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Keywords: populism, hate crimes, national pride, moral justification, political violence, anti-immigration

Populism Predicts Sympathy for Attacks against Asylum Seekers through

National Pride and Moral Justification of Political Violence

In recent years, right-wing extremists have increasingly attacked immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees in various countries (e.g., Colarossi, 2021; Jones, 2018; Schumacher, 2016; Taylor, 2021). For example, as the so-called "migrant crisis" emerged in Europe in 2016, more than 2500 attacks against asylum seekers were reported in the same year in Germany, more than 1700 were reported in 2018, and 1600 in 2020 (Bathke, 2022). During that time, more than 150 asylum seekers in Germany were severely injured in these violent attacks according to police reports. Another report counted 129 attacks by far-right groups on refugee camps in 2019 (Human Rights Watch, 2021). According to official data for the first six months of 2020, more than 9000 politically-right motivated hate crimes were reported (Deutscher Bundestag, 2020). In February 2020, one of the most extreme examples of far-right motivated hate crimes was the anti-immigrant attack committed in Hanau, Frankfurt. Eleven people were killed, and five others were wounded by a politically-right wing extremist, who targeted two Turkish hookah bars (Pladson, 2020).

These examples illustrate the destructive consequences of the normalization of violence that seem to derive from right-wing populism. Right-wing populist leaders, their followers, and endorsement of the populist beliefs that had been considered being at the fringe of society a few years ago have gradually become more mainstream and seen as somewhat 'acceptable' (e.g., Ekman, 2022; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Portelinha & Elcheroth, 2016; Stathi & Guerra, 2021; Wodak, 2020). Recent studies showed that populist beliefs are highly associated with a higher level of authoritarianism (Bakker et al., 2016), lower support for pro-refugee policies (Uysal, 2022), and higher threat perception against migration (Dennison & Turnbull-Dugarte, 2022). Given the "epidemic" impact of divisive rhetoric on hostile behavior (Bilewicz & Soral, 2020), it is important to examine whether people, who endorse

populist beliefs, would also justify politically motivated violence in line with the rhetoric of

right-wing populist leaders. Crandall et al. (2018), for example, longitudinally and

experimentally showed that the perceived acceptability of prejudice toward societal minorities

that were singled out by Donald Trump increased after the 2016 presidential election. The

researchers concluded that social norms might have changed, which would now allow for

prejudice to be openly expressed. Moving this one step further, we argue that changing social

norms in the *populist zeitgeist* may result in supporting hate crimes against targeted minority

groups. In this study, we aimed to investigate the social-psychological link between populist

beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers. Specifically, we aimed to examine

whether populist beliefs predict sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers through

heightened national pride and moral justification of political violence in Germany.

Populism and Anti-immigration

Populism is defined as a "thin-centered ideology" (Mudde, 2004, p. 544) that

addresses only specific political agendas or political questions and is compatible with various

political positions. In populist rhetoric, it is usually evident that there is a group of 'others'

who do not belong to the nation or the people (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). The identity

of these "others" determines whether populist beliefs will evolve into right-wing or left-wing

populist views. Considering the thin-centered nature of populism, it needs to host ideologies.

Taggart (2000), hence, defines populism as an empty-hearted ideology. When populist beliefs

are combined with anti-immigrant attitudes, authoritarianism, nativism, and conservatism as

host ideologies, it is defined as right-wing populism. For left-wing populism, host ideologies

of populism are mostly anti-elitism, classism, and economic victimhood narratives of the

working class (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2015).

According to populist thinking, society is separated into two opposing groups: The

good and the evil (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Right-wing populists put immigrants

on the evil side as outgroups and "the ordinary and pure" aggrieved people on the good side

as the ingroup. Right-wing populist leaders present themselves as representatives of the

ordinary people, hence, as ingroup leaders, who promise to save the ingroup from the

antagonism of the evil outgroup (Betz & Johnson, 2004; Jansen, 2011). Thus, these outgroups

become the target of right-wing populist leaders' derogatory rhetoric.

