

ARTICLE

# The Relationship between Economic Populist Sovereignism, Globalization and Populist Radical Right Politics: Voter Attitudes in Western Europe and the United States

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(Received 12 June 2022; revised 26 May 2023; accepted 6 June 2023; first published online 15 August 2023)

## Abstract

Sovereignism is at the crux of the current wave of radical right-wing populism (RRP). While sovereignism may concern different dimensions, claims by RRP parties and leaders about regaining sovereignty are increasingly associated with socioeconomic issues such as welfare, redistribution and international trade. Adopting a demand-side perspective, this article draws from an original cross-national survey to investigate the intersection between economic sovereignism, economic populism and globalization attitudes, and how such attitudes may shape RRP voting in Western Europe and the United States. Our results confirm that economic populism and sovereignism form coherent sets of attitudes together with perceptions of globalization, and that such attitudes have a significant effect on support for RRP actors. We find different patterns of association, however, across our European cases and the United States, which suggests that the relationship between populism, sovereignism and economic globalization is partly dependent upon national context and historical legacies.

**Keywords:** sovereignism; populism; right-wing politics; globalization; public attitudes

In recent years, the concept of sovereignism has emerged to describe the idea of ‘taking back control’ in the context of the ‘erosion of nation-states’ (Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Kallis 2018). While sovereignism and populism may be studied separately, scholars have argued that the two can be merged to form the concept of ‘populist sovereignism’, which advocates for the reassertion of popular sovereignty by reinstating state sovereignty (De Spiegeleire et al. 2017; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020). The tandem of populism and sovereignism may manifest across a variety of parties and leaders, but it has been deemed central to the contemporary wave of radical right-wing populism (RRP) in Western democracies (Basile and

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Borri 2022; Brusenbauch Meislova and Buckledee 2021; Heinisch et al. 2020). The populist sovereigntism of such parties concerns a wide range of political, economic and cultural issues associated with globalization and internationalization (e.g. Marin et al. 2020; Stamati 2020). In seeking to protect and defend the state's sovereignty, populist sovereigntism may be viewed as a claim against globalization – which is broadly defined as ‘the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space’ (Steger 2013: 15).

This article's starting point is an examination of the relationship between sovereigntism, populism and globalization. Despite gaining scholarly interest, this relationship has received relatively little attention in the academic sphere. The primary goal of this article is to investigate the potential connection between populism and sovereigntism in the context of RRP politics and how they might resonate differently with the issues and grievances stemming from globalization across different actors and within different contextual opportunities. Although the analysis in this article is essentially exploratory, it contributes to the existing literature in three significant ways.

First, we specifically focus on the economic dimension of globalization. Globalization is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing economics, politics, culture, ideology, environment and technology (Steger 2013). While we acknowledge the multidimensional nature of the contemporary challenge posed by populist sovereigntism, we are primarily interested in its economic aspects, which have received relatively little attention in the burgeoning literature on populism and sovereigntism. Specifically, we draw on recent studies involving the link between economic populism, sovereigntism and RRP politics (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020; Mazzoleni and Ivaldi 2022). RRP parties advocate ‘taking back control’ in the name of the ‘people’ and against the political establishment and supranational institutions with the aim of restoring the people's economic prosperity and the country's economic greatness, as exemplified by Donald Trump's ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) US presidential campaign slogan.

Second, this article extends existing scholarly work on party-based populist sovereigntism by adopting a demand-side approach. Using original cross-national survey data, we investigate economic populist and sovereigntist attitudes among the general public, as well as their relationship with views of economic globalization. Subsequently, we examine how these attitudes may shape individual electoral support for RRP parties by taking into account well-established predictors of voting for such parties, including cultural concerns related to immigration and law and order, while also controlling for attitudes towards economic redistribution.

Finally, the article offers an important contribution by adopting a transatlantic perspective. Contemporary developments in RRP sovereigntism make a strong case for a comparative approach encompassing Western Europe and the United States (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mudde 2022). By examining a selection of Western European countries and contrasting them with the United States, we align with the recent recommendation that the scholarship should move beyond ‘Eurocentrism’ (Castelli Gattinara 2020).

The article is organized as follows. First, we define the core and intertwined concepts of economic populism and sovereigntism and discuss their connection with globalization in the context of the populist radical right. Next, we outline the

objectives of our analysis, clarify the rationale behind our case selection and describe our methodology. We analyse data from an original cross-national survey conducted in September 2020, which covered France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United States. The survey used a set of items specifically designed to capture economic populist and sovereignist attitudes, as well as attitudes towards economic globalization among the general public. Our findings confirm that economic populism and sovereignism constitute cohesive sets of attitudes together with perceptions of globalization. We find, in particular, that economic sovereignist attitudes and negative perspectives on globalization have a significant effect on individual electoral support for RRP actors on both sides of the Atlantic. Furthermore, we find diverse configurations of economic populist attitudes, which suggests that the relationship between populism, sovereignism and economic globalization is context-dependent and may vary based on national traditions and legacies.

### Framework of analysis

Sovereignism describes the rejection of the erosion of national sovereignty and primarily calls for the primacy of the nation state. Unlike nationalism, sovereignism centres on the notion of ‘taking back control’. According to Stephan De Spiegeleire et al. (2017: 37), ‘nationalism gains its characteristics primarily from the unifying sentiment of an imagined community and mission of creating a state that is coterminous with the nation. Sovereignism gains its characteristics primarily from its mission of asserting or reasserting the state’s exclusive authority over its territory and affairs.’

