What drives young adults' populist attitudes? An analysis of the predictors of populism in Portugal

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Abstract

Portugal is a peculiar Southern European country regarding populism. Long considered immune to populist surges, it has recently become a fertile electoral ground for far-right populism, which garners strong support among younger generations. This article, based on a survey with 1047 people (aged 18–30) from all regions of Portugal, focuses on this under-researched geographic context and demographic group, aiming to understand the drivers of populist inclinations among Portuguese young adults. Our results show that, although Portuguese young adults have been heavily affected by socioeconomic challenges that may pave the way for populist attitudes, these are found to be primarily related to political dimensions rather than socioeconomic status. Moreover, negative emotions about the political situation, use of new media, and living in peripheral regions predict populist attitudes. We discuss these findings in light of the bleak social panorama

faced by Portuguese young adults, the regional disparities within the country, and the role of new media in shaping contemporary relationships with politics.

Keywords: populism – populist attitudes – Portugal – predictors – young adults.

1. Introduction: The Portuguese exceptionalism and the young adults' social context

We are living in an "age of populism"[1]. Electoral support for populist political actors has grown[2], and several countries report increasingly higher levels of citizens' populist attitudes[3]. The literature in the field attributes this (re)emergence and consolidation of populism to a "perfect storm"[4] that combines economic, media, political, and social crises. According to Salgado and Stavrakakis[5], populism in Southern European countries emerged primarily as a response to political and economic decline. However, despite facing a similar crisis scenario[6], Portugal was described as immune to populist surges[7]. Indeed, until recently, Portugal and Malta were the only European countries

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[1] Bernhard, M., Kreppel, A., and de la Torre, C. *Still the Age of Populism?: Re-examining theories and concepts* (London: Routledge, 2024). Mudde, C. "Europe's populist surge: a long time in the making." *Foreign Affairs* 95 (6) (2016), 25-30.

[2] Rooduijn, M. "What unites the voter bases of populist parties? Comparing the electorates of 15 populist parties." *European Political Science Review* 10 (3) (2017), 351-368.

[3] Kaltwasser, CR. and Van Hauwaert, S. "The populist citizen: Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America." *European Political Science Review* 12 (1) (2020), 1-18; Van Hauwaert, S. and Van Kessel, S. "Beyond protest and discontent: A cross-national analysis of the effect of populist attitudes and issue positions on populist party support." *European Journal of Political Research* 57 (1) (2018), 68-92.

[4] Brubaker, R. "Why populism?." *Theory and Society* 46 (5) (2017), 357-385.

[5] Salgado, S. and Stavrakakis, Y. "Introduction: populist discourses and political communication in Southern Europe." *European Political Science* 18 (1) (2018), 1-10.

[6] Amaral, L. "Social, Economic, and Demographic Change during the Portuguese Democracy (1974–2020)." In *The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, eds. J M. Fernandes, P C. Magalhães and A C Pinto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 53-69; Lisi, M., Llamazares, I. and Tsakatika, M. "Economic crisis and the variety of populist response: evidence from Greece, Portugal and Spain." *West European Politics* 42 (6) (2019), 1284-1309.

[7] Quintas da Silva, R. "A Portuguese exception to right-wing populism." *Palgrave Communications* 4 (1) (2018).

without clear-cut populist parties in their partisan landscape[8]. This Portuguese exceptionalism is particularly noteworthy given that the country was one of the hardest hit by the Great Recession, with a bailout period between 2011 and 2014[9]. Some authors argue that the Partido Comunista Português (Portuguese Communist Party) and the Bloco de Esquerda (Left Bloc) took populist positions in their political manifestos during this period[10], even though the literature does not consider them as populist parties[11]. Other populist parties, movements and candidates also emerged during those years but did not play a prominent role in Portuguese politics[12]. An example of this populist failure is the far-right party Partido Nacional Renovador (National Renewal Party), which has never elected any representative to the Portuguese parliament[13].

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[8] Rooduijn, M., Van Kessel, S., Froio, C., Pirro, A., De Lange, S., Halikiopoulou, D., Lewis, P., Mudde, C., Taggart, P. "The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe." (2019). www.popu-list.org

[9] Moury, C. and De Giorgi, E. "Bailout Politics in Portugal (2008– 2020)." *The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, eds. J M. Fernandes, P C. Magalhães and A C. Pinto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 683-698.

[10] Lisi, M. and Borghetto, E. "Populism, Blame Shifting and the Crisis: Discourse Strategies in Portuguese Political Parties." *South European Society and Politics* 23 (4) (2018), 405-427; Silva, F C., Manucci, L. and Veloso Larraz, D. "Populism and nationalism revisited: A comparative study of the Spanish and Portuguese New Left." *Nations and Nationalism* 28 (2022), 941–953.

[11] Rooduijn, M., Van Kessel, S., Froio, C., Pirro, A., De Lange, S., Halikiopoulou, D., Lewis, P., Mudde, C., Taggart, P. "The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe."; Rooduijn, M., Pirro, A., Halikiopoulou, D., van Kessel, S., de Lange, S., Mudde, C. and Taggart, P. "The PopuList 3.0: An Overview of Populist, Far-left and Far-right Parties in Europe." (2023). www.popu-list.org

[12] Salgado, S. and Zúquete, J.P. "Discreet Populisms amid unfavorable contexts and stigmatization." In *Populist Communication in Europe*, eds T. Aalberg, F. Esser, C. Reinemann, J. Strömbäck and C H. de Vreese (London: Routledge, 2016), 235-248.

[13] Marchi, R. "The extreme right in 21st century Portugal: the Partido Nacional Renovador" In *Right-wing extremist in Europe: country analyses, counter-strategies and labour-market oriented exit strategies*, eds R. Melzer and S. Serafin (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2013), 133-155.

The Portuguese immunity to populism ended[14] with the appearance and exponential growth of Chega (Enough) – a radical right-wing populist party[15]. This happens in a context where Portugal is experiencing an acute crisis of legitimacy among political elites and a general distrust towards institutional politics[16] due, for example, to successive corruption scandals involving prominent political figures in government[17]. According to the last OECD trust survey[18], perceptions of government unreliability, closeness, unfairness and unresponsiveness are key determinants of distrust in political institutions at the national and local levels. Since the election of its first deputy to the Portuguese parliament in October 2019, Chega has recently increased its parliamentary representation to 50 deputies (in a parliament of 230 seats), becoming the third most-voted political force, with the support of more than 1.100.000 voters in the elections of March 2024. Such impressive mobilisation was anchored in its leader's appeal to the Christian right, the party's galvanisation of collective action by police unions, and an agenda that opposes post-materialist, left-wing concerns[19]. The number of Chega deputies is a curious (and unfortunate) coincidence with the 50th anniversary of the "Carnation Revolution" of 1974, which ended the far-right dictatorship and established democracy in Portugal. The forecasts made by Portuguese researchers five years ago have now come true:

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[14] Heyne, L. and Manucci, L. "A new Iberian exceptionalism? Comparing the populist radical right electorate in Portugal and Spain." *Political Research Exchange* 3 (1) (2021).

[15] Marchi, R. *A nova direita anti-sistema: o caso do Chega* (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2020); Mendes, M. "'Enough' of What? An Analysis of Chega's Populist Radical Right Agenda." *South European Society and Politics* 26 (3) (2022), 329-353.

[16] Magalhães, P. "Disaffected democrats: political attitudes and political action in Portugal." *West European Politics* 28 (5) (2005), 973-991.

[17] de Sousa, L. and Coroado, S. "Political Corruption in Portugal." In *The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, eds. J M. Fernandes, P C. Magalhães and A C Pinto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 589-603.

[18] OECD. "Lessons from the OECD Trust Survey in Portugal." (2023). https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/03/lessons-from-the-oecd-trust-survey-in-portugal_3c2e60f1/9754dd09-en.pdf

[19] Marchi, R. "The new populist radical right in Portugal." In *The Routledge Handbook of Far-right Extremist in Europe*, eds K. Kondor and M. Littler (London: Routledge, 2023), 117-128; Zúquete, J P. "Populismo: lá fora e cá dentro." (Lisboa: Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos, 2022).