In the populism literature, outgroups are defined – and targeted – vertically and

horizontally according to their social positions (Bos et al., 2020; Hameelers & de Vreese,

2020). For instance, the elites represent vertical outgroups and are the typical nemesis of

traditional populist logic (Bakker et al., 2016; Barr, 2009; Hawkins, 2009; Mudde, 2004,

2017). Their verticality stems from the elites' higher social position in comparison with

aggrieved 'ordinary people', whereby the elites can be blamed by right-wing populist leaders

as responsible for the relative deprivation of the aggrieved "ordinary people". Not surprising

then, intergroup differentiation between the ordinary people and the elites creates anti-

establishment sentiments and political distrust among populist voters, especially among those

who do not feel represented by mainstream politics or elites (Geurkink et al., 2020; McKay et

al., 2021).

On the other hand, societal outgroups based on cultural, ethnic, or religious grounds

are the horizontal outgroups, which are seen as being unjustly favored by the elites at the

expense of the ordinary people (Hameelers & de Vreese, 2020). Immigrants are a source for

right-wing populist leaders, against whom these leaders can stir ethnocentric sentiments

among the general population (cf. Billig, 1988). Seen this way, immigrants serve as the

horizontal nemesis, against which right-wing populists can build their rhetoric and mobilize

their followers (Akkerman et al., 2017; Hirsch et al., 2021; Rothmund et al., 2020). Intergroup

differentiation between the ordinary people and immigrants leads to exclusionist populist

beliefs (Bos et al., 2020; Hameelers & Fawzi, 2020), which may lead to political violence

following the divisive rhetoric of right-wing populist leaders. Similarly, Leander et al. (2020) showed that the disempowerment among dominant group members as a consequence of the victimhood narrative of White nationalism leads to sympathy for violent extremist attacks in various contexts. Hence, elites (as evidenced by, for example, the 2021 Capitol attack in Washington), as well as immigrants, can become targets of open hostility (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Jay et al., 2019; Mols & Jetten, 2016). However, the latter group is frequently the target of discrimination and hostility due to its comparatively higher vulnerability and therefore they are the focus of the current research. Considering prior findings evincing a relationship between populism and anti-immigrant attitudes (Bakker et al., 2016; Rothmund et al., 2020; Uysal, 2022), we hypothesized that higher endorsement of populist beliefs would be associated with higher sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers (*Hypothesis 1*).

Populism and National Pride

Intergroup differences do not automatically lead to prejudice and discrimination as enacted prejudice. Rather, acting on prejudicial views requires a specific distinction between "us" (as "virtuous") and "them" (as "immoral" and "evil"). Such distinction may actively mobilize the ingroup against an outgroup (e.g., Bos et al., 2020; Flannery et al., 2021; Marchlewska et al., 2018). In that sense, populism can be conceived of as antagonistic political understanding based on the psycho-political construction of the 'real' people of a nation (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Uysal et al., 2022). This construction needs the category of "evil immigrants" as a reference point to highlight the authenticity of the 'real' people and to mobilize them (Laclau, 2005). Hence, populist beliefs are based on moralization via the means of national identification, which differentiates "us" from "them" by attaching qualities such as purity and authenticity to the 'real' people on one hand, and immorality, non-nativism, and self-serving interests to "corrupt elites" and their 'partners in crime' – the

immigrants (Mudde, 2017). Hence, populist political beliefs turn nationalist, when the elites

are framed in national terms, and then the ordinary people base their identity on a strong and

exclusionist national identification (Elad-Strenger & Kessler, in press; Uysal, 2022).