Although sovereignism is not necessarily linked to populism (e.g. Basile and Mazzoleni 2022), scholars have recently proposed that the two concepts be merged to form ‘populist sovereignism’. This concept advocates for the restoration of popular sovereignty by reinstating state sovereignty (De Spiegeleire et al. 2017; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020). In this article, we consider populism as a discourse and a set of attitudes referring to the Manichean opposition between the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ (e.g. Kefford et al. 2022). Thus, populist sovereignism emphasizes the need to re-empower the nation state through popular support, countering the influence of the current elite and ensuring effective decision-making and political power for the people (De Spiegeleire et al. 2017). As Angelos Chrysosgelos (2020: 23) points out, populist sovereignism addresses the insulation of the state from society and demands that ‘the sovereignty of the government and the people become coterminous again’.

Populist sovereignism has permeated various party families and is considered a central feature of the contemporary wave of RRP (Basile and Borri 2022; Brusenbauch Meislova and Buckledee 2021; Heinisch et al. 2020; Kallis 2018). RRP parties such as the Rassemblement National (RN – National Rally) in France, the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP – Swiss People’s Party) in Switzerland and the Lega (League) in Italy portray themselves as champions of national values and defenders of national interests against supranational institutions, and they all emphasize the importance of the nation state in restoring popular sovereignty (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020). Similarly, in the United States, Donald

Trump's populism typically opposes global governance while advocating for the supremacy of national sovereignty in the interest of the American people (Campani et al. 2022; Gruszczynski and Lawrence 2019; Steger 2019).

In seeking to defend the state's sovereignty, populist sovereignism can be viewed as a response to globalization (e.g. Marin et al. 2020; Stamati 2020). Globalization is a multifaceted concept in the social and political sciences and serves as an umbrella term for a wide range of phenomena that may be regarded as both opportunities and threats (Rodrik 2011; Steger and James 2019). According to Manfred Steger (2013: 17), globalization refers to 'the multidimensional and uneven intensification of social [i.e. economic, political and cultural] relations and consciousness across world-time [i.e. history] and world-space [i.e. geography]'.

Globalization is widely considered an important driver of contemporary populism, owing to the economic shocks, social insecurity and inequalities shaped by global processes (Bajo-Rubio and Yan 2019; Milner 2021; Mughan et al. 2003). Economic globalization refers to economic interdependence, free trade, supranational integration, digital world economy and global economic governance, as well as competition between individuals, groups and countries. As discussed in the political science literature, the backlash against globalization takes many forms, and its recent relevance has been linked to party cues rather than a general shift in public opinion (e.g. Walter 2021). RRP parties in Europe are often presented in the literature as staunch opponents of globalization (Colantone and Stanig 2019; Kriesi et al. 2008; Rodrik 2018, 2021; Zaslove 2008). Such parties' populist sovereignist claims increasingly stem from socioeconomic grievances and issues such as welfare, redistribution and international trade. In the United States, Steger (2019) explicitly links Trump's populism to the anti-globalization discourse, pointing to an ideational reconfiguration of right-wing national populism that, in his view, reflects the growing significance of the concepts of globalization and globalism. Steger argues that *anti-globalist populism* should be seen as a pivotal evolution within the current manifestations of right-wing populism in the American context.

### A 'demand-side' approach

The starting point of this article is the relationship between sovereignism, populism and globalization. Despite growing interest among scholars, this relationship remains relatively under-researched and not yet fully understood. This article aims to bridge this research gap by examining how populism and sovereignism may be connected in the context of RRP politics and how they might resonate differently with the issues and grievances arising from globalization. While we acknowledge the multidimensional nature of contemporary challenges posed by populist sovereignism (e.g. political, cultural, institutional), we are primarily concerned with the economic dimension, which has received relatively little attention in the existing literature. In so doing, we draw on our previous work (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020) and use the concept of *economic populist sovereignism* as a specific mode of articulation between sovereignism and populism in relation to socioeconomic issues, and, in this paper, to economic globalization.

*Economic populism* refers to the idea that the 'true' people form an economic community that shares a common destiny and whose material well-being and

sovereignty are perceived as being in decline and/or at risk. In economic populism, the people are defined as a 'virtuous' community of hardworking 'makers', as opposed to 'corrupt' and essentially non-productive elites who are situated at the top of society and allegedly betray or ignore the well-being of the 'people'. By constructing an idealized or 'golden' period when economic well-being and sovereignty were predominant, and which needs to be restored, economic populism implicitly conveys a message of 'nostalgia of the old good times' (Betz and Johnson 2004). Therefore, the notion of 'taking back control' inherent in *economic sovereignism* is seen as the preferred means of re-establishing the people's well-being and 'true interests'. Supranational mechanisms and institutions associated with globalization play an important role in economic populist sovereignist claims, as they are perceived as significant factors in the decline of the people's economic prosperity. Thus, economic populist sovereignism can be defined as the claim to re-empower both the people and the 'nation state' as political subjects, safeguard the interests of the people and those of the nation against global threats, and attain economic prosperity through popular and national re-empowerment.

By adopting a 'demand-side' approach, we aim to examine how economic populism, sovereignism and attitudes towards globalization may be connected among the general public and how such attitudes may shape individual electoral support for RRP parties and leaders. Recent studies suggest that citizens harbour economic populist sovereignist attitudes and that these attitudes fuel individual support for RRP parties in Western Europe (Mazzoleni and Ivaldi 2022). In addition, there is substantial evidence in the literature that attitudes towards globalization play a role in shaping electoral preferences (Hellwig 2008; Mader et al. 2020).

If anti-globalist populism is the predominant reconfiguration of contemporary right-wing populism (as suggested by Steger, among others), it is reasonable to anticipate that this combination of economic populism, sovereignism and opposition to economic globalization would be reflected in citizens' attitudes. We expect that economic populism and economic sovereignism will consistently emerge as salient, coherent and correlated sets of attitudes among the public, and that these attitudes will be closely intertwined with perceptions of economic globalization.

