between the two, anti-pluralism and moralism. Oliver and Rahn (2016) divided populism into three dimensions: anti-elitism, mistrust of experts, and national affiliation.

However, most recent works (Schulz et al., 2018; Spruyt et al., 2016,?) use the three-dimensional division established by Akkerman et al. (2014) who defined populist attitudes as comprised of people-centrism, anti-elitism and Manicheanism. The three dimensions can also sufficiently cover the four-item scale of Hawkins et al. (2012), as the last item in their scale can be seen as a mix of people-centrism and anti-elitism. Despite differences in the selections, these three dimensions also overlap with the features described by Stanley (2011). The dimension of “mistrust of experts” in the measurement of Oliver and Rahn (2016) is closer to “people-centrism”, but the “nationalist affinity” in their scale stands apart from all other scales where the focus is on morality instead of nationality (Silva et al., 2020).

Review works on these scales have found this three-dimensional composition to be effective in tapping into populist attitudes (Silva et al., 2020). Hence, in this study, we will similarly define and use this three-dimensional approach to measure populism. However, we have certain reservations about the moralistic dimension of populism. Because our respondents can distinct “the people” from “the elite” on sociocultural, socioeconomic or power-based division, depending on their ideological inclinations, Manicheanism might not be a necessary condition of populism ( Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2018).

There is another problem with the Manichean dimension of populism. In the case of Pakistan, national identity is constructed around religion; more than 90 per cent of the population is Muslim; and almost all political parties have used religious symbols and signifiers in their discourse. We expect that most respondents will have a Manichean view of politics, regardless of holding a populist attitude. However, since this is the first nationalist survey of populist attitudes in Pakistan, we kept all items as they were and included Manichean measures in our study. It allowed us to identify the limitations of the most commonly used populist attitude scale when applied outside Europe.

### **Populist, Pluralist and Elitist Attitude**

To present the populist attitude as distinct from other political attitudes, researchers contrasted it with two other attitudes, pluralism and elitism, which were theoretically presented as opposite to populism (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012). However, except for a few studies (Schulz et al., 2018), most empirical results showed that pluralism and elitism are not always opposite to populism. Hawkins et al. (2012) noted that the people-centric items of populism can be appealing to those holding pluralist views. Akkerman et al. (2014) revised the pluralist attitude scale and reported that its items load low on both elitist and populist scales. However, they found that elitism and populism share an anti-

politician attitude, with the former supporting the rule by “experts” and the latter backing the rule of the people. Commenting on these mixed results, Warren (2020) argued that people can combine the three attitudes in a variety of ways, depending on their conceptualisation of liberal democracies.

Overall, we assumed that pluralism only has a negative relationship with the people-centric views of populism, while elitism intersects with anti-elitist features of populist attitudes. To test this assumption, we followed Wuttke et al. (2020) to separate the two sub-dimensions of the scale, i.e., the “anti-elitism and sovereignty” sub-dimension measured through the first four items and the “anti-elitism and Manichaeian” sub-dimension measured through the last two items. Because the first sub-dimension targets specifically the people-centric views, it is expected to be somewhat appealing to pluralists but not to elitists. In contrast, the emphasis of the second dimension is a moralistic division between the people and the power, negating pluralist ideas of democracy. Based on these distinctions, we set the following hypotheses to test the relationship between populism, elitism and pluralism.

H1: There will be a weak but significant correlation between populist, pluralist and elitist attitudes.

H2. There will be a negative correlation between the “anti-elitism and sovereignty” sub-dimension of populism and elitist attitude.

H3. There will be a negative correlation between the “anti-elitism and Manichean” sub-dimension of populism and the pluralist attitude.

## Populism and Voting Decisions

Several prior studies have tested the relationship between populist attitudes and voting choices and have suggested that voters exhibiting populist attitudes are likely to vote for populist parties in Europe (Akkerman et al., 2014; Giebler et al., 2021; Hauwaert & Kessel, 2018), the United States (Hawkins et al., 2020), Turkey (Aytaç & Elçi, 2019) and India (Ammassari et al., 2023). We expect the same predictive relationship between populist attitude and voting for populist parties in Pakistan as well, testing it on both the voting decisions in the past and the future.