"(…) if the party [Chega] grows exponentially from its current 1.3 per cent of the vote and one out of 230 parliamentary seats (…) no longer allow[s] us to describe Portugal as a negative case of populism in the European landscape.[20]"

Yet, "five years after the advent of Chega, the extant research on populist attitudes in Portugal mainly depicts the pre-2019 context"[21]. Therefore, the rapid rise of radical right-wing populism and its corresponding electoral representation makes it all the more important to assess and understand the populist attitudes among the Portuguese people[22]. We focus our analysis on young adults aged between 18 and 30 years old, as these are crucial formative years for political socialisation and development, and represent a key demographic for anticipating shifts in political culture. Moreover, the current panorama of Portuguese young adults' lives is bleak[23]: they face an unstable economic situation[24], precarious job prospects[25], and a severe housing crisis[26]. This context contributes to a deep erosion of trust in democratic institutions[27], creating fertile ground for populist orientations[28]. Indeed, some authors argue that younger generations seem to be attracted

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[20] Santana-Pereira, J. and Cancela, J. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal." *South European Society and Politics* 25 (2) (2020), 205-228.

[21] Santana-Pereira, J. "Atitudes populistas e o voto da direita radical populista em diferentes tipos de eleições: Evidências de Portugal." *Análise Social* 59 (251) (2024).

[22] Falcão, F., Jalali, C. and Costa, P. "Empirical validation study and psychometric evaluation of the properties of the populist attitudes scale for the portuguese population." *BMC Psychology* 11 (1) (2023).

[23] Tsatsanis, E., Borghetto, E., Freire, A. and Montero, J R. "Generational and Ideological Gaps in Democratic Support: Seeds of Deconsolidation in Post-Crisis Southern Europe?." *South European Society and Politics* 26 (2) (2022), 209-237.

[24] Fonseca, G., Lourenço, D., Francisco, R., Crespo, C. and Relvas, A P. "Families Navigating Macroeconomic Hard Times: The Experiences of Portuguese Emerging Adults and Their Parents in the Aftermath of the Great Recession." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 33 (1) (2023), 314-326.

[25] Carmo, R M. and Matias, A R. *Retratos da Precariedade: Quotidianos e aspirações dos trabalhadores jovens* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2019); Roque, I., Carmo, R ., de Assis, R V. and Caleiras, J. "Precarious Work and Intermittent Life Trajectories in a Portuguese Gig Economy." *Journal of Labor and Society* (2022), 1-26.

[26] Mendes, L. "The Dysfunctional Rental Market in Portugal: A Policy Review." *Land* 11 (4) (2022).

[27] Carmo, R M., Roque, I., Caleiras, J. and Assis, R V. *O Trabalho Aqui e Agora: Crises, Percursos e Vulnerabilidades* (Lisbon: Tinta da China, 2021); Rodrigues, C F. "Social and Economic Inequality." In *The Oxford Handbook of Portuguese Politics*, eds. J M. Fernandes, P C. Magalhães and A C. Pinto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 487-503.

[28] Foa, R S., Klassen, A., Wenger, D., Rand, A. and Slade, M. *Youth and Satisfaction with Democracy: Reversing the Democratic Disconnect?* (Cambridge: Centre for the Future of Democracy, 2020); Körner,

to populist authoritarian and nationalist alternatives[29]. In the last national parliamentary elections, studies found a correlation between the decline in abstention and the growth of radical right-wing populism, with strong support for Chega among young Portuguese voters[30]. National studies also show that young Portuguese citizens have high levels of populist attitudes, although these are lower than those of the older population[31]. Young adults are, therefore, a critical group that must be considered more thoroughly in understanding populist attitudes in Portugal.

This article relies on recent data and contributes to the growing body of research in this area by exploring how the variables that the literature has identified as particularly relevant to the study of adherence to populist ideas predict (or not) the Portuguese young adult's populist attitudes. The contribution of this article is twofold: i) an understanding of the factors driving the adherence to populist ideas in a peculiar Southern European country where the emergence of relevant populist political actors is relatively recent[32]; ii) an exploration of the role played by predictors of populism among young people, as an important age group that has been somewhat bypassed in the study of populist attitudes[33].

A., Eckstein, K. and Noack, P. "Young and Prone to Populist Ideas? – Facets and Correlates of Populist Attitudes in Middle Adolescence." *International Journal of Developmental Science* 17 (1-3) (2023), 43–54.

[29] Foa, R S. and Mounk, Y. "Youth and the populist wave." *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45 (9-10) (2019), 1013-1024; Heyne and Manucci. "A new Iberian exceptionalism? Comparing the populist radical right electorate in Portugal and Spain.".

[30] Almeida, J. and Rodríguez-Pose, A. "The geography of discontent and the rise of far-right politics in Portugal." *European Politics and Policy (EUROPP) blog of The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE)* (2024). https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2024/03/26/the-geography-of-discontent-and-the-rise-of-far-right-politics-in-portugal/

[31] Costa, P. *A Participação Política da Juventude em Portugal: Portugal em 2020* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2022) https://gulbenkian.pt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Relato%CC%81rio-02-final_red.pdf; Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228; Soares, R., Malafaia, C. and Ferreira, P. "Populismo, emoções e política: o papel das caraterísticas socioeconómicas, da confiança na classe política e da satisfação com a democracia." In *Emoções e comportamento eleitoral em Portugal*, eds J M R. Otero, N L. Diez, E J. Gulías, P. Costa (Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais do ICS-UL, in press).

[32] Falcão, Jalali and Costa. "Empirical validation study and psychometric evaluation of the properties of the populist attitudes scale for the portuguese population."

[33] Noack, P. and Eckstein, K. "Populism in youth: Do experiences in school matter?." *Child Development Perspectives* 17 (2) (2023), 90-96.

This manuscript progresses as follows: first, we detail the definition of populism and take stock of the state-of-the-art on populist attitudes and their correlates. Based on the literature, we also present our study's hypotheses. The following section describes the methodological approach: the participants, the variables used and the data analysis procedures. We then present the results of the linear regression model tested and conclude by discussing the findings, while answering the main question raised in the title of this article.

2.   Populist attitudes and their correlates

We define populism as a thin ideology that sees society as divided into two (intra) homogeneous and (inter) antagonistic groups – the 'pure' people as opposed to the 'corrupt' elite (economic, media, political) – and that emphasises that political decisions should be the expression of the will/sovereignty of the people[34]. This definition of populism as an ideology is often used in studies focusing on the so-called demand side of populism, such as citizens' populist attitudes[35]. A systematic literature review on correlates of populist attitudes[36] shows that there is still insufficient research in this field focused on the Portuguese context, particularly among younger populations[37], while revealing that populist attitudes are associated with four main dimensions: political, socioeconomic, emotional, and media. Thus, it is particularly important to examine how the variables identified in the literature as most relevant to studying populist support predict (or not) young adults' populist attitudes. We present some hypotheses regarding the correlates of populist attitudes among young adults in Portugal.

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[34] Mudde, C. and Kaltwasser, C R. *Populism: a Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[35] Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert. "The populist citizen: Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America", 1-18.

[36] Soares, R., Malafaia, C. and Ferreira, P. "Which Dimensions Are Related to Populist Attitudes: An Educational View Based on a Systematic Literature Review." *Societies* 14 (9) (2024).

[37] Jungkunz, S. and Weiss, J. "Populist attitudes among Teenagers: How negative relationships with socialization agents are linked to populist attitudes." *Perspectives on Politics* (2024), 1-17; Körner, Eckstein and Noack. "Young and Prone to Populist Ideas? – Facets and Correlates of Populist Attitudes in Middle Adolescence.", 43–54; Noack and Eckstein. "Populism in youth: Do experiences in school matter?.", 90-96.