Furthermore, we expect that these attitudes will serve as significant drivers of individual-level voting for RRP parties. Their effect, if any, should remain distinct from that of voter economic preferences in the domestic arena and should persist alongside well-established correlates of voting for such parties such as the perception of a cultural threat posed by immigration and concerns relating to law and order.

However, the relationship between populism, sovereignism and globalization may vary among different actors and within distinct contextual circumstances. At the party level, the expressions of populism and sovereignism do not necessarily imply opposition to globalization. In a recent book, Barrie Axford (2021) challenges the dominant interpretation of populism as primarily anti-globalist and emphasizes the diverse forms of globalization that populism contests. RRP parties and leaders may pursue different economic strategies at both the national and the supranational level, 'including economic protectionism and welfare chauvinism for instance, combined with market-liberal or more Keynesian demand-oriented domestic economic policies' (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020: 205). In the United States, Trump's populism

illustrates the prominent role played by market-driven economics alongside strong criticism of international economic governance (e.g. Campani et al. 2022; Wright 2019).

Citizens and voters can respond in different ways to the challenges posed by populism and sovereignism and the issues related to economic globalization. To explore this diversity, the analysis in this article uses original survey data to compare Western Europe with the United States. For decades, scholars have primarily focused on RRP politics in Western Europe (e.g. Betz 1994; Mudde 2007). However, recent literature on populism in the United States has urged the need for cross-national studies that would surpass traditional regional boundaries (Donovan and Redlawsk 2018; Heike et al. 2019; Inglehart and Norris 2017; Judis 2016). In particular, a growing body of research has identified similarities in the contemporary trends of right-wing populism across Europe and America (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Nagel 2019; Rahn 2019), thereby emphasizing the importance of conducting more ‘transatlantic’ comparative studies to address these commonalities (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Mudde 2022).

By comparing European countries with the United States, our data provide a unique opportunity to examine how the association between economic populism, economic sovereignism and globalization may vary across different contexts. Moreover, we can also expect some variation among European states. A recent paper by Jakub Wondreys and Cas Mudde (2022) reveals substantial internal heterogeneity within the current wave of far-right parties in Europe. The populist response to globalization can vary among populist actors, political systems and national economic legacies. In this article, we explore how globalization and the rise of transnational rules and institutions may shape public opinion and, more importantly, voter preferences for RRP parties and leaders across different contexts (Kayser 2007; Milner 2021; Rodrik 2018).

## Case selection

To address these questions, this article looks comparatively at four European countries (France, Germany, Italy and Switzerland) alongside the United States, due to the significant level of electoral support enjoyed by established RRP parties and leaders in these countries. The RN in France, the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD – Alternative for Germany) in Germany, the Lega and Fratelli d’Italia (FdI – Brothers of Italy) in Italy and the SVP in Switzerland are commonly referred to as ‘populist radical right’ parties (Mudde 2007; Wondreys and Mudde 2022). In the United States, Donald Trump’s interpretation of RRP shows strong similarities to the populist radical right in the European context (Mudde 2022).

Our selection of cases encompasses a varied mixture of different political, institutional, socioeconomic and cultural contexts, which enables a comparative analysis of economic populism, sovereignism and attitudes towards globalization. Globalization might be perceived differently in countries where economic prosperity has traditionally been closely linked to the welfare state, such as France, as opposed to countries where liberal free-trade policies have historically prevailed, like the United States (Gingrich and Ansell 2012; see also Loxbo 2022; Swank and Betz 2003). The United States holds a prominent position in the global

economy, exhibits less economic integration with supranational institutions and has a distinct welfare state tradition (Alesina and Glaeser 2004). In Europe, variations in EU membership may also influence patterns of resistance against supranational powers among voters. Germany, France and Italy are among Europe's largest national economies and are economically integrated within the European Union, while Switzerland offers a contrasting case as a country outside the EU.

Moreover, the selected cases exhibit distinct economic traditions and varying levels of state intervention and centralization, which may inform the manifestation of economic sovereigntism and globalization. Switzerland and Germany operate under federal systems, as opposed to the more unitary systems of government in Italy and France. The levels of centralization within these countries may be a significant factor in shaping how parties interpret their sovereigntism and how such issues resonate with voters in those countries.

Our populist actors also display variations in their principal socioeconomic orientations and positions vis-à-vis globalization (Otjes et al. 2018: 285). Certain parties, like the French RN, have embraced an explicit anti-globalization agenda, opposing international trade and calling for economic protectionist policies, while others actors, like the UK's Brexiters, have championed a free-trade agenda against what they perceive as the protectionist tendencies of the EU and its regulations restricting economic national sovereignty (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020). In the United States, Trump's socioeconomic policies encompassed a combination of traditional conservative policies and more distinctively left-leaning interventionist and anti-trade positions (Steger 2019).

Finally, we observe disparities in party competition. Countries such as France, Germany and Italy have notable radical left populist parties (e.g. La France Insoumise (LFI – France Unbowed) in France, Die Linke (The Left) in Germany, and the Movimento Cinque Stelle (M5S – Five Star Movement) in Italy) that can compete with their radical right counterparts on economic populism and sovereigntism (Damiani 2020). In the United States, the political history of populism demonstrates the existence of left-leaning economic populism closely linked to social inequalities and economic democracy (Grattan 2016; Warren 2020). As exemplified by Bernie Sanders's left-wing populism during his campaign for the 2016 Democratic nomination, anti-globalist assertions in America can be intertwined with other ideas, such as the impact of free trade on employment and the growing socioeconomic inequality, and may find their way into the political left (Abdelal 2020; Judis 2016: 78–87; Stauffer 2021). Overall, our selection of cases exemplifies how economic populism and sovereigntism can resonate differently across various contexts and actors while still allowing for the possibility of cross-national convergence and similarities.