H4a: Those who voted for PTI will score significantly higher on the populist attitude scale as compared to those who voted for other parties.

H4b: Those who intended to vote for PTI will score significantly higher on the populist attitude scale as compared to those who voted for other parties.

## Populism and Voting Absenteeism

The relationship between populism and voting turnout or absenteeism is much contested. Theoretically, populist parties are expected to increase voter turnout by mobilising the disenfranchised segments of society (Becchetti & Conzo, 2023). However, the empirical research fails to show such a relationship. Voter turnout was reported to have no significant relationship with the presence of a populist party in an election (Leininger & Meijers, 2021; Schwander et al., 2020), the success of a populist party in an election (Schwander et al., 2020), and the level of populist discourse used by left-wing parties (Allred et al., 2015). However, specifically in central Europe, the use of populist discourse by right-wing parties yields higher voter turnout (Allred et al., 2015).

As can be noted, most studies examining the relationship between populism and voter turnout have used populist discourse or the presence of populist leaders or parties in elections as the independent variables (Leininger & Meijers, 2021; Schwander et al., 2020), while the relationship between populist attitude and voting turnout has only recently been explored where the results are usually mixed. Studies show that populist attitudes encourage other forms of political participation but do not influence voter turnout (Geurkink et al. (2020), (Anduiza et al., 2019). Moreover, most studies have been conducted on European voters and are based on cross-country comparisons (Guiso et al., 2017; Huber & Ruth, 2017; Leininger & Meijers, 2021), making it difficult to draw hypotheses from them for a study on Pakistan.

The anti-elitist attitude and the distrust of the system were deemed some important factors behind voting for a populist party, but they are equally important determinants of voting absenteeism. In a recent study in the US, the activation of populist attitudes has been reported to encourage voting absenteeism (Ardag et al., 2020). Similarly, Kuba et al. (2023) have reported correlations between voting for a populist party and voting absenteeism. Hence, we assume that a populist attitude can also serve as a predictor of voting absenteeism.

H5a: Those who had not voted in the last elections will score significantly higher on the populist attitude scale as compared to those who voted.

H5b: Those who intend to not vote in the coming elections will score significantly higher on the populist attitude scale as compared to those who voted.

Since this dissatisfaction with the system to the degree of not voting for any party is associated with anti-elitist elements of populism but not with its people-centrism, we also assume a negative relationship between voting absenteeism and elitist attitude.

H6a: Those who had not voted in the last elections will score significantly lower on the elitist attitude scale as compared to those who voted.

H6b: Those who intend to not vote in the coming elections will score significantly lower on the elitist attitude scale as compared to those who voted.

## Data and Measures

The data for the present study was collected through an Online Survey distributed through a mix of quota and snowball sampling in 2021-2022. We shared the survey link (See Appendix) with teachers and students in our network for distribution, with consideration of the population distribution of each province. The target was to collect 500 responses at least. We received 447 responses in total, but six did not meet the inclusive criteria of being over 18 and Pakistani, and ten did not consent to participate.

A descriptive analysis was conducted on the remaining 431 responses. Owing to slight predispositions in the gender and provincial distribution in our sample, a weight variable was added. For the weightage measurement (Table 1), national estimates of gender and province were taken from the Census 2017 data. For Gilgit Baltistan, the weighting was for gender only, as it is an autonomous region. For population data, we accessed the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2016-2017.

## Variables:

### Populist Attitude:

To measure populist attitude, we used the original six-item populist attitude scale developed by Akkerman et al. (2014). The scale covers three components of populist attitude: anti-elitism, Manicheanism, and popular sovereignty, as per the ideational concept of populism by Mudde (2004). For each item, the respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = I very much disagree and 5 = I very much agree). The comparison of this scale with other populist attitude scales has shown that it is among the best available scales in terms of good fit on indices, performance of each item and average loading of each item (Silva et al., 2020).