A few years ago, Santana-Pereira and Cancela[38] suggested that, in the post-bailout period, the absence of populist parties in Portugal was more related to the lack of supply than demand. In other words, the authors considered that the explanation for Portugal's exceptionalism in the South European context was mainly due to the lack of political actors capable of both penetrating the closed Portuguese party system and galvanising the existing attitudes of ideological radicalisation and dissatisfaction with national and European institutions. Yet, such conditions have emerged in recent years and, in fact, international research shows that populist attitudes are more common among citizens who distrust institutional political bodies[39]. Studies show that European populist citizens, in general, tend to be ideologically extreme (either left- or right-wing)[40], while research focusing on Southern European countries indicates that populist attitudes are more often associated with left-wing ideological positions[41]. National census data[42] show that Portugal's young population faces several challenges, including high unemployment rates, precarious employment, low wages, and difficulties in becoming economically independent from their parents. Tsatsanis and colleagues[43] state that young people in crisis-affected Southern Europe tend to be more critical of political institutions, hold more extreme ideological positions, and be more open to alternative radical political movements. Portuguese young adults are highly dissatisfied with democratic

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[38] Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228.

[39] Ehrke, F., Grommisch, G., Busch, E P. and Kaczmarek, M. "Populist Attitudes Predict Compliance-Related Attitudes and Behaviors During the COVID-19 Pandemic Via Trust in Institutions." *Social Psychology* 54 (1-2) (2023), 78-94; Vuksan-Ćusa, B. "Populist attitudes in Croatia: First analysis with notes on conceptualisation and measurement." *Politics in Central Europe* 19 (1) (2023), 145-173.

[40] Filsinger, M. "Perceived exclusionary disadvantages and populist attitudes: Evidence from comparative and longitudinal survey data in six European countries." *Political Research Quarterly* 76 (3) (2023), 1043-1057; Marcos-Marne, H., Llamazares, I. and Shikano, S. "Left-Right radicalism and Populist attitudes in France and Spain." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30 (4) (2022), 608-622.

[41] Tsatsanis, E., Andreadis, I. and Teperoglou, E. "Populism from Below: Socio-economic and Ideological Correlates of Mass Attitudes in Greece." *South European Society and Politics* 23 (4) (2018), 429-450; Rico, G., Guinjoan, M. and Anduiza, E. "The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism: How Anger and Fear Affect Populist Attitudes." *Swiss Political Science Review* 23 (4) (2017), 444-461.

[42] PORDATA. "Pordata faz retrato dos jovens entre os 15 e os 24 anos." (2023). https://www.pordata.pt/sites/default/files/2024-07/f_2023_07_25_pr_jovens_vf.pdf

[43] Tsatsanis, E., Lisi, M. and Freire, A. "A generational divide? Age-related aspects of political transformation in post-crisis Southern Europe" (London: Routledge, 2023).

institutions[44], and it is essential to monitor how these grievances may lead to changes in how younger citizens relate to the political system. Indeed, Fernández-García and Valencia-Sáiz[45] argue that the rise of populism in Southern Europe largely responds to a crisis of representation and discontent with the functioning of democracy. The recent parliamentary elections show that young Portuguese people seem to be moving closer to far-right populist politics[46]. Based on this literature and the Portuguese youth scenario, we hypothesise:

> H1: Higher levels of populist attitudes are expected among young adults who are more distrustful of political institutions.

> H2: Populist attitudes among the Portuguese young adults surveyed will be more prevalent in extreme ideological positions (both left- and right-wing).

Despite the dissatisfaction with politics, some studies reveal that European populist citizens are politically interested[47] and support the democratic political system[48] and people-centred forms of political engagement[49]. Nonetheless, there are also studies with opposite conclusions, with some authors arguing that populist attitudes are associated with lower support for democracy[50] and a lack of interest in politics[51]. Given these

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[44] Quaranta, M., Cancela, J., Martín, I. and Tsirbas, Y. "Trust, Satisfaction and Political Engagement during Economic Crisis: Young Citizens in Southern Europe." *South European Society and Politics* 26 (2) (2021), 153-179.

[45] Fernández-García, B. and Valencia-Sáiz, Á. "Populism in Southern Europe." In *Democracy Fatigue*, eds. C. García-Rivero (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2023), 215-239.

[46] Almeida and Rodríguez-Pose "The geography of discontent and the rise of far-right politics in Portugal."; Heyne and Manucci. "A new Iberian exceptionalism? Comparing the populist radical right electorate in Portugal and Spain.".

[47] Bernhard, L. and Haenggli, R. "Who Holds Populist Attitudes? Evidence from Switzerland." *Swiss Political Science Review* 24 (4) (2018), 510-524.

[48] Zaslove, A. and Meijers, M. "Populist Democrats? Unpacking the Relationship Between Populist and Democratic Attitudes at the Citizen Level." *Political Studies* 72 (3) (2023), 1133-1159.

[49] Wuttke, A., Schimpf, C. and Schoen, H. "Populist Citizens in four European Countries: Widespread Dissatisfaction goes with Contradictory but Pro-democratic Regime Preferences." *Swiss Political Science Review* 29 (2) (2022), 246-257.

[50] Bos, L., Wichgers, L. and van Spanje, J. "Are Populists Politically Intolerant? Citizens' Populist Attitudes and Tolerance of Various Political Antagonists." *Political Studies* 71 (3) (2023), 851-868.

[51] Spruyt, B., Keppens, G. and Van Droogenbroeck, F. "Who Supports Populism and What Attracts People to It?." *Political Research Quarterly* 69 (2) (2016), 335-346.

ambivalent results, it is essential to examine the predictive role of these political variables in the Portuguese young adults' populist attitudes. National and international research highlights that populist attitudes are associated with conventional and unconventional political engagement[52]. Costa[53] notes that young Portuguese people feel able to influence political processes individually and collectively, and engage in unconventional forms of political participation. In Portugal, some authors point out that the period of economic crisis led to a growing political interest among young people and a rise in their levels of political participation, albeit through unconventional and non-institutional forms[54]. Thus, given the apparent specificity of the Portuguese context, we can assume that perceptions that political elites have been incapable of providing adequate answers to young people's problems lead to increased political interest and engagement. From this:

> H3: A positive relationship is expected between young adults' political interest and populist attitudes.

The literature asserts that, although younger people are critical of the functioning of democracy and distrustful of the credibility of its institutions, they are not opposed to the democratic regime[55]. Consequently, we can expect young adults' populist attitudes to be associated with support for democracy (H4a). Furthermore, given the ideational definition of populism, in which one of its foundations is that the opinion of the majority of the people (*volonté générale*) should be the barometer of political decisions[56], we hypothesise

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[52] Anduiza, E., Guinjoan, M. and Rico, G. "Populism, participation, and political equality." *European Political Science Review* 11 (1) (2019), 109-124; Santana-Pereira, J. "A relação entre atitudes populistas e participação política em Portugal." *Relações Internacionais* 67 (2020), 57-72.

[53] Costa. *A Participação política da Juventude em Portugal: Portugal em 2020*.

[54] Freire, A., Valentim, V., Queiroga, V. and Graça, F. "Political participation of the young versus old age cohorts before and after the Great Recession: Portugal in a Comparative Perspective, 2008-2016." In *Political Representation and Citizenship in Portugal*, eds M. Lisi, A. Freire and E. Tsatsanis (Lanham: Lexington Book, 2020), 87-104.

[55] Grassi, E F G., Portos, M. and Felicetti, A. "Young People's Attitudes towards Democracy and Political Participation: Evidence from a Cross-European Study." *Government and Opposition* (2023), 1-23; Norris, P. "Is Western Democracy Backsliding? Diagnosing the Risks." *Journal of Democracy* 28 (2) (2017), 1-25.

[56] Mudde, C. "Populism in Europe: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism (The Government and Opposition/Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019)." *Government and Opposition* 56 (4) (2021), 577-597.

that higher levels of populist attitudes are expected among young adults who defend the importance of direct (H4b) and deliberative (H4c) forms of political participation.

Contrary to what Santana-Pereira and Cancela[57] concluded for the Portuguese context, international research has shown that populist attitudes are related to socioeconomic and demographic characteristics: male gender[58], lower economic capital[59], living in rural or semi-rural areas[60] and higher levels of religiosity[61]. In Portugal, the growing support for right-wing populism is associated with feelings of deprivation or declinism[62], especially among residents of rural areas and some medium-sized cities who are deeply exasperated by their prolonged political marginalisation and abandonment[63]. Heyne and Manucci[64] indicate that the Chega electorate tends to be composed of younger male people who are more likely to live in rural rather than urban areas. Moreover, Ferreira Dias[65] points out that one of the common narratives of André Ventura – the leader of Chega – is his recourse to political messianism using various elements of popular Portuguese religiosity. National literature has shown that citizens with populist attitudes

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[57] Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228.