Populist leaders position the ingroup of the "real" people against the threat posed by

immigrants; thereby they unite citizens under a common politicized social identity and create

a moral majority, who is supposed, according to populist rhetoric, to overcome the economic

and cultural threats (Jay et al., 2019; Mols & Jetten, 2016). Hence, by stressing shared

grievances, populist rhetoric frames the problems and inequalities created by the prevailing

liberal democracies as the irreconcilable differences between group identities and norms,

which boosts intragroup homogeneity and intergroup differentiation (Uysal et al., 2022). In

other words, while populism addresses individuals' shared grievances, it also fosters a

positive collective self-perception by highlighting national pride (via intragroup homogeneity)

and a populist solution (via intergroup differentiation between ordinary people and

immigrants).

Although differentiation between ingroup (e.g., 'real' ordinary people) and outgroup

(e.g., immigrants) is an important basis for negative behavior towards the outgroup (Brewer,

1999; Tajfel et al., 1971), the perception of threat and strong intergroup emotions (e.g., anger,

contempt) may motivate more aggressive behavior such as hate crimes (Struch & Schwartz,

1989). For instance, Walters et al. (2016) discussed the perception of intergroup threats and

their concurring emotions (e.g., anger) as a potential determinant of hate crimes. Although the

role of negative intergroup emotions (e.g., anger) is frequently discussed in hate crimes in the

social psychology literature (e.g., Mackie et al., 2000), positive emotions (e.g., pride) may

also trigger aggressive behaviors towards outgroups (e.g., Hoerst & Drury, 2021). Relevant

ingroup norms, interests, and values that frame the national pride can then influence what is

seen as appropriate and legitimate behavior of the ingroup. Considering pride is a mobilizing

emotion (Tausch & Becker, 2013) group identity-related pride can become the basis of power and a tool to perceive and present even violent acts towards the outgroup as 'virtuous' (Reicher et al., 2008; Turner, 2005). Hence, we hypothesized that populist beliefs would be associated with national pride (*Hypothesis 2*) and that national pride would predict sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers (*Hypothesis 3*).

Populism and Moral Justification of Political Violence

Individuals tend to follow social norms within the framework of what is morally right or wrong in their social and political behaviors (Skitka & Bauman, 2008; Skitka et al., 2005; van Zomeren et al., 2012). Social and moral norms provide prescriptions that compel people to behave in certain ways under certain conditions. Yet, people, who have a higher level of moral disengagement, feel less stressed when they engage in behaviors that may otherwise be considered immoral or unethical by others (Moore et al., 2012). Erisen et al. (2021) showed that moral disengagement is positively associated with populist attitudes, especially when they involve a Manichean outlook that conceives of the world (hence, also politics) as a war between light and darkness, or between the good "ordinary people" and the evil immigrants supported by elites. However, what appears as "morally disengaged" is mostly in line with the actors' ingroup norms (Hoerst & Drury, 2021). Moral disengagement is understood as distancing from moral standards in a specific situation (cf. Bandura, 1999). On the contrary, when social identities become salient, people tend to comply with identity-relevant (e.g., ingroup) values and norms (McGarty et al., 2011; Reicher et al., 1995). In the case of supporting far-right populist violence, people are not disengaging from a prior moral standard, but they are consistent with a moral prior of the ingroup: violence against targeted outgroups is a justified tool to protect ingroup resources.

Populist beliefs help to construct the ingroup of the "real" ordinary people, which also tends to mobilize, activate, politicize, and trigger a widespread and deep-rooted socio-cultural

conflict in society (Ostiguy, 2017) following salient ingroup norms. The populist political

logic sees politics as enmity between two opposing groups (i.e., goods vs. evil; Mudde, 2017;

Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), which can radicalize collective mobilization to political

violence. In other words, the category of "real" ordinary and national people created and

sustained by populist rhetoric are mobilized against the "immoral" non-native immigrants,

who are allegedly beneficiaries of the ingroup grievances created by elites and who threaten

the ingroup's moral community (Bieber, 2018; Bonikowski, 2017).