## Data and methods

The analysis conducted in this article is essentially exploratory. We analyse data from an original survey administered in September 2020 in five countries: France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United States. The survey was conducted online by YouGov in France, Germany, Italy and the United States, while the Link Institute conducted it in Switzerland. The data consist of nationally

representative samples of voting-age citizens, with about 2,000 respondents from each country. Participants were selected from their national panels by the two polling companies recruited via the Internet, employing quota sampling based on gender, age, occupation and municipality size, along with regional stratification. To maintain data quality, respondents who had completed the questionnaire in less than half the median time (i.e. 'speeders') were excluded. Consequently, the final analytical samples consisted of 1,880, 1,914, 1,816, 1,841 and 2,451 respondents in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the United States, respectively.

Building on the core components identified above, we included a set of items specifically designed to measure economic populism and sovereigntism, as well as attitudes towards globalization (see details in Appendix A1 in the Supplementary Material).

Our economic sovereigntism items encompass the notion of reclaiming economic control at the national level and the importance of securing the country's well-being by closing economic borders. Taking economic prosperity as a core feature, the final item specifically addresses social justice, thus including a component of socioeconomic egalitarianism. Our economic populism items capture the nostalgia-tinged perception of the country's past economic prosperity, the antagonism between the people and the elite, and the need for the people to have a say in economic decision-making. Finally, the perception of globalization is operationalized with four different items that focus on global economic interdependence, opportunities and threats, as well as the perception of the impact of international trade on job creation within the country. The precise wording of these survey items can be found in Appendix A1. Respondents provided their responses using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 'Strongly disagree' to 7 'Strongly agree'.

We begin by running an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to investigate the correlations between our items and examine the underlying structure of our data. To carry out this analysis, we pool the data from the five countries and perform a preliminary parallel analysis to determine the appropriate number of factors to retain from the EFA in order to have an accurate representation of the data. Next, by drawing on recent studies of populist attitudes (Castanho et al. 2020), we employ a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to assess the fit of the model derived from the EFA. Based on the factor structure confirmed by CFA, we then construct Mokken (1971) attitudinal scales and estimate Item Response Theory (IRT) scores by using a graded response model (GRM) for polytomous items. Unlike Likert scales, IRT analysis makes it possible to test important scale properties such as unidimensionality, local independence of items and monotonicity (Chalmers 2012). The IRT scores serve as our main independent variables to examine the relationship between economic populist, sovereigntist and anti-globalization attitudes, and RRP voting preferences across our samples from Western Europe and the United States. In this final step, we perform a multivariate analysis to explore how populist, sovereigntist and globalization attitudes may shape individual support for RRP, while also considering well-established predictors of voting for such parties, such as the perceived cultural threat of immigration and concerns about law and order. We also control for attitudes towards economic redistribution.



## Results

The descriptive statistics for all items in our five countries are presented in Appendix A2 in the Supplementary Material. The data reveal that economic populist views are more widespread in France, Italy and the United States – as indicated by higher means on the economic populist items – than in Germany and Switzerland. By contrast, differences in economic sovereignism across nations are less pronounced: citizens in France, Italy and the United States are only more sovereignist on the item concerning the need for the country to regain control over its economic destiny, while fewer differences are observed across the other sovereignist items. Finally, France stands out from the other countries in terms of views on economic globalization. French citizens demonstrate more negative perceptions of the socioeconomic impact of globalization. This finding aligns with the traditional view of economic globalization as a threat to the country's post-war model of welfare state, rather than being viewed as an opportunity for growth and job creation (Meunier 2003).

### ***Economic populist sovereignism as a set of attitudes and the perception of economic globalization***

Regarding the exploratory factor analysis of the pooled data, the preliminary parallel analysis indicates that three factors should be retained. The factor solution obtained from the EFA confirms three main underlying factors with eigenvalues exceeding 1. These factors account for 20%, 14% and 11% of the total variance, respectively, amounting to a total of 45% of explained variance (refer to Appendix A3 in the Supplementary Material for complete details). The root mean square of residuals (RMSR) is 0.02, which is an acceptable value. In addition, the RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) index is 0.05, which suggests a reasonably good fit for the model (as a general guideline, an RMSEA value below 0.05 indicates a good fit). Table 1 provides a summary of the factor loadings for the pooled data. For the sake of clarity, we only show loadings above the conventional threshold of 0.3.

The exploratory factor analysis indicates that the five items pertaining to economic populism form a consistently salient and coherent set of attitudes among citizens. The first factor exhibits high positive loadings, representing a set of economic populist attitudes. Individuals who believe the country has experienced economic decline, perceive politicians as ignoring both the people's interests and living standards, and feel that these politicians care too little about hardworking people also tend to support the notion that citizens should have more of a say in economic decisions. Factor 2 identifies a set of positive attitudes towards economic globalization, which is perceived as a driver for economic growth and job creation. Respondents holding these attitudes support the idea of collaborating with other countries to ensure their own country's economic prosperity. Finally, factor 3 reveals positive correlations among items related to the belief that the country should reclaim its economic destiny, close its economic borders and prioritize national sovereignty to ensure social justice. These correlations exemplify the core features of economic sovereignism.