[58] Bernhard and Haenggli "Who Holds Populist Attitudes? Evidence from Switzerland.", 510-524.

[59] Rico, G. and Anduiza, E. "Economic correlates of populist attitudes: an analysis of nine european countries in the aftermath of the great recession." *Acta Política* 54 (3) (2019), 371-397.

[60] Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert. "The populist citizen: Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America", 1-18.

[61] Elçi, E. "Politics of Nostalgia and Populism: Evidence from Turkey." *British Journal of Political Science* 52 (2) (2021), 697-714.

[62] Elchardus, M. and Spruyt, B. "Populism, Persistent Republicanism and Declinism: An Empirical Analysis of Populism as a Thin Ideology." *Government and Opposition* 51 (2016), 111-133; Filsinger. "Perceived Exclusionary Disadvantages and Populist Attitudes: Evidence from Comparative and Longitudinal Survey Data in Six European Countries.", 1043-1057.

[63] Almeida and Rodríguez-Pose "The geography of discontent and the rise of far-right politics in Portugal."; Chamusca, P. "Discontent, populism, or the revenge of the "places that don't matter"? Analysis of the rise of the far-right in Portugal." *Societies* 14 (6) (2024).

[64] Heyne and Manucci. "A new Iberian exceptionalism? Comparing the populist radical right electorate in Portugal and Spain.".

[65] Ferreira Dias, J. "Political Messianism in Portugal, the Case of André Ventura." *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* (2022), 79-107.

tend to support political parties with populist rhetoric[66]. Thus, assuming that there is a relationship between populist attitudes and populist voting and also considering the similarities between the conclusions of international research on agreement with populist ideas and national studies on support for radical right-wing populism in Portugal, we might expect that Portuguese young adults' populist attitudes would be associated with being male (H5a), more religious (H5b), living in peripheral areas (H5c), and having a lower income (H5d).

Other studies suggest that negative emotions proved to be stronger predictors of European populist attitudes than socioeconomic or sociocultural factors[67]. Indeed, adherence to populist viewpoints is driven by negative emotions, namely anger[68], anxiety[69] and feelings of threat[70]. A holistic analysis of populism should include positive emotions[71] because, on the one hand, populist messages elicit positive emotional appeals[72], and, on the other hand, literature has pointed to the importance of emotions such as hope and pride in supporting European populist parties[73]. Nonetheless, the role of

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[66] Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228; Soares, N., Silva, P. and Moniz, J. "Desenterrar as raízes: atitudes populistas e traços de personalidade em Portugal." *Análise Social* 59 (251) (2024).

[67] Abadi, D., Cabot, P H., Duyvendak, J W. and Fischer, A. "Socio-economic or emotional predictors of populist attitudes across Europe." *PsyArXiv* (2020). https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/gtm65

[68] Rico, G., Guinjoan, M. and Anduiza, E. "The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism: How Anger and Fear Affect Populist Attitudes.", 444-461.

[69] Abadi, D., Arnaldo, I. and Fischer, A. "Anxious and Angry: Emotional Responses to the COVID-19 Threat." *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (2021).

[70] Dennison, J. and Turnbull-Dugarte, S J. "Populist Attitudes and Threat Perceptions of Global Transformations and Governance: Experimental Evidence from India and the United Kingdom." *Political Psychology* 43 (5) (2022), 873-892.

[71] Obradović, S., Power, S. and Sheehy-Skeffington, J. "Understanding the psychological appeal of populism." *Current Opinion in Psychology* 35 (2020), 125-131.

[72] Caiani, M. and Di Cocco, J. "Populism and emotions: a comparative study using Machine Learning." *Italian Political Science Review* 53 (3) (2023), 351-366; Wirz, D. "Persuasion through emotion? An experimental test of the emotion-eliciting nature of populist communication." *International Journal of Communication* 12 (2018), 1114-1138.

[73] Jaráiz Gulías, E., Castro Martínez, P. and Colomé García, G. "The Emotional Dimension of the Spanish Far Right and Its Effects on Satisfaction with Democracy." *Social Sciences* 11 (10) (2022); Saxonberg, S., Frič, P. and Gyárfášová, O. "Fear, Anger, Hope, and Pride: Negative and Positive Emotions in Electoral Behaviour." *Sociológia - Slovak Sociological Review* 55 (2) (2023), 153-176.

positive emotions in populist attitudes is still insufficiently explored[74]. Considering the harsh social context lived by Portuguese young adults, which likely impacts their feelings about the current political situation, we hypothesise that:

> H6: Higher populist attitudes are expected among Portuguese young adults who feel more negative emotions about the current country's political situation.

The literature also examines the relationship between individual-level populism and media variables[75]. Populist citizens tend to have anti-media attitudes[76]: those with broad populist beliefs are more distrustful and dissatisfied with the traditional media[77]. Nevertheless, studies show that Europeans with high levels of populist attitudes have diversified media consumption patterns, using new[78], traditional[79], or both[80] media to stay informed about political and social issues. González-González and colleagues[81] conclude that Portuguese citizens with stronger populist attitudes do not tend to use social media

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[74] Soares, Malafaia and Ferreira. "Which Dimensions Are Related to Populist Attitudes: An Educational View Based on a Systematic Literature Review."

[75] Pajnik, M., Berzelak, N. and Šulc, A. "Aligning populist worldviews of citizens to media preferences: peculiarities of an illiberal political context." *East European Politics* 39 (3) (2023), 554-573.

[76] Fawzi, N. and Krämer, B. "The Media as Part of a Detached Elite? Exploring Antimedia Populism Among Citizens and Its Relation to Political Populism." *International Journal of Communication* 15 (2021), 3292-3314.

[77] Schulz, A., Wirth, W. and Muller, P. "We Are the People and You Are Fake News: A Social Identity Approach to Populist Citizens' False Consensus and Hostile Media Perceptions." *Communication Research* 47 (2) (2020), 201-226.

[78] Schumann, S., Thomas, F., Ehrke, F., Bertlich, T. and Dupont, J. "Maintenance or change? Examining the reinforcing spiral between social media news use and populist attitudes." *Information Communication and Society* 25 (13) (2021), 1934-1951.

[79] Stier, S., Kirkizh, N., Froio, C. and Schroeder, R. "Populist Attitudes and Selective Exposure to Online News: A Cross-Country Analysis Combining Web Tracking and Surveys." *International Journal of Press-Politics* 25 (3) (2020), 426-446.

[80] Cremonesi, C., Bobba, G., Legnante, G., Mancosu, M., Roncarolo, F. and Seddone, A. "Political Information Exposure and Populist attitudes in the 'Laboratory of populism': An Exploratory Analysis of the 2018 Italian general election campaign." *Comunicazione Politica* 20 (1) (2019), 39-62.

[81] González-González, P., Marcos-Marné, H., Llamazares, I. and de Zúñiga, H G. "The Informational Consequences of Populism: Social Media News Use and "News Finds Me" Perception." *Politics and Governance* 10 (1) (2022), 197-209.

to keep informed about political affairs news. Nonetheless, Salgado[82] notes that when populist discourses were not recurrent in politics and media, social media were very relevant in increasing the visibility of this type of narrative in Portugal, which echoes other national studies stating that social media played a crucial role in the meteoric rise of right-wing populism in the country[83]. Research also shows that young Portuguese people use social media, rather than traditional media, to obtain information about politics[84]. Therefore, we expect that, in contrast to the general Portuguese population, the consumption of political information in the new media is positively associated with young adults' populist attitudes.

> H7: Portuguese young adults who prefer new media as a source of political information are expected to have higher levels of populist attitudes than young adults who consume more traditional media.

As this section shows, existing research reveals diverse and somewhat ambivalent conclusions about the predictors of populist attitudes. It is essential to test the aforementioned variables and understand how they play out among an important group, such as young adults, in a singular and under-researched context as Portugal.