In line with the above, we expected that people, who endorse populist beliefs to a

greater extent, would also be supportive of political violence and thereby provide the

normative background for potential hate crimes. We suggest that by viewing this behavior as

in line with the ingroup's norms and values, violence would be morally justified and be seen

as necessary (cf. Reicher et al., 2008), even if this behavior may be considered immoral by an

outgroup or a third-party perspective. Thus, we hypothesize that populist beliefs will be

associated with higher moral justification of political violence (*Hypothesis 4*), and moral

justification of political violence will predict sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers

(*Hypothesis 5*). Last, we hypothesize two significant mediational pathways: endorsement of

populism will be associated with sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers via increased

national pride (*Hypothesis 6*) and higher moral justification of political violence (*Hypothesis

7*).

Method

Participants

The German General Social Survey (ALLBUS)[1] is a trend panel survey project

conducted by the GESIS – Leibniz Institute for the Social Science. Data collection is based on

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[1] The raw data and analyses code are publicly available via the Open Science Framework
(OSF) webpage: https://osf.io/5nwap/?view_only=6fa2b9840f0a4d18bf9a93971afbe3c2. All materials
and detailed data collection procedure are available in the GESIS website:
https://search.gesis.org/research_data/ZA5270.

multiple methods such as both computer-assisted and paper-and-pencil face-to-face

interviews, and self-administered standardized questionnaires. The sampling procedure is

based on the population probability, which is using the weights to reach given benchmarks for

the population. ALLBUS has been collecting data every 2 years since 1986. The current study

used the data collected in 2018 as some of our key variables (such as national pride and moral

justification of political violence) were added to the survey in 2018 (GESIS, 2019). The data

were collected between April and September 2018. The original dataset recruited 3477

participants. We removed 209 participants who were not German citizens because no

measures for national pride and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers were included

for these participants. The final sample was 3268 participants (1610 women and 1658 men).

The average age of participants was 52.36 (Range = 18-95, *SD* = 17.58).

Measures

The response scale ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree) unless

otherwise stated.

Populist Beliefs. While ALLBUS 2018 used a seven-item populism scale, we used

five of these items following a principal component analysis. Since all items loaded on a

single factor, we choose five items that have factor loadings from .71 to .75. Hence, we

removed two items that have less than .60 factor loading.[2] Items read as: "*Politicians talk too*

much and do too little (PA1)," "*An ordinary citizen would represent my interests better than a*

professional politician (PA2)," "*What they call compromise in politics is in reality just a*

betrayal of principles (PA3)," "*The people and not politicians should make the important*

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[2] The items that read: "The members of parliament must only be bound to the will of the people" and "The people agree on what needs to happen politically" were removed from the populist beliefs scale. The factor loadings of these items were .48 and .59 respectively. The reliability score of the scale did not change when we dropped these items (.80). Further, we conducted an additional principal component analysis by adding all other items in the study, in addition to populist beliefs items. The results confirmed populist belief items create a single construct that is separate from other variables, such as national pride and moral justification of violence.

political decisions (PA4)" and "*Politicians only care about the interests of the rich and powerful (PA5)*". Populist beliefs were operationalized as a latent variable in SEM. For ease of interpretation, we also report reliability coefficients for composite scores, which were created by averaging the items in the scale: α = .80. The composite score was also used to calculate the correlations among variables (Table 1).

National Pride. We measured national pride with a single item that read: "*I am proud to be German*".

Moral Justification of Political Violence. We measured the variable with a single item that read: "*Violence can be morally justifiable in order to achieve certain political goals*" (1 = Do not agree at all; 4 = Completely agree).

Sympathy for Attacks against Asylum Seekers. We used a single item to assess the extent to which people show sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers in Germany: "*I can understand that people carry out attacks on homes of asylum seekers.*"

Results

The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations between our variables are depicted in Table 1. Inspection of the means through one-sample t-test shows that, on average, participants reported higher levels of populist beliefs compared to the scale mid-point (M = 3.23, SD = .83, t = 15.79, $p < .001$). The participants also reported higher national pride than the scale mid-point (M = 3.99, SD = 1.07, t = 52.72, $p < .001$). Participants showed low moral justification of political violence (M = 1.40, SD = .67, t = -93.94, $p < .001$) and low sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers (M = 1.39, SD = .93, t = -99.26, $p < .001$). Only 7.1% of participants reported that violence can be morally justifiable to achieve political goals. Similarly, 6.1% of participants reported that they can understand that people carry out attacks on asylum seekers' homes.