### Pluralist Attitude:

Pluralism was operationalised through the 2-item scale Akkerman et al. (2014) designed to study the relationship between populist and pluralist attitudes. We kept the items unchanged to allow a comparison of Pakistan with other countries

where the relationship has been proven true in prior studies. The items were scored using the 5-point Likert scale of agreement, similar to the populist scale.

### **Elitist Attitude:**

Just like pluralism, elitism in respondents was also measured through the original scale of Akkerman et al. (2014) to allow comparability of the current case with prior cases. The scale had four items and was scored similarly to the other attitude scales, with 1 showing low elitism and 5 showing high elitism.

To reduce order bias, the items of all three scales measuring political attitude were shuffled for each respondent.

### **Voting decisions:**

To operationalise voting decisions, we asked two questions – one on the actual voting decision in the last elections and the second on voting preference for upcoming elections. For each question, we gave them a list of mainstream political parties to select. They had the option to enter any other party if not on the list. Also, there was an option for those who did not vote or will not vote. Since this is a nominal variable, at the first step of the analysis, we just compared the mean scores of populist attitude, elitist attitude and pluralist attitude for voters (or future voters) of each party.

### **Voting Absenteeism**

From the original question on voting decisions in the last elections, we operationalise voting absenteeism through a dummy variable with 0 for those who did not vote and 1 for those who voted in the last elections. Similarly, to measure the intention of voting absenteeism, we used the question on voting intention to create a dummy variable with 0 for those who intend to not vote in future elections and 1 for those who intend to vote.

## **RESULTS**

### **Descriptive, Reliability and Factor Analysis**

Before we test our hypotheses, it was important to confirm if the political attitude scales are applicable in the case of Pakistan and if the results are comparable with other studies using the same scales.

We found that the average score of Pakistanis (See Chart 1) in the three political attitude scales is comparable to the scores reported by Akkerman et al. (2014) and Geurkink et al. (2020) in their research on Dutch voters and those reported by Dennison and Turnbull-Dugarte (2022) in their research on Indian and British voters. On the Populism scale, the mean scores lie in the range of 3.1 to 4.1, which is close to the mean scores reported in other studies, indicating that Pakistanis exhibit a similar level of populist attitudes. Interestingly, the highest score was given to POP5 (Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.” This was also the highest-scored item in the Dutch samples and British samples and the second-highest in the Indian sample, indicating a common dissatisfaction among voters with the inaction of the elected officials.

Variable		M (SD)	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
POP1	Populist attitude scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.67)	3.75 (1.15)	.644	.138	.309	-.125
POP2		3.13 (1.17)	.777	-.064	.072	.150
POP3		3.49 (1.05)	.509	.371	-.073	.004
POP4		3.27 (1.17)	.694	.056	.035	.097
POP5		4.08 (1.11)	.389	.444	.072	-.209
POP6		3.62 (1.09)	.173	.651	.202	.086
PLU1	Pluralist attitude scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.50)	3.52 (1.08)	.017	.149	.718	-.158
PLU2		4.03 (1.00)	.330	.352	.348	-.465
ELI1	Elitist attitude scale (Cronbach's alpha = 0.27)	3.30 (1.15)	-.092	.802	.093	.036
ELI2		2.67 (1.15)	.226	.129	-.021	.811
ELI3		3.38 (1.16)	.258	.152	.547	-.139
ELI4		3.19 (1.22)	-.033	-.001	.690	.404
Eigenvalue			3.025	1.397	1.111	1.012
% squared loading (after rotation)			18.1%	13.5%	13.1%	9.8%