3. Methodological approach

3.1. Participants and Procedure

This article uses data from an online survey of young adults in Portugal. Data were collected between March and July 2023. This survey sought to diversify the sample regarding the participants' demographic, political, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The survey was disseminated in diverse contexts – higher education institutions, youth parties,

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[82] Salgado, S. "Where's populism? Online media and the diffusion of populist discourses and styles in Portugal." *European Political Science* 18 (1) (2019), 53-65.

[83] Pina, S. "The use of social media by the extreme right in Election campaigns: a comparison of Portugal and Spain.", In *Media, Populism and Corruption*, eds. I F. Cunha, L. Guazina, A. Cabrera and C. Martins (Lisbon: ICNOVA, 2023), 24-36; Vieira, A F. and Joaquim, L. "New Media and Populism: The meteoric rise of right-wing populism in Portugal" In *Media, Populism and Corruption*, eds. I F. Cunha, L. Guazina, A. Cabrera and C. Martins (Lisbon: ICNOVA, 2023), 158-174.

[84] Costa. *A Participação política da Juventude em Portugal: Portugal em 2020*; Matos, R., Soares, M., Torres, J., and Maia, R L. *Estudo sobre a participação política juvenil em Portugal: resultados de um inquérito online e de grupos de discussão com jovens* (Lisboa: Conselho Nacional da Juventude, 2023).

youth associations, activist collectives, vocational training centres, and social media pages – in different geographical areas (urban, semi-urban, rural). All participants were duly informed about the study's goals and scope, and all ethical issues were safeguarded, namely the confidentiality and anonymity of the data. This informed the voluntary decision to fill in the survey.

The sample of this study comprises young adults aged between 18 and 30 years old. A total of 1047 people participated in the survey (530 females, 481 males, and 16 who identify with another gender), with an average age of 22.96 years ($SD = 3.64$). Of those respondents, 983 are Portuguese citizens, and 49 are citizens of other nationalities. The young adults surveyed live in all regions of Portugal: North (49.5%), Centre (22.1%), Lisbon Metropolitan Area (20.3%), Alentejo (2.9%), Algarve (2.1%), Autonomous Region of Madeira (0.8%), and Autonomous Region of Azores (2.3%). There is also heterogeneity in respondents' place of residence: 33.8% live in a big city, 24% in the suburbs or outskirts of a big city, 30.2% in a village or small town, and 12% in a hamlet. Regarding household income, most young adults say that their income covers most (31.6%) or all (54.4%) of their expenses. Contrarily, 10.7% say that their disposable income covers only part of their needs, and 3.3% state that their household income does not cover their expenses. Finally, most young adults do not attend religious ceremonies (53.8%). Of those who do, 31.5% attend only occasionally, 4.2% attend monthly, and 10.5% of young adults attend weekly religious ceremonies.

Our sample is not representative of the young adult population in Portugal. Nevertheless, there are some resemblances with national census data, particularly regarding gender distribution and region of residence. Data from 2021[85] show that of the approximately one million young people living in Portugal, 51% are male, 10% were born in another country, and 20% have no religion. The young population is concentrated in urban and coastal regions, likewise our study's respondents: North (39%), Centre (16%), Lisbon Metropolitan Area (32%), Alentejo (4%), Algarve (4%), Autonomous Region of Madeira (2%), and Autonomous Region of Azores (3%).

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[85] PORDATA. "Pordata faz retrato dos jovens entre os 15 e os 24 anos." (2023). https://www.pordata.pt/sites/default/files/2024-07/f_2023_07_25_pr_jovens_vf.pdf; Rodrigues, C. "A população jovem nos Censos 2021." (2023) https://www.opj.ics.ulisboa.pt/publicacoes/olhares-sobre-jovens/

3.2. Measures

3.2.1. Dependent variable: measurement of populist attitudes

To measure people's agreement with *populist attitudes*, we used a set of 8 items on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Six of these items were taken from the work of Akkerman and colleagues[86]. In addition, in line with recent studies[87], we added two items proposed by Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel[88]: "The particular interests of the political class negatively affect the welfare of the people" and "Politicians always end up agreeing when it comes to protecting their privileges". According to Van Hauwaert and colleagues[89], including these two items increases the conceptual breadth and validity of the scale for measuring citizens' populist attitudes. After exploratory factor analysis (EFA; extraction method, maximum likelihood (ML), and varimax rotation), a unifactorial solution was found, with the construct being described by all items and having a good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.78$).

3.2.2. Independent variables

As independent variables, we included a range of socioeconomic, political, emotional, and media dimensions that previous research identified as particularly relevant to the study of populist attitudes[90].

It includes demographic and socioeconomic information. We use dummy variables to test our expectations that populist attitudes among young adults are associated with being male, living in peripheral areas, having a lower income, and being more religious: *gender* (0 = male), *place of residence* (0 = hamlet, 1 = village or small town), *household income* (0 = does not cover all needs "at all", 1 = covers "partly" all needs), and

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[86] Akkerman, A., Mudde, C. and Zaslove, A. "How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters." *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (9) (2013), 1324-1353.

[87] Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert. "The populist citizen: Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America", 1-18.

[88] Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel. "Beyond protest and discontent: A cross-national analysis of the effect of populist attitudes and issue positions on populist party support.", 68-92.

[89] Van Hauwaert, S., Schimpf, C. and Azevedo, F. "The measurement of populist attitudes: Testing cross-national scales using item response theory." *Politics* 40 (1) (2020), 3-21.

[90] Soares, Malafaia and Ferreira. "Which Dimensions Are Related to Populist Attitudes: An Educational View Based on a Systematic Literature Review."

participation in religious ceremonies from 1 (never) to 5 (several times a week; we named these respondents as "weekly participants").

Also, an item on the ideological position of the respondents. *Ideology*[91] was accounted for by the conventional ideological self-positioning on a 1-10 scale (from left-wing (1) to right-wing (10)). We use dummy variables to refer to *far-left* respondents – who are positioned in 1, 2 – and *far-right* respondents – who are positioned in 9, 10.

Moreover, our instrument included other political variables, namely: i) *political interest* (EFA, ML one-factor solution, 59.9% variance explained; Cronbach's α = 0.80)[92] was measured based on three items: e.g., "I bring social and political issues into conversation with other people"; and ii) *democratic support* (EFA, ML one-factor solution, 46% variance explained; Cronbach's α = 0.76)[93] encompassing three items: e.g., "Democracy is the best system of government I know". The response's format ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

We measured the degree of importance that respondents attribute to specific political topics, such as: i) *forms of direct democracy*[94]: "In a democracy, citizens should have the final decision on some political issues by voting in referendums"; ii) and *deliberative forms of participation*[95]: "Citizens should have the opportunity to take part in meetings where they can debate important community and/or local political issues". A 5-point answer scale was used (1 = not important at all, 5 = extremely important).

We also asked about the level of trust in eight institutional bodies: European Union, national government, parliament, local governance (e.g., city council), political parties,

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[91] Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228.

[92] Emler, N P. "What does it take to be a political actor in a multicultural society?." In *Nationalism, ethnicity, citizenship: Multidisciplinary perspectives*, eds. M. Barrett, C. Flood and J. Eade (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2011), 135-161.

[93] Melendez, C. and Kaltwasser, C R. "Negative partisanship towards the populist radical right and democratic resilience in Western Europe." *Democratization* 28 (5) (2021), 949-969; Zaslove, A., Geurkink, B., Jacobs, K. and Akkerman, A. "Power to the people? Populism, democracy, and political participation: a citizen's perspective." *West European Politics* 44 (4) (2020), 727-751.

[94] Mohrenberg, S., Huber, R. and Freyburg, T. "Love at first sight? Populist attitudes and support for direct democracy." *Party Politics* 27 (3) (2021), 528-539.

[95] Zaslove, Geurkink, Jacobs and Akkerman. "Power to the people? Populism, democracy, and political participation: a citizen's perspective.", 727-751.

politicians, court, and media. The answer options range from 1 (very little trust) to 5 (extreme trust). All items were included in the construct of the *institutional trust* scale (Cronbach's α = 0.85).