Contrary to our expectations, however, the item concerning the perception of globalization as increasing economic inequalities has small positive loadings

**Table 1.** Exploratory Factor Analysis of Economic Populist Sovereignist and Anti-Globalization Items in Europe and the United States – Factor Loadings

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
The overall economic well-being of this country has declined compared to the past	0.587		
Today in our country, many economic decisions are made without considering the interests of the people	0.771		
In this country, one does not really care about people who work hard	0.582		
In our country, politicians don't really care about the people's living standard	0.770		
Citizens should have more say in the economic decisions of our country	0.513		
To ensure economic prosperity, our country should work more together with other countries		0.648	
Globalization is an opportunity for economic growth in our country		0.714	
International trade leads to jobs creation in our country		0.691	
Our country must regain control of its economic destiny			0.491
To guarantee its well-being, our country should be able to close its economic borders			0.565
We must strengthen our national sovereignty to ensure more social justice			0.711
Globalization increases inequalities in our country	0.239	-0.293	0.250

Note: EFA, oblimin rotation, pooled data for five countries,  $n = 6,913$ .

(below 0.3) on all three factors. These cross-loadings indicate a weak correlation between this particular item and the other items in the factor solution. Therefore, we exclude it from subsequent analysis. It is worth noting that a similar EFA conducted for each individual country confirms the factor structure observed in the pooled dataset (see Appendix A4 in the Supplementary Material for more details).

Next, we turn to CFA to assess the validity of the three-factor model derived from the exploratory factor analysis (see details in Appendix A5 in the Supplementary Material). We use multiple group confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFA) with a diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) model designed for ordinal data, taking 'country' as the grouping variable. We allow the covariance between all three latent variables to be free in order to take into account the correlations observed between the factors from the preliminary EFA. The CFA fit statistics confirm that the data are consistent with the hypothesized three-factor structure. The RMSEA is 0.06, which indicates a reasonable error of approximation. As a general guideline, an  $RMSEA \leq 0.05$  suggests a close approximate fit, while values between 0.05 and 0.08 indicate a reasonable error of approximation, which is considered acceptable, while an  $RMSEA \geq 0.10$  indicates a poor fit

(Kline 2005: 139). The RMSR is 0.05, the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) is 0.95 and the comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.96. Both the TLI and CFI values meet or exceed the recommended cut-off of 0.95. Since we are primarily interested in correlations rather than levels, the model assumes only configural invariance (i.e. a similar factor structure) across all countries.

Parameter estimates provide support for the convergent validity of the three-factor solution. All items demonstrate significant loadings on the factor, with most standardized factor loadings exceeding 0.5 and all reaching statistical significance at the alpha level of 0.05. In the European cases, the covariances confirm a strong positive correlation between factor 1 (economic populism) and factor 3 (economic sovereigntism) in France (0.77), Italy (0.83), Germany (0.80) and Switzerland (0.70). The CFA also confirms that economic populist and sovereigntist attitudes exhibit a negative, albeit more moderately correlated, association with positive views of economic globalization, with covariances ranging from about  $-0.2$  to  $-0.3$  across the four European countries. Appendix A5 contains all details and path diagrams illustrating the standardized results obtained from the CFA.

These findings for the European cases align with previous studies that have identified a correlation between economic populism and sovereigntism among both parties and voters in Western Europe (Ivaldi and Mazzoleni 2020; Mazzoleni and Ivaldi 2022). Our findings further enhance our understanding of this link by corroborating that, in the context of Western Europe, such attitudes may be somewhat connected with negative perceptions of economic globalization.

However, the CFA suggests a distinct contextual fit for the United States, with lower average factor loadings on the third factor relating to economic sovereigntist attitudes and, more importantly, different covariances between the three factors. In contrast to the European countries, the American case reveals a positive correlation between economic populist attitudes (factor 1) and positive views of economic globalization (factor 2, covariance = 0.5). We find a weak negative correlation between economic populism (factor 1) and economic sovereigntism (factor 3, covariance =  $-0.17$ ). The American sample diverges significantly from the European countries in terms of the covariances among the three dimensions considered for the analysis, which suggests a distinct local pattern of populist and sovereigntist attitudes among the American public. These disparities will be addressed below.

### **RRP electoral support**

The final set of questions in this article concern how economic populist and sovereigntist attitudes, in conjunction with views of globalization, may shape individual electoral support for RRP parties and leaders. Using the CFA factors, we test three distinct Mokken scales: economic populism (EcoPop), economic sovereigntism (EcoSov) and positive views of globalization (Global). These scales serve as our main independent variables in the pooled dataset (see Appendix A6 in the Supplementary Material for more details). In the pooled data, the coefficients of homogeneity for all three scales exceed the 0.4 threshold, which indicates ‘moderate’ Mokken scales and a sufficient level of homogeneity. Furthermore, all three scales satisfy the classic IRT assumptions of unidimensionality, local independence of items and monotonicity (refer to the summary table of scale properties in

Appendix A6). We calculate an IRT score for each scale by using a GRM for polytomous items (see Appendix A7 in the Supplementary Material for specifics). The resulting scales for economic populism (EcoPop), positive views of globalization (Global) and economic sovereigntism (EcoSov) have a mean equal to 0 and range from  $-3$  to  $1.6$ ,  $-2.3$  to  $1.8$ , and  $-2.3$  to  $1.6$ , respectively.

We use these as our main independent variables to examine the relationship between economic populist, sovereigntist and globalization attitudes on the one hand, and RRP voting preferences on the other hand. Considering the different covariance structures observed in the CFA, we conduct two separate analyses for Western Europe and the United States.

Beginning with the four European cases and in line with previous research, we expect economic populist, sovereigntist and globalization attitudes to be significant drivers of RRP voting across European countries. We anticipate that these effects will be visible alongside well-established correlates of the RRP vote, including the perception of a cultural threat posed by immigration, as well as attitudes to law and order. Importantly, these effects should also be independent of voter economic preferences within the domestic realm, which we assess by measuring attitudes towards economic redistribution (see Table 2 for a description of the attitudinal correlates used in this analysis).