**Chart 1: Descriptive, Reliability and Factor Analysis**

However, further analysis showed that except for the populism scale ( $\alpha = 0.67$ ), the other two scales were not reliable for a Pakistani sample. The inter-item correlation between the two measures of pluralism is low (0.34). It appears that in Pakistan, the public does not consider listening to other's views and making compromises as similar. The concept of political compromise in Pakistan is influenced by the notion of “friendly opposition” introduced by the two mainstream parties, PML-N and PPP. After years of clashes that led to a military dictatorship, they signed a Charter of Democracy in 2006, undertaking to support each other's government. Consequently, the public witnessed compromises on important policy matters in the two governments formed after the revival of democracy in the country in 2002. The PTI leadership strongly criticised this politics of compromise and played an active role in opposition when the two parties were in government. So, those who exhibited a populist attitude might be more critical of political compromise but not of listening to the views of other

groups.

The four items of elitism were weakly correlated, suggesting a lack of consensus among respondents regarding the most desirable form of elite governance. In particular, the correlation between E2 (governance by successful businesspeople) and E4 (governance by independent experts) was a mere 0.009, while the correlation between E2 and E1 (governance by politicians) was slightly higher at 0.048. These findings highlight the existence of divergent preferences within the population regarding the ideal elite group to lead the country, indicating a potential division among those who support elitist principles.

Principle Components Analysis (PCA) was performed with Varimax rotation to examine the relationship between populist, pluralist and elitist attitudes in our sample. The data meet the assumptions for the PCA, with acceptable sampling adequacy ( $KMO=0.78$ ). The correlation between items was also large enough for PCA ( $\chi^2(66) = 630.487, p < 0.001$ ). However, the results were not as expected.

The PCA extracted four factors with an eigenvalue above 1.0. Cumulatively, the four factors explained over 54% of the variation. Two items load lower than the accepted bound of 0.45 on all four factors. One was POP4 (Elected officials talk too much and take too little action), whose loading on Factor 2 was closer to the accepted value, so it was considered in the analysis. However, PLU2 (It is important to listen to the opinions of other groups) was removed due to weak loading on all factors.

The first four items of the Populism scale, included by Wuttke et al. (2020) in the sub-dimension of "anti-elitism and public sovereignty", all load on the first factor, indicating that this sub-dimension stands apart from other items of populist attitudes and other political attitudes. The two items belonging to the sub-dimension of "anti-elitism and Manicheanism" also hang together, loading high on Factor 2. However, ELI1 (Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful businesspeople) also loaded high on this factor. The connection is hard to explain, but it might indicate that Pakistanis might not consider the business class to be elite, as indicated by the low loading of this item on elitist dimensions. Given that PTI never openly criticised the business elite and some tycoons were part of its main leadership, such a connection is understandable. If the business class is deemed as among "the people" by Pakistanis, this factor combines the items that measure anti-elitism and Manicheanism in Pakistanis expressing dissatisfaction with an elected government [POP5], rejecting the compromises in politics [POP6] and supporting the rule by businesspeople [ELI1].

The loadings on factor 3 are the hardest to explain theoretically. Here, the item measuring pluralism (In a democracy, it is important to make compromises

among differing viewpoints) is loaded heavily onto a factor that brings together two items of elitism indicating support for rule by experts (ELI3) and Manichean view of politics (ELI4). It is theoretically impossible to understand how a person supporting making compromises in politics views politics as a struggle between good and evil. Hence, PLU1 was also deleted, leaving us with no item measuring pluralism. Overall, the low or unexplainable loading of the pluralist attitude scale in the Pakistani sample indicates that the wording of these items might not suit the political understanding of Pakistanis. Although the exclusion of the pluralist attitude scale limits our research in explaining the relationship between populism and pluralism in Pakistan, it lays the foundation for future studies to test other measures of pluralism in Pakistan.

Finally, the only item supporting the rule by politicians [ELI3] stood apart from all other items. While Akkerman et al. (2014) used this item to measure elitism, in the context of Pakistan, where politicians have a long history of struggle against military rulers, this item is a measure of support for elected government and democracy. The item load is very low on the elitist dimension (the correlation of this item with other measures of elitism is also below 0.1), and the two sub-dimensions of populist attitude, showing that people who believe that politicians should lead lack both populist and elitist attitudes.