The emotional dimensions were also considered. We asked how intensely respondents feel certain emotions when they think about the current political situation in Portugal[96]. Respondents rated each item on a 5-point scale from 1 (nothing) to 5 (extremely). After EFA, we identified a two-dimensional construct (ML, two-factor solution, 48.1% variance explained): *negative emotions* with five items (Cronbach's α = 0.82): "anxiety", "anger", "fear", "impotence", and "threat"; *positive emotions* with two items (Cronbach's α = 0.60): "hope" and "pride". Although the reliability of the positive emotions' variable is relatively low, we chose to retain the composite variable for consistency with the negative emotions scale, considering that the Cronbach's alpha is, nonetheless, at the threshold of acceptability – which is not uncommon in exploratory analyses, particularly those dealing with scales composed of few items[97].

Furthermore, we explored media consumption's role in staying informed about political and social issues[98]. Respondents were asked to position themselves on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (nothing very often) to 5 (very often). Two-dimensional construct results from the EFA (ML, two-factor solution, 42.7% variance explained): *traditional media consumption* with three items (Cronbach's α = 0.71): "tv channels", "radio" and "print newspapers or their apps"; *new media consumption* with five items (Cronbach's α = 0.76): e.g., "friends' social media pages (Instagram, Twitter/X, etc.)", "chat groups by unknown people sharing (Telegram, WhatsApp, etc.)".

3.3. Data analysis procedures

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[96] Gaffney, A., Hackett, J., Rast, D., Hohman, Z. and Jaurique, A. "The State of American Protest: Shared Anger and Populism." *Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy* 18 (1) (2018), 11-33.

[97] Field, A. "Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics." (London: Sage Publications, 2013).

[98] Fawzi, N. and Mothes, C. "Perceptions of Media Performance: Expectation-Evaluation Discrepancies and Their Relationship with Media-Related and Populist Attitudes." *Media and Communication* 8 (3) (2020), 335-347; Müller, P. and Schulz, A. "Alternative media for a populist audience? Exploring political and media use predictors of exposure to Breitbart, Sputnik, and Co." *Information Communication and Society* 24 (2) (2021), 277-293.

To grasp the predictive effect of those independent variables on populist attitudes, we performed linear regressions with the following predictors organised in blocks (socioeconomic, political, emotional, and media):

(a) gender, place of residence, household income, attendance at religious ceremonies;

(b) ideological position, political interest, democratic support, support of forms of direct democracy and deliberative forms of participation, institutional trust;

(c) emotions about the current Portuguese political situation;

(d) media consumption to stay informed about political and social issues.

This approach makes it possible to detect the relative weight of each dimension in explaining the variance of young adults' populist attitudes in Portugal.

4.   Results

Our results demonstrate that populist attitudes – agreement with the ideas of anti-elitism, people-centrism and homogeneity of people[99] – are widespread among the Portuguese young adults surveyed (M = 3.59, *SD* = .62). The data also show that respondents are politically interested (M = 4.10, *SD* = .87) and that, despite a medium level of institutional trust (M = 2.52, *SD* = .68), they strongly support the democratic system (M = 4.25, *SD* = .81), as well as direct (M = 3.78, *SD* = 1.06) and deliberative (M = 4.24, *SD* = .81) forms of participation. Participants exhibit more negative (M = 2.88, *SD* = .92) than positive (M = 2.00, *SD* = .83) emotions about the current country's political situation. Portuguese young adults surveyed also consume more traditional media (M = 3.26, *SD* = 1.03) than new media (M = 2.61, *SD* = .95) to stay politically informed. Figure 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the political, emotional, and media variables used in the linear regressions.

The ANOVA results confirm the significance of the linear regression model tested, with the set of variables explaining around 45% of the variance in populist attitudes [R^2_{Aj} = 0.45, $F(17, 669) = 32.05$, $p < 0.001$]. Tolerance values are consistently high (>0.10);

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[99] Mudde. "Populism in Europe: An Illiberal Democratic Response to Undemocratic Liberalism (The Government and Opposition/Leonard Schapiro Lecture 2019).", 577-597.

therefore, multicollinearity among predictors does not appear to be a problem. Table 1 details all unstandardised regression coefficients on populist attitudes.

Demographic and socioeconomic variables explain 3% of the variance, which rises to 42% when adding political dimensions. When emotional and media variables are included, the predictive value increases slightly (around 2.5%).
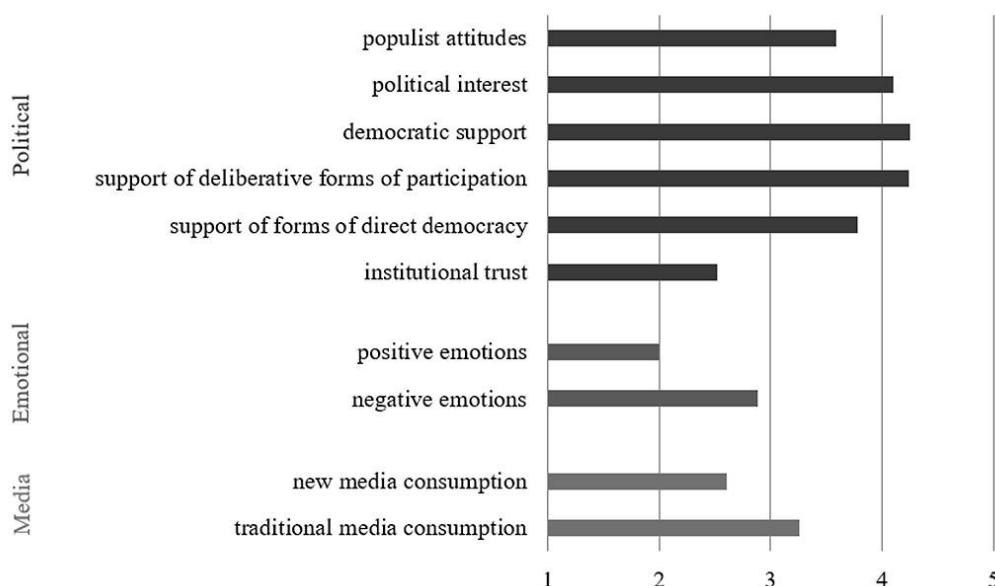

Figure 1. Descriptive statistics for the variables used in the linear regressions

Table 1. Unstandardised regression coefficients on populist attitudes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	B (std. err)	B (std. err)	B (std. err)	B (std. err)
gender_male	.048 (.048)	-.041 (.039)	-.014 (.039)	-0.09 (.038)
place of residence_in a village or small town	.143** (.054)	.095* (.042)	.083* (.042)	**.082*** (.042)
place of residence_hamlet	.225** (.079)	.108 (.062)	.090 (.061)	.088 (.061)
householdincome_not at all	.260 (.147)	.025 (.115)	-.005 (.113)	-.011 (.113)
householdincome_partly	.052 (.084)	-.052 (.066)	-.057 (.065)	-.062 (.065)
attendance at religious ceremonies_weekly participant	.113 (.079)	-.043 (.065)	-.047 (.064)	-.050 (.063)

ideological position_far-left		.229*** (.059)	.228*** (.058)	**.219*** (.058)**
ideological position_far-right		.237** (.082)	.217** (.081)	**.180** (.082)**
political interest		.025 (.026)	.009 (.026)	-.009 (.027)
democratic support		-.035 (.031)	-.037 (.031)	-.037 (.031)
support of forms of direct democracy		.201*** (.019)	.196*** (.019)	**.199*** (.019)**
support of deliberative forms of participation		.014 (.026)	.011 (.026)	.010 (.026)
institutional trust		-.385*** (.032)	-.357*** (.035)	**-.343*** (.036)**
negative emotions			.103*** (.022)	**.095*** (.022)**
positive emotions			.023 (.025)	.016 (.025)
traditional media consumption				-.003 (.020)
new media consumption				**.059** (.021)**
Constant	3.453*** (.042)	3.709*** (.178)	3.395*** (.188)	3.322*** (.190)
R^2	.027	.424	.442	.449