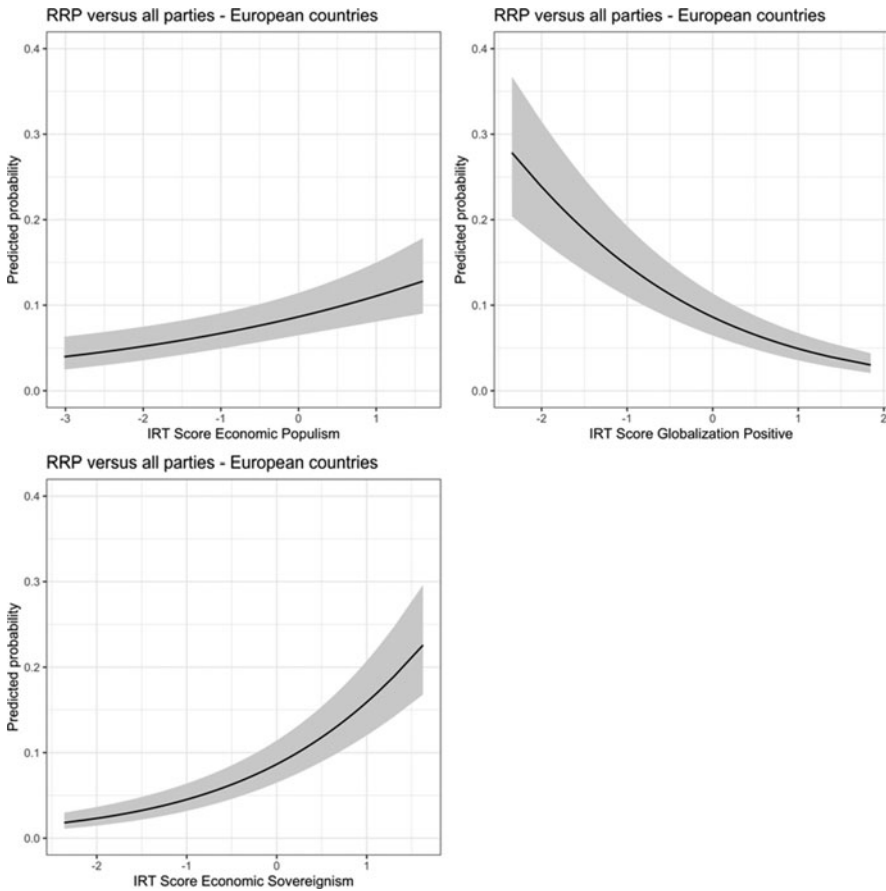
To start, we run a binary logistic regression analysis that compares RRP voters with all other voters in the pooled European dataset (see Model 1 in Appendix A8 in the Supplementary Material). We specify country-fixed effects to account for unobserved country variance. RRP voters are selected based on their responses to a voting intention question: RN in France ( $n = 234$  voters against 696 for other parties), AfD in Germany ( $n = 135/970$ ), Lega and FdI in Italy ( $n = 427/633$ ) and the SVP in Switzerland ( $n = 258/655$ ). Non-responses and abstainers are excluded from the model. We use the IRT scores of economic populism (EcoPop), economic sovereigntism (EcoSov) and pro-globalization (Global) attitudes as our main independent variables. We control for three standard sociodemographic variables (gender, age, education), along with attitudes towards immigration, law and order, and redistribution (see Model 1 in Appendix A8).

The results confirm that economic populist, sovereigntist and anti-globalization attitudes exert a significant and positive effect on voting for RRP parties in European countries. This holds even after controlling for voters' sociological profile, economic preferences and typical sociocultural attitudes associated with voting for such parties. The effect of economic populist, economic sovereigntist and

**Table 2.** Attitudinal Correlates Used for the Analysis of Radical Right-Wing Populist Voting

Attitude	Item <sup>a</sup>
Cultural threat of immigration	[Country]'s cultural life is enriched by people coming to live here from other countries (reversed item)
Economic redistribution	To reduce inequality, one should take from the rich to give to the poor
Law and order	What our country really needs instead of more 'civil rights' is a good stiff dose of law and order

Note: <sup>a</sup>All three items are seven-point Likert scales ranging from 1 'Strongly disagree' to 7 'Strongly agree'.



**Figure 1.** Predicted Probabilities of Radical Right-Wing Populist Voting in Western Europe  
 Note: Predicted probabilities from Model 1 in Appendix A8.

globalization attitudes is both significant and substantial (see predicted probabilities in Figure 1). The average marginal effects (AMEs) show that a one-unit increase on the IRT scale of economic sovereignty (EcoSov) results in an increase of about 8% in the predicted probability of supporting the selected European RRP parties. Conversely, the comparable AME shows a decrease of about 7% for positive views of globalization (Global). Though still significant, the effect is smaller for the economic populism (EcoPop) scale, with an AME of 3%. It is worth noting that the model also confirms the well-established effect of attitudes towards immigration and law and order, showing a positive and substantial effect on the likelihood of supporting RRP parties in our European countries, while pro-redistribution attitudes tend to decrease the probability of turning to such parties.