Taken together, this indicates that either there were some measurement errors or the scale developed by Akkerman et al. (2014) lacks contextual validity for Pakistan, where the understanding of elite and political comprises is different than that in other countries. There is a need to modify the scale as per the political understanding of Pakistanis. The lack of funding in this project has hindered us from conducting a pilot study, developing a new scale, or adding multiple scales to our questionnaire, but for future studies measuring populist attitudes in Pakistan, this analysis highlights the need to pay attention to the validity of measures before collecting data.

### **The relationship between populist attitudes and other political attitudes**

Most prior studies have reported that populist attitudes correlate with other two political attitudes. We analysed the correlations (Table 2) between the means scores on each attitudinal scale and confirmed that populist attitude is significantly and positively correlated with pluralist attitude ( $p < 0.01$ ) and significantly and positively correlated with elitist attitude ( $p < 0.01$ ), though the correlation is weak. Hence, the first hypothesis was proved true.

a = "anti-elitism and public sovereignty" subdimension; b = "anti-elitism and Manichean" subdimension; M = mean; SD = Standard Deviation; r = Pearson correlation, sig. = significance value.

**Table 1.**

	M(SD)	Pluralism r (sig.)	Elitism r (sig.)
Populism	3.54 (0.70)	0.381 (0.00)	0.362 (0.00)
Populism1 <sup>a</sup>	3.39 (0.79)	0.307 (0.00)	0.284 (0.00)
Populism2 <sup>b</sup>	3.84 (0.86)	0.332 (0.00)	0.346 (0.00)
Pluralism	3.77 (0.87)		0.286 (0.00)
Elitism	3.14 (0.67)		

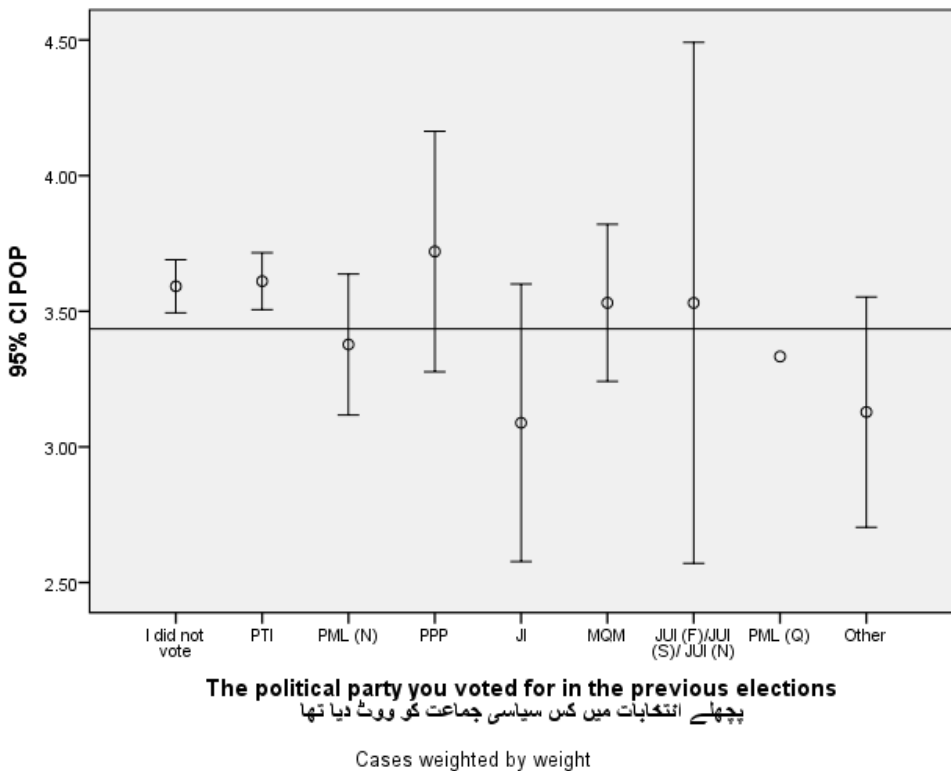
To test the second and third hypotheses, we computed mean scores of the items measuring the two sub-dimensions of populism and then examined their correlation with pluralism and elitism. Although we expected a negative correlation, we found that the sub-dimension of “anti-elitism and public sovereignty” has a positive and weak correlation with both pluralism and elitism ( $p < 0.01$ ). Similarly, the other sub-dimension of “anti-elitism and Manicheanism” also has a positive and weak correlation with the other two political attitudes. Hence, both hypotheses were rejected by the data. This is against the theoretical understanding of the measures but is likely affected by the poor reliability of elitism and pluralism scales.