Notes: Unstandardised regression coefficients (B) and standard errors (std. err). Coefficients are statistically significant at *p < 0.05. **p < 0.01. ***p < 0.001

Figure 2 presents the standardised regression coefficients of the variables included in the model, i.e. the coefficients when variables are transformed into the same unit of measurement, which makes it possible to compare the effects of the different predictors. The major significant predictor is *institutional trust* (B = -0.343, β = -0.367, SE = 0.036, $CI95\%$ = -0.413, -0.273; p < 0.001), followed by *support of forms of direct democracy* (B = 0.199, β = 0.336, SE = 0.019, $CI95\%$ = 0.161, 0.236; p < 0.001), *negative emotions* (B = 0.095, β = 0.135, SE = 0.022, $CI95\%$ = 0.052, 0.139; p < 0.001) and *far-left ideology* (B = 0.219, β = 0.116, SE = 0.058, $CI95\%$ = 0.105, 0.332; p < 0.001). Moreover, despite their lower predictive power, *new media consumption* (B = 0.059, β = 0.089, SE = 0.021, $CI95\%$ = 0.018, 0.100; p = 0.005), *far-right ideology* (B = 0.180, β = 0.079, SE = 0.082,

CI95% = 0.019, 0.341; p = 0.029), and *living in a village or small town* (*B* = 0.082, β = 0.059, *SE* = 0.042, *CI95%* = 0.000, 0.164; p = 0.049) are also significantly associated with higher levels of populist attitudes.

The variables related to male gender, lower household income, weekly attendance at religious ceremonies, political interest, support for the democratic system and forms of deliberative participation, positive emotions about the current Portuguese political situation and traditional media consumption are not significant predictors of young adults' populist attitudes.
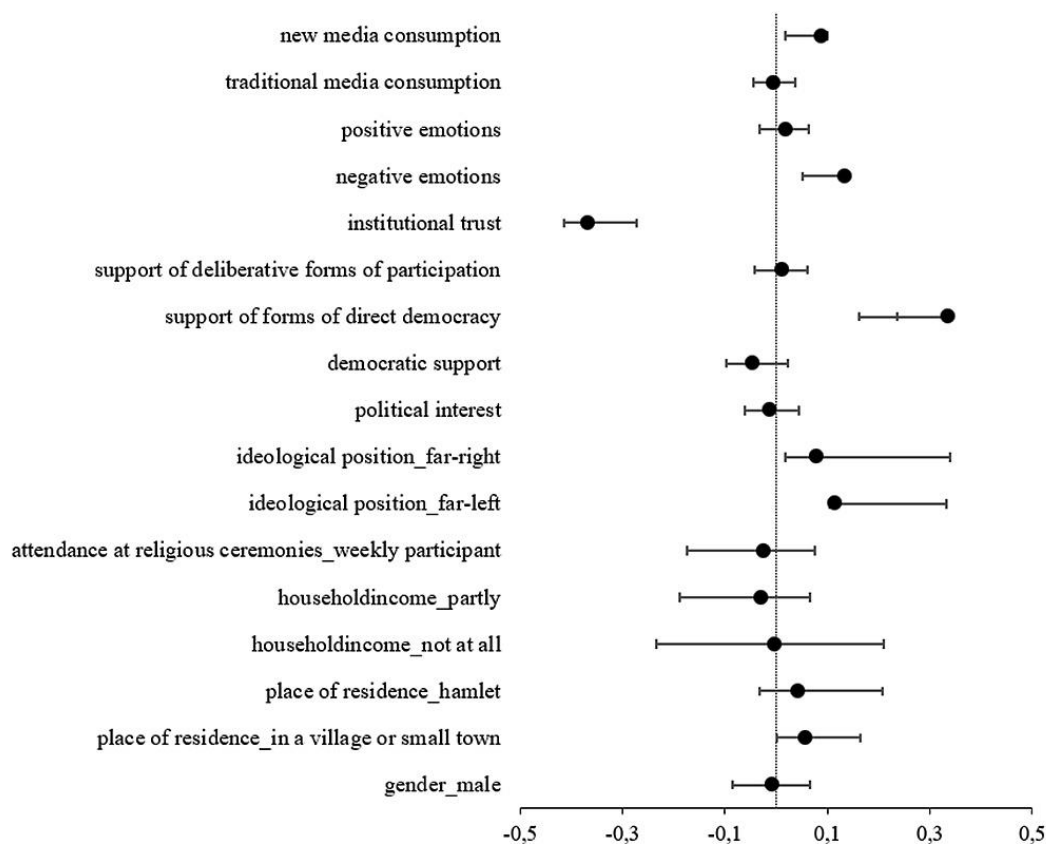

Figure 2. Standardised regression coefficients and their 95% confidence intervals

5. Concluding discussion

This article describes the correlates of populist attitudes among young adults in Portugal. This is a peculiar country in the populist landscape of Southern Europe, once radical right-wing populism has only recently surged into the mainstream political arena

– which also explains the scarcity of studies with recent data on Portuguese populist attitudes[100].

As Hawkins and colleagues[101] point out, populist attitudes can be widespread among citizens, but they need to be activated by a social, economic and/or political context that makes them salient. Our study contributes to understanding how the current problematic social scenario faced by Portuguese young adults – facing social and economic challenges[102] – may contribute to a crisis of confidence in political institutions and an increase of negative emotions towards the status quo, activating populist orientations and the claims for alternative forms of democratic participation. Foa and Mounk[103] suggest that when young generations face systemic economic and social problems, their political apathy turns into "active antipathy", characterised by intense hostility towards political institutions. Our results add to this argument by showing that youth distrust of institutions also favours their agreement with populist viewpoints (supporting Hypothesis 1). At the same time, we found no relationship between respondents' populist attitudes, and their interest in politics (not confirming Hypothesis 3), and their support for democracy (rejecting Hypothesis 4a).

In addition to their institutional distrust, the young adult populists surveyed are also citizens disenchanted and disgusted with the status quo, as evidenced by the predictive power of negative emotions about the country's current political situation on populist attitudes (consistent with Hypothesis 6). These findings corroborate national research showing that the populist attitudes of the general Portuguese population are associated with higher levels of distrust and dissatisfaction with institutional bodies, as well as more

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[100] Falcão, Jalali and Costa. "Empirical validation study and psychometric evaluation of the properties of the populist attitudes scale for the portuguese population."; Santana Pereira. "Atitudes populistas e o voto da direita radical populista em diferentes tipos de eleições: Evidências de Portugal."

[101] Hawkins, K., Read, M. and Pauwels, T. "Populism and its causes." In *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. C R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo and P. Ostiguy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 269-286.

[102] e.g., Fonseca, Lourenço, Francisco, Crespo and Relvas. "Families Navigating Macroeconomic Hard Times: The Experiences of Portuguese Emerging Adults and Their Parents in the Aftermath of the Great Recession.", 314-326; Mendes. "The Dysfunctional Rental Market in Portugal: A Policy Review.".

[103] Foa and Mounk. "Youth and the populist wave.", 1013-1024.

negative sentiments towards politics[104]. It is worth highlighting the similarity between these correlates of populist attitudes and some of the key characteristics of Chega party supporters. Specifically, research shows that Portuguese radical right-wing populists are deeply dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy and strongly distrust the regime's institutions[105]. This suggests that agreement with populist ideas and mistrust of political bodies may translate into increased electoral support for populist parties like Chega, particularly among young voters. Indeed, national scholars note that populist attitudes are strong predictors of populist voting in highly personalised elections, such as presidential elections[106], and are positively associated with the identification with parties that employ populist rhetoric[107].

The dissatisfaction and critical stance towards the country's political situation and the responsiveness of its institutions translate into claims for alternative models of democracy: while our research results show no association between young adults' populist attitudes and deliberative forms of political participation (rejecting Hypothesis 4c), the respondents do support direct and people-centred forms of democratic participation, such as referendums (confirming Hypothesis 4b). This finding contrasts with the study by Soares and colleagues[108], which suggests that populist Portuguese citizens often lack confidence in their political influence. The anti-establishment position, anchored in perceptions that political elites are not responding adequately to their problems, leads populist young adults surveyed to consider that the opinion of the majority of the people (*volonté générale*) should be the barometer for political decisions. To be sure, those claims for people's sovereignty are seen as one of the foundations of

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[104] Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228; Soares, Malafaia and Ferreira. "Populismo, emoções e política: o papel das caraterísticas socioeconómicas, da confiança na classe política e da satisfação com a democracia."