Running a similar model for each of our four countries individually, our analysis confirms that economic populist, sovereignist and anti-globalization attitudes have

**Table 3.** Summary Table of Average Marginal Effects (AMEs) for Economic Populist, Sovereignist and Globalization Attitudes across France, Italy, Germany and Switzerland (%)

Country	EcoPop	Global	EcoSov
France	7***	-7***	3*
Italy	3*	-9***	13***
Germany	4***	-5***	5***
Switzerland	n.s.	-7***	11***

Note: AMEs calculated from binary logistic regressions of RRP voting contrasted with all other parties, including sociodemographic and attitudinal controls. For clarity we only show our three variables of interest. See details of all models for individual European countries in Appendix A8. \*  $p < 0.1$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ .

a significant impact on voting for RRP parties, albeit with some national variation (refer to all the models in Appendix A8). Table 3 provides a summary of the AMEs calculated for our main variables of interest across each of the four European cases. In Italy and Switzerland, the effect of economic populism is relatively weaker, while larger AMEs are observed for economic sovereignism in these two countries, reaching 13% and 11%, respectively. In Italy and Switzerland, the smaller effect for the economic populism variable may reflect the national political standing of the RRP parties: Both the SVP and Lega are or have recently been in government, which may account for the lower levels of economic populism among their respective electorates.

These findings indicate that economic populist and sovereignist attitudes are positively associated with the populist radical right, even in contexts characterized by the presence of a relevant radical-left populist party, such as LFI in France, Die Linke in Germany, and the M5S in Italy. To explore such populist competition further, we conducted a similar binary logistic regression analysis, this time contrasting radical left-wing populist voters with all other voters in the aforementioned countries. We used the same specifications and predictors as before (see Model 3 in Appendix A9 in the Supplementary Material for more details). Radical-left populist voters were selected as follows: LFI in France ( $n = 76$  voters against 854 for other parties), Die Linke in Germany ( $n = 100/1,005$ ) and the M5S in Italy ( $n = 182/878$ ).

The analysis shows that economic populist and anti-globalization attitudes have a significant but weaker effect on voting for radical left-wing populist parties in France, Germany and Italy, controlling for voters' sociological profile, economic preferences and sociocultural attitudes. The average marginal effect of the economic populism scale on voting for the populist radical left amounts to 2%, compared with 3% for the populist radical right. Positive attitudes towards globalization lead to a mere 2% average decrease in the probability of voting for radical left-wing populists, compared with 7% for RRP voters. Most notably, we find no statistically significant effect of economic sovereignist attitudes on support for the populist radical left ( $p = 0.65$ ). These results confirm that economic sovereignism may be primarily associated with radical right-wing populism in Europe and suggest that the issues and grievances associated with globalization resonate more strongly with RRP voters than with their left-wing counterparts in countries where both instances of populism coexist.

### ***Between Western Europe and the United States***

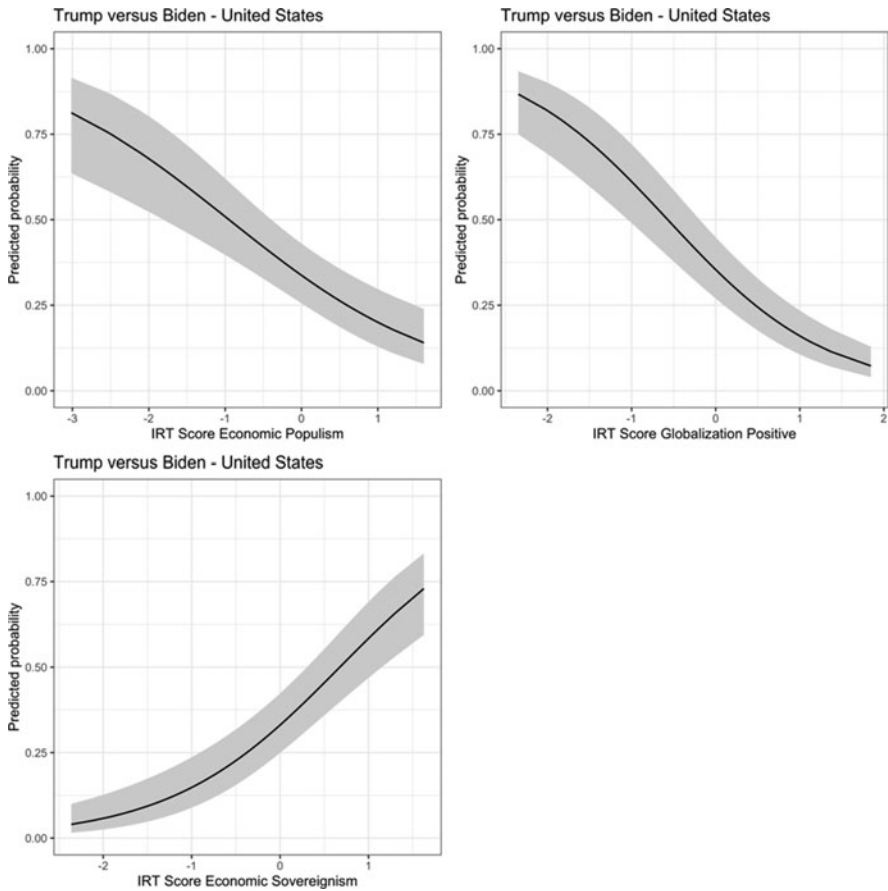
Turning to the American sample, we ran a binary logistic regression analysis to compare Trump voters with Biden voters, considering the former as our case of RRP in the United States ( $n = 594$  Trump voters against 780 for Biden). Voters were selected based on their intention to vote in the 2020 presidential election, which featured the two main contenders (Joe Biden and Donald Trump) along with other Democratic and Republican candidates, as well as abstentions. However, owing to the small number of respondents who declared they would vote for other Democratic and Republican candidates, we focus on the Biden versus Trump horseshoe, excluding other candidates, abstainers and non-responses. Similar to the European cases, our main independent variables are the IRT scores of the three scales: economic populism (EcoPop), globalization positive (Global) and economic sovereigntism (EcoSov). We once again control for standard sociodemographic variables (gender, age and education), as well as cultural immigration, law and order, and redistribution attitudes (see Appendix A8 for details of Model 2).