### Political attitude and voting decisions and intentions.

Pakistan has a multiparty electoral system with two mainstream parties – the centre-left PPP and the centre-right PML-N. The PPP had previously been a left-wing populist party, but it gradually shifted to the centre. However, since the main slogans of the party remained the same, some still treat it as a populist party. In addition, multiple ethnonationalist parties are operating in specific regions, such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Awami National Party (ANP), etc. Voters of these parties might share with PTI voters an anti-elitist attitude mostly directed to the mainstream parties and the ruling elite groups, including the state institutions. There are also many Islamist parties, such as Jamat-e-Islami (JI) and several factions of Jamiat-Ulema Islam (JUI) etc. In the 2018 elections, these parties formed an alliance, but since the voters of these parties remained divided, we asked voters to pick the specific parties they voted for. The voters of these parties are likely to score high on Manichean measures but not on people-centric measures. PTI, the right-wing populist party, will be the focus of this analysis. The PTI voters are expected to exhibit stronger anti-elitist attitudes towards politicians but might not oppose the government by experts or businesspeople, as the party leadership supports meritocracy.

In the 2018 general election conducted before the data collection period (2021-2022), the turnout was 52 per cent. In our sample, some 61 per cent claimed to have voted, which might indicate a response bias or sample bias. Of those who voted, the majority claimed to have voted for PTI (40.1%), followed by PML-N (8.3%) and PPP (1.2%). Comparing these percentages with the actual voter share of these parties in the 2018 elections, our sample has a higher representation of PTI voters.

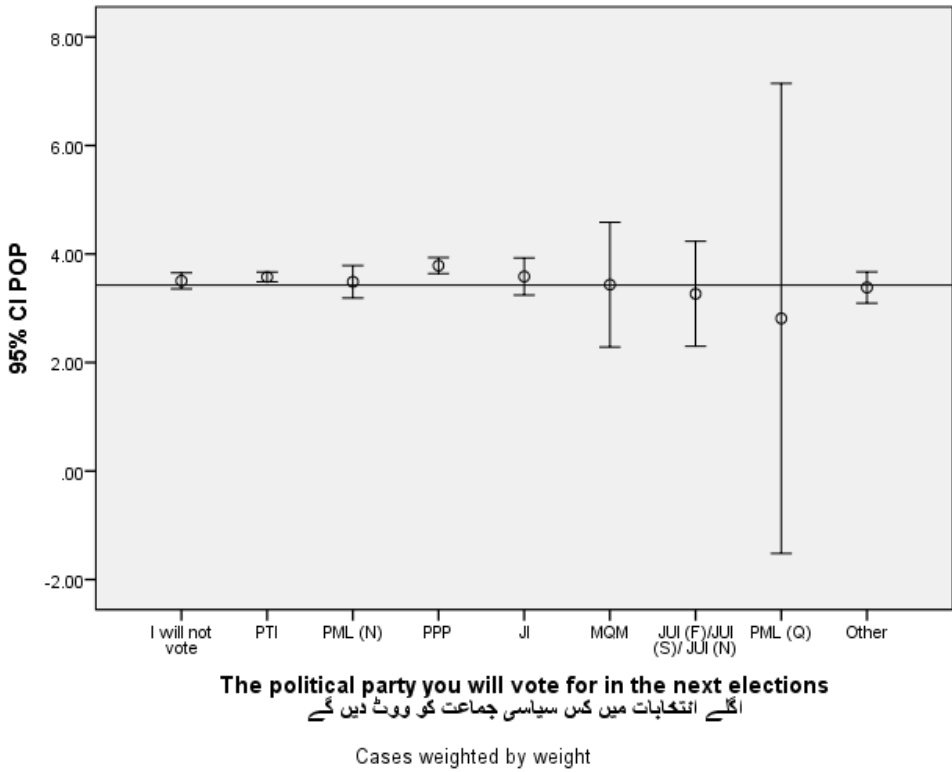
Figure 1 compares the mean populism score with the confidence interval for the means (>95%) with respect to the party the respondent reported to vote in the last elections. It clearly shows that mean scores of PTI, as well as those who did not vote, are higher than other parties. Although the mean score of PPP, MQM and JUI factions also fall above the total mean reference line, there is much variation in the populist attitude of their voters. In contrast, all PTI votes scored above the average populist score of the sample.