[105] Heyne and Manucci. "A new Iberian exceptionalism? Comparing the populist radical right electorate in Portugal and Spain."; Marchi, R. and Zúquete, J P. "O populismo de extrema-direita em Portugal: a cultura política dos membros do Chega." *Análise Social* 59 (251) (2024).

[106] Santana Pereira. "Atitudes populistas e o voto da direita radical populista em diferentes tipos de eleições: Evidências de Portugal."

[107] Soares, Silva and Moniz. "Desenterrar as raízes: atitudes populistas e traços de personalidade em Portugal."

[108] Soares, Silva and Moniz. "Desenterrar as raízes: atitudes populistas e traços de personalidade em Portugal."

democracy[109]. Our data confirms that young people's critical views on the functioning of democracy are not rooted in opposition or rejection of the democratic system[110]. This being said, it would be worth exploring how the seemingly utilitarian approach – that is, the notion that the good political choice is the one that will produce the greatest good for the greatest number – articulates with young people's stance on liberalism, particularly individual freedoms. Our results show that Portuguese young adult respondents who are ideologically radical (either left- or right-wing) display higher levels of populist attitudes (supporting Hypothesis 2). In a recent study, Marchi and Zúquete[111] state that the political culture of Portuguese supporters of radical-right populism is focused on majoritarianism towards minorities, with securitarian and culturalist characteristics. So, we might conjecture that this defence of listening directly to people's preferences on certain issues might, in some cases, be particularly challenging and worrying for the rights of ethnic and sexual minority groups.

Our findings on the predictive role of ideology in populist adherence align with studies in Southern European countries, which point out that agreement with populist ideas is mainly associated with far-left ideological identification[112]. Yet, similar to what Santana-Pereira and Cancela[113] observed for the Portuguese population, our findings also show the effects of far-right ideology, reinstating that populism can be either left or right, progressive or conservative, as it can be combined with many different host ideologies[114].

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[111] Marchi and Zúquete. "O populismo de extrema-direita em Portugal: a cultura política dos membros do Chega."

[112] Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza. "The Emotional Underpinnings of Populism: How Anger and Fear Affect Populist Attitudes.", 444-461; Tsatsanis, Andreadis and Teperoglou "Populism from Below: Socio-economic and Ideological Correlates of Mass Attitudes in Greece.", 429-450.

[113] Santana-Pereira and Cancela. "Demand without Supply? Populist Attitudes and Voting Behaviour in Post-Bailout Portugal", 205-228.

[114] Bakker, B N., Rooduijn, M. and Schumacher, G. "The psychological roots of populist voting: Evidence from the United States, the Netherlands and Germany." *European Journal of Political Research* 55 (2) (2016), 302-320.

Therefore, we stress the importance of further research into the varieties of populism, including left and right-wing populist attitudes.

The literature on the socioeconomic profile of European populist citizens concludes that they tend to be male, religious and have lower incomes[115]. Our analyses show that these conclusions are not borne out in the Portuguese young adult respondents (not confirming Hypotheses 5a, 5b and 5d). On the one hand, these data confirm Santana-Pereira and Cancela's[116] assertion that no socio-demographic pattern is associated with different degrees of agreement with populist viewpoints in Portugal. On the other hand, these results diverge from other national studies that mention that Portuguese citizens' populist attitudes are related to being male, having lower incomes, and attending religious ceremonies less frequently[117]. Our results suggest that the crisis context discussed above may be more structural, affecting different classes across the board. Some authors indicate that subjective loss of status and 'sociotropic' considerations matter more than objective socioeconomic conditions and 'egotropic' perceptions in adherence to populism[118]. Thus, young adults' populist attitudes may be related to a social resentment[119] associated with a

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[115] Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert. "The populist citizen: Empirical evidence from Europe and Latin America", 1-18; Rico and Anduiza "Economic correlates of populist attitudes: an analysis of nine European countries in the aftermath of the great recession.", 371-397; Stankov, N. and Zivkovic, S. "May the lord protect our country: ethnic relations as a moderator between religiosity and radical right vote." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 30 (3) (2021), 521-535.

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generalised sense of insecurity, precariousness and powerlessness[120], as well as a perceived loss of social status compared to other groups[121].

Our study reveals that the only demographic dimension that is statistically significant in predicting populist attitudes is the place of residence. Our results align with other European studies[122], showing that young adults who live in rural or semi-rural areas are more likely to adopt populist positions (consistent with Hypothesis 5c). In contextualising these results, it is important to consider that, even though Portugal is one of the few European countries where economic disparities between regions have been reduced, the urban-rural divide continues to be shaped by social inequalities[123] – linked to educational and employment opportunities, as well as infrastructural conditions – which often force young Portuguese living in rural and remote areas to migrate to urban centres, where job prospects and access to public higher education are greater[124]. This dynamic, also marked by an ageing population in remote areas, contributes to what is referred to as the 'syndrome of political neglect'[125]: the perception of being overlooked by political decision-makers, with regional marginalisation exacerbating this sense of

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[125] Magalhães, P. and Cancela, J. "Political neglect and support for the radical right: the case of rural Portugal." *Political Geography* 116 (2025).

exclusion. Consequently, these 'places that don't matter'[126] become fertile ground for populism and, as indicated by Magalhães and Cancela[127], it is the feeling of political neglect – more than economic and cultural cleavages – that is most strongly associated with the radical right vote in rural settings.

Regarding media consumption, our data show that although the young adults surveyed make a considerable use of traditional media, the consumption of political news in platforms such as social media is one of the predictors of populist attitudes (Hypothesis 7), contrary to what is suggested in the study by González-González and colleagues[128]. This use of new media by young adult populists can fuel a dangerous vicious cycle between populism, disinformation and political polarisation. Indeed, research suggests that institutional political actors often strategically disseminate populist messages on social media[129], reaching young demographics[130] and contributing to an increase in populist attitudes[131]. Populist communication style is often based on sensationalist and simplistic frames (e.g., reducing the complexity of political issues), negative (e.g., resorting to crisis rhetoric with elements of immorality, exaggeration, scandal and emergency) and emotional (e.g., using a tone to evoke positive and negative emotions)[132]. Studies also reveal how online populist narratives reinforce Manichean and polarised

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worldviews, demonising the "other" (political elites, minority groups, etc.) and promoting extreme political positions[133]. The algorithmic power of social media facilitates the spread of unverified and biased (mis)information that distorts social reality[134]. In fact, compared to traditional media, new media platforms have played a significantly greater role in the introduction and amplification of populist discourses in Portugal by both right- and left-wing political actors[135]. Therefore, we emphasise the need for further studies to explore in more depth the observed relationship between Portuguese young adults' populist attitudes and social media.

Our study has some limitations. First, using a non-randomised, convenience sample leads to potential biases and limits the generalisability of the findings. Second, although we used some of the most relevant variables for the study of populist attitudes, identified through a systematic literature review[136], we stress that it might be important to include other variables of interest, such as nativism, cultural and economic attitudes, and voting behaviour. Moreover, further research may choose to treat certain variables in different ways. For example, although we used dichotomous indicators for the ideology scale to clearly identify individuals at the ideological extremes, alternative approaches could treat ideology in ways that do not assume controlling for the opposite ideological pole, such as using ideology squared or absolute distance from the average. Finally, the study's cross-sectional design raises concerns about direct causal inference, namely regarding the possibility of reverse causality and the third-variables effects. We suggest that future longitudinal studies could explore the observed associations more robustly, thereby mitigating these limitations.

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Despite these limitations, this article provides an answer to the question raised in the title of this paper. Portuguese young adult respondents' populist attitudes are driven by a major distrust toward institutional political bodies, significant support for people-centred forms of political engagement, an extreme ideological stance (either left- or right-wing), and negative emotions about the country's political situation. These young adults use new media for political information and live in peripheral (often politically forgotten) regions.

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