Table 1. *Means, standard deviations, and correlations of all measures*

Variables	*M* (*SD*)	1	2	3	4
1. Populist Beliefs	3.23 (.83)	-	.16***	.08***	.21***
2. National Pride	3.99 (1.07)		-	.02	.08***
3. Moral Justification of Political Violence	1.40 (.67)			-	.15***
4. Sympathy for Attacks against Asylum Seekers	1.39 (.93)				-

Note. ***$p < .001$

Next, we performed structural equation modeling (SEM) to test our hypothesized

model, using the lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012). The model tested whether *a*) populist

beliefs predict national pride and moral justification of political violence and *b*) populist

beliefs, national pride, and moral justification of political violence predict sympathy for

attacks against asylum seekers in Germany.

Single-item variables were treated as latent constructs by fixing the loading

coefficients at 1.[3] As our moral justification of political violence and sympathy for attacks

against asylum seekers variables are nonnormally distributed and most of the variables are

ordinal, we used the "diagonally weighted least squares" (DWLS) estimator for the structural

equation model. DWLS is specifically designed for ordinal data, and it makes no

distributional assumptions about the observed variables (Li, 2016; Robitzsch, 2020).
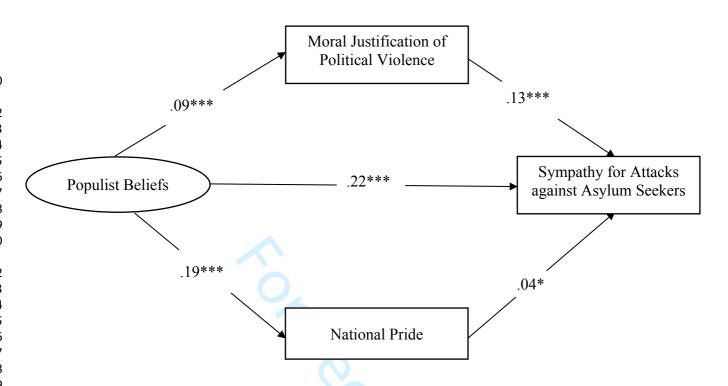
Overall, fit indices indicated that our model showed a good fit with data, $\chi 2 = 56.169$,

df = 18, *p* < .001, GFI = .997, AGFI = .995, CFI= .994, TLI = .991, RMSEA = .026, CI [.018,

.033], SRMR = .023.[4] As Figure 1 illustrates, populist beliefs predicted higher sympathy for

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[3] The results (both standardized estimates and fit indices) did not change when we tested the model by
using observed scores for single-item variables instead of treating them as latent variables.
[4] We also tested an alternative model by changing the order of populist attitudes and national pride, which
reflects an ongoing discussion in the literature on whether nationalism or populism theoretically leads to
the other construct. In other words, the alternative model is based on the idea that national pride predicts
sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers both directly and indirectly, while populist attitudes in

attacks against asylum seekers (b = .22, SE = .02, p < .001), supporting *Hypothesis 1*. People

who endorsed more populist beliefs showed sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers in

Germany. Considering *Hypothesis 2* and *Hypothesis 3*, populist beliefs predicted higher

national pride (b = .19, SE = .02, p < .001) and national pride predicted higher sympathy for

attacks against asylum seekers (b = .04, SE = .02, p = .015). As for Hypothesis *4* and

Hypothesis *5*, populist beliefs predicted higher moral justification of political violence (b =

.09, SE = .01, p < .001) and moral justification of political violence predicted higher

sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers (b = .13, SE = .03, p < .001). We also tested the

model by adding control variables such as age, gender, education level, and living in Eastern

vs. Western Germany. The standardized estimates of the main variables did not change.