**Figure 1:**

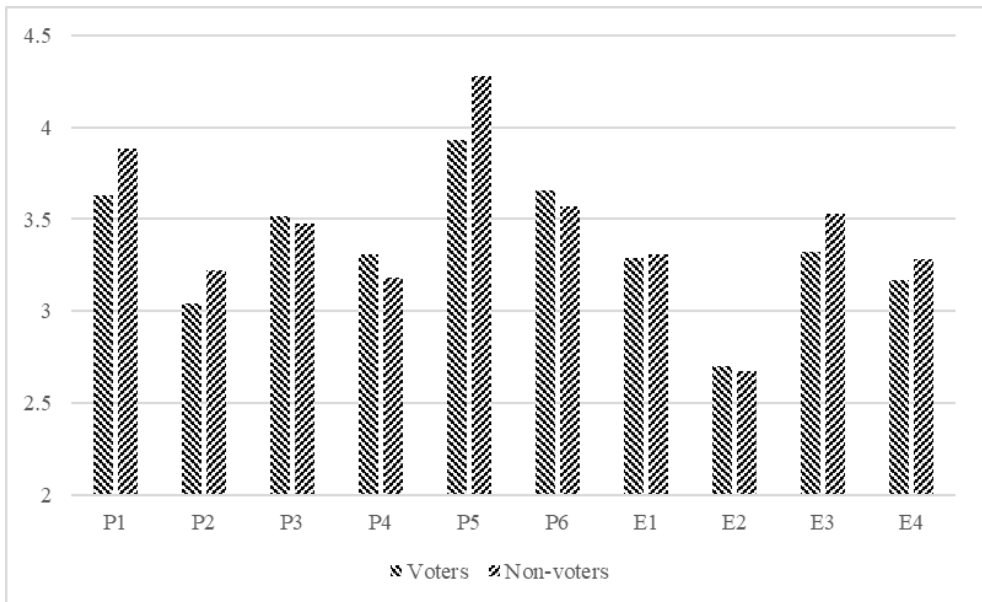
The comparison of populist attitude means among PTI voters, voters of other parties and voter absentee through ANOVA also showed significant differences ( $F(2,424) = 6.107, p < 0.005$ ). The post-hoc test showed that those who voted for PTI scored somewhat higher than other parties, but the difference was statistically significant (Mean difference = 0.30,  $p < 0.05$ ). Similar results were obtained for those who did not vote (Mean difference = 0.28,  $p < 0.05$ ). There was no significant difference in populist attitude between those who voted for PTI and those who did not vote, indicating that both types of voters have similar levels of populist attitude.

Upon plotting the mean populism score with the confidence interval for the means (>95%) against the voting intentions of the respondents, we could not find much difference. Those who intended to vote for PPP had the highest mean score of populist attitudes, while the means score of the voters of all other parties was close to the reference line of the total mean score. The only exception was PML-Q, which was a party established by the military government in the past and can best be described as an elitist, patronage-based party. The low populist attitude of its voters is explicable. Because there was a slight increase in the sample percentage between PTI voters in the last elections (40.1%) and PTI potential voters in future elections (51.4%), it appears that some respondents who scored lower in populist attitude also decided to vote for PTI in the upcoming elections. The only possible factor that could bring this change was that PTI was in government when the data was collected, and its adherence to the democratic discourse might be appealing to pluralist voters.



**Figure 2:**

Lastly, we compared the elitism and populism scores of those who voted and did not vote as well as those who intended to vote or not vote through an independent sample t-test. The analysis showed that voters and non-voters in the last elections significantly differed in their attitude towards only two measures of populism (See figure). Those who did not vote had a slightly higher mean score on P1 (The politicians in the Pakistani parliament need to follow the will of the people) than those who voted ( $t_{(399.96)} = -2.26, p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, the non-voters scored higher on P5 (Elected officials talk too much and take too little action) as compared to voters ( $t_{(421)} = -3.21, p < 0.01$ ). In all other measures, the difference was not significant. Contrary to expectations, non-voters also showed slightly higher mean scores on the elitism scale, and in one measure, E3 (Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to independent experts), the difference was significant ( $t_{(413)} = -1.86, p < 0.005$ ).



**Figure 3:**

Contrary to expectations, there was no significant difference in the populist attitude or elitist attitude score of those who intended to vote and those who intended to not vote in the next elections. Hence, voting intention seems to have no statistically significant relationship with the political attitude.

## CONCLUSION

In a world marked by political, cultural and economic differences, developing universal scales for measuring any phenomenon poses a challenge to those interested in cross-country or cross-regional comparisons. The present study aimed to test a populist attitude scale intended to understand the growing demand for populism in the world. While developed in Europe, the scale has been used in other settings, including Asia. Because no such empirical inquiry has yet been made in Pakistan to measure populist attitude among Pakistanis to understand why they voted for a populist party, we conducted this research to test if the scale can be used to measure populist attitude in Pakistan and if it can predict the voting decisions and intentions of Pakistani voters. While we found the populist attitude scale to be reliable and a valid and distinct attitudinal measure for the Pakistani sample, the reliability and validity of the pluralist and elitist attitude scales were problematic. This could be an outcome of the sample bias as we had limited resources and collected data through non-probability sampling techniques. However, a more plausible explanation can be provided by the socio-political differences between Pakistan and other European democracies. First, the military is one important elite class in Pakistan that has not been covered in the elitist scale. Second, since different items of the elite scale target different elite groups, the elite competition in Pakistan is likely to influence the inter-item correlation of these measures, and it is important to measure elitism through general measures without specification of the elite group. Third, as noted earlier (Akkerman et al. (2014) p. 1340), the attitude towards the two measures of pluralism can differ, and it might be a good suggestion to add more items in the pluralism scale in future studies.

Taken together, some of the assumptions we made from the review of the literature were proven true, while some could not be satisfied. We found weak positive correlations between all three attitudes, and even after dividing the populist attitude into sub-dimensions, the correlations remained positive. Our findings show that populist attitudes can be one factor behind voting for the PTI, but voters of other political parties, particularly the PPP, also exhibited higher populist attitudes. However, political attitudes are not a good predictor of voting intentions in Pakistan. Populist attitudes of non-voters were also higher than voters, but closer analysis showed that the main difference was only in two measures of populism. Despite the limitations related to sampling strategy and the rejection of some hypotheses, the study has opened new avenues for future empirical studies on the demand side of populism. It suggests modification of the political attitude scales so to better connect the political attitude of Pakistanis and voters in other similar hybrid democracies with their voting decisions.

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