Younger participants (b = -.11, SE < .01, p < .001), participants with lower education levels (b

= -.20, SE = .02, p < .001), participants who live in Eastern Germany (b = .04, SE = .04, p =

.043), and men (b = -.04, SE = .03, p = .017) showed higher sympathy for attacks against

asylum seekers.

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addition to moral justification will mediate this relationship. Although the alternative model also showed an
acceptable fit with the data ($\chi 2$ = 99.51, df = 18, p < .001, GFI = .995; AGFI = .991; CFI = .987; RMSEA =
.037, 95% CI [0.030, 0.045]; ECVI =.042), our original model showed better fit than the alternative model
in various comparison indices: lower chi-square (56.17 < 99.51), lower ECVI (.029 < .042), lower RMSEA
(.026 < .037), lower SRMR (.023 < .030), higher CFI (.994 > .987), and higher TLI (.991 > .980).
Moreover, the standardized coefficient of the relationship between populist beliefs and moral justification
of political violence in original model (b = .09, SE = .01, p < .001) is higher than the standardized
coefficient of relationship between national pride and moral justification of political violence in alternative
model (b = .06, SE = .01, p = .001)

Figure 1. Simplified model testing the populist beliefs on sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers

Furthermore, we conducted mediation analyses to test the mediating roles of national pride and moral justification of political violence on the relationship between populist beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers (*Hypotheses 6 and 7*). We used a bootstrap re-sampling method (with 5,000 repetitions) to examine the indirect effects of populist beliefs on sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers. The indirect effect of populist beliefs on sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers through national pride was significant, $b = .01$, $SE = .01$, 95% CI [.00, .02], z-test = 2.383, $p = .017$, indirect / total effect = % 4.15. Moral justification of political violence also significantly mediated the relationship between populist beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers, $b = .02$, $SE = .01$, 95% CI [.01, .03], z-test = 3.505, $p < .001$, indirect / total effect = % 4.98.

Discussion

In this study, we sought to investigate the relationship between the endorsement of populist beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers. In particular, we examine whether populist beliefs predict sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers through moral justification for political violence and national pride. The results of our study show that higher endorsement of populist beliefs is associated with higher national pride, more moral justification of political violence, and higher sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers. Moreover, sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers is predicted by populist beliefs, national pride, and moral justification. Last, together with the direct prediction pattern, our results suggest significant indirect effects of populist beliefs on higher sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers, mediated by increased national pride and higher moral justification of political violence.

The theoretical underpinnings for this research, as we have suggested, lie in the Manichean, divisive, and exclusionist nature of right-wing populism. Right-wing populist leaders construct immigrants and asylum seekers as evil. To overcome societal divisions in fighting against the so-called immigrant influx, enhanced national pride among the ingroup of "real people" (i.e., German nationals) is crucial for the populist agenda (Jay et al., 2019; Mols & Jetten, 2016). Hence, it is not surprising that national pride – as an emotional and mobilizing aspect of national identity – mediates the relationship between the endorsement of populism and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers. Crucially, we suggest that individuals must perceive their support for anti-immigrant action as virtuous, and therefore perceive themselves as being in the moral majority and that to achieve this, right-wing populist leaders attach such moral sentiments to their agendas (cf. Reicher et al., 2008). That is when people believe that they are legitimate and moral victims of this kind of societal conflict, attacks against outgroups can be morally justifiable because the outgroup is evil

(e.g., Leander et al., 2020). Our results show that moral justification of political violence indeed explained the relationship between populist beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers supports these arguments. However, one could argue that without a high level of national pride and moral justification populist beliefs can perfectly predict sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers, as the indirect effects are relatively smaller than the direct effects.

Our study contributes to examining the theoretical and practical relevance between populist beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers. German politics in recent years highlighted how populism and support for hate crimes are interconnected. For instance, the right-wing populist party AfD (Alternative für Deutschland) managed to increase their votes by almost ten per cent in the 2017 election, presumably aided by constructing so-called "refugee flows" as a national threat to the German nation and 'real' nationals (Fang, 2022; Muno & Stockemer, 2021). Although in the 2021 election votes for the AfD decreased by around two per cent, they still succeed in obtaining ten per cent of the votes. While mainstream parties use national pride to establish political trust for the political system and their parties (e.g., Widmann, 2021), populist parties such as the AfD may use national pride to moralize ingroup identity and make salient the moral distinction between national ingroup and foreign outgroups.

To challenge the negative impact of populist beliefs on intergroup relations, we need a broader social psychological understanding of the underlying motivations and varieties of populism and populist beliefs. Although recent approaches improved theorizing in the intersection of political science, communication, and social psychology by introducing social identity premises (e.g., Bos et al., 2020; Hameelers & de Vreese, 2020; Mols & Jetten, 2020; Uysal, 2022), we believe that current trends still lack the conceptualization of the right-wing populism in psychological terms. We argue that populism should be understood through an

active mobilization and subjective understanding of the individuals who endorse populist

beliefs and collective victimhood narratives instead of intergroup relations based on objective

social status (e.g., Armaly & Enders, 2021; Reicher & Uluşahin, 2020; Uysal et al., 2022).

Despite the implications of the current study, we acknowledge that the findings should

be interpreted with caution due to some limitations. First, the study is correlational, thus it

would be problematic to assume causality between variables (for example, between populist

beliefs and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers). Second, our findings focused on

sentiments regarding attacks against asylum seekers, rather than violence against broader

marginalized groups such as immigrants. It is thus important to be cautious while generalizing

our findings to hate crimes against immigrants. Third, our outcome variable "sympathy for

attacks against asylum seekers" does not necessarily mean support, approval, or endorsement

of these attacks. As the expression "*kann ich gut verstehen*" that is used in the original

German scale means to sympathize or even endorse but also "making sense" or "providing

intellectual explanation", we cannot directly generalize our findings to support or approval of

hate crimes. This should prompt us to consider and conceptualize the different levels of

positive (or at least non-negative) sentiments on attacks against asylum seekers. Moreover, we

conducted our analyses with secondary data collected in 2018. Considering the possibly

changing nature of attitudes towards asylum seekers after Ukrainian refugees in Europe, we

cannot readily generalize our findings to all immigrant groups. Future studies may consider

the impact of other characteristics of immigrants, such as religion, ethnicity, and perceived

similarity when focusing on support for hate crimes. We believe that discussing how

Europeans developed different sentiments against different immigrant groups within a

framework of the social psychology of populism can provide great avenues for future

research. If there are different underlying motivations for anti-immigration against minorities

from the global North, such as Europe, and the global South such as MENA (the Middle East

and North Africa) regions and Latin America, research should focus on how populism

interacts with these underlying motivations and map violence against different groups among

populists and non-populists.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge that our findings are limited to the German

context, hence, to intergroup relations and politics in Germany. Germany provides a unique

lens considering its post-war reconciliation efforts. Although after the reunification in the

1990s, a series of violent attacks had been taking place in Germany, with some of them

ending in mass homicides of immigrants, expressing support for such attacks had been

normatively uncommon in the country. Further, due to post-war reconstruction, Germany has

long been hosting immigrants. Thus, we may not be able to generalize our findings to "new"

immigration contexts. To address this, more studies are needed that focus on the link between

populist beliefs and political violence while considering the socio-historical context of

immigration.

Conclusion

In this study, we explored the relationships between populist beliefs, national pride,

moral justification of political violence and sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers in

Germany. The results show that people who endorse more populist beliefs report higher

sympathy for attacks against asylum seekers in Germany, and this relation is explained via

higher national pride and moral justification of political violence. Taken together, this

research highlights the importance of considering the detrimental effects of populism on

politically motivated violence and points to the need for a more nuanced, psychologically-

informed understanding of right-wing populism.

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