Before delving into our variables of interest, it is worth noting that the regression coefficients confirm the effect of immigration and law-and-order attitudes on the likelihood of supporting Trump in the United States: voters who view immigration as enriching America's culture are much less likely to favour the former Republican president. Conversely, individuals who prioritize law and order demonstrate a much higher probability of choosing Trump over Biden. Unsurprisingly, we find that voters who support economic redistribution are more likely to favour the Democratic candidate. All effects are statistically significant and substantial.

When examining our main variables, we see a different articulation of globalization attitudes, populism and sovereigntism in the American case (see Figure 2). Similar to Europe, positive views of globalization have a significant and negative effect on voting for Trump in the United States. In addition, we find a statistically significant positive effect for economic sovereigntist attitudes, which aligns with the observed trend in Europe. Calculating the average marginal effects for these two predictors within the logistic model reveals a substantial decrease of about 8% for the pro-globalization scale, and a similar increase in the economic sovereigntism dimension with a one-unit increase on each of the two scales. However, in a noteworthy departure from the European cases, we find a significantly negative effect of economic populism on the inclination to support Trump in a hypothetical US presidential election. Here, the AME shows a decrease of about 6% in the probability of favouring the former Republican president, with a one-unit increase on the economic populism scale. This suggests that economic populist attitudes in the United States may be more closely aligned with the political left and, in this specific instance, with voting for Biden over Trump.

### **Conclusion**

Sovereigntism is primarily centred on the concept of 'taking back control'. As Aristotle Kallis (2018: 286–287) argues, the notion of 'regaining control' on behalf of a 'redefined' community by 're-spatializing' power is central to sovereigntism. Although it may take different guises across the political spectrum, sovereigntism



**Figure 2.** Predicted Probabilities of Voting for Trump in the United States  
 Note: Predicted probabilities from Model 2 in Appendix A8.

has been identified in recent studies as an important feature of RRP parties and leaders. These political actors typically advocate for ‘taking back control’ in the name of the ‘people’ by positioning themselves against the political establishment and supranational institutions. These claims often encompass various cultural and political issues, but they are increasingly associated with socioeconomic grievances, including welfare, redistribution and international trade. The aim is to restore the people’s economic prosperity and the country’s overall greatness, as exemplified by Donald Trump’s pledge to ‘Make America Great Again’.

Drawing from the growing literature related to the party supply of populism and sovereignty in contemporary Western democracies, this article has adopted a demand-side perspective to further explore the intersection between economic populism, economic sovereignty and economic globalization in RRP politics. The study sought to answer questions regarding how populism and sovereignty interact to shape mobilization by these political actors and how this interaction



may vary across different contexts and within the framework of diverse opportunities and constraints presented by economic globalization.

While primarily exploratory, these findings contribute to the existing literature on the alignment of RRP politics with issues and grievances arising from globalization and internationalization (Kriesi et al. 2008; Rodrik 2021). Moreover, they have important implications for our general understanding of the populist phenomenon. First, they reinforce the significance of the tandem of populism and sovereignism, emphasizing their complex modes of articulation and their potential convergence within the contemporary wave of RRP movements. Our findings align with recent research highlighting the close connection between economic populism and sovereignism in Western Europe (Mazzoleni and Ivaldi 2022).

Second, this article introduced a set of items specifically designed to measure economic populist, sovereignist and globalization attitudes, and to explore their relationship. Our results show that economic populism and sovereignism, together with perceptions of globalization, form coherent sets of attitudes that have a significant effect on individual electoral support for RRP parties, albeit with some variation among nations. This suggests that these parties may mobilize beyond their traditional focus on cultural issues (e.g. immigration) and that their sovereignist response to the socioeconomic grievances and anxieties associated with globalization may increasingly resonate with Western electorates, thereby shaping voter preferences. Moreover, the analysis in this article underlines distinct configurations of economic populist, sovereignist and globalization attitudes across our countries of interest. In Europe, our findings generally support the association between economic populism, sovereignism, negative views of globalization and electoral support for RRP parties. Economically populist voters are more likely to align with parties such as the RN, AfD, Lega, FdI and SVP, and this effect is more pronounced in France and Germany. Notably, the impact of economic populist attitudes is weaker in Switzerland and Italy, possibly reflecting the status of the SVP and Lega as governing parties.

Third, the adoption of a comparative perspective in this article enabled us to identify important areas of commonality and diversity both within our European cases and between those cases and the United States. These findings contribute to our understanding of the 'global' populist phenomenon and add to existing scholarship on the transatlantic convergence in right-wing populism (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Mudde 2022). Specifically, this article reveals that economic sovereignist and anti-globalization attitudes are significant factors driving individual support for RRP parties and leaders on both sides of the Atlantic, alongside traditional predictors of voting for those parties, such as the cultural threat of immigration and law and order, and independently from voters' socioeconomic preferences. These results emphasize a major area of convergence between Western Europe and the United States in terms of right-wing populism, despite their divergent economic legacies and traditions (e.g. Heike et al. 2019).

However, the analysis also reveals a distinct pattern of economic populism concerning support for Donald Trump in the United States: unlike in Europe, economic populist attitudes among the American public are correlated with positive views of economic globalization. Surprisingly, these attitudes are negatively correlated with voting for Trump, thus only partially supporting the suggestion made

by Steger (2019) regarding Trump's distinctive anti-globalist populist reconfiguration at the voter level. By contrast, the observed pattern of attitudes in the United States underscores the relevance of a left-wing manifestation of economic populism, closely tied to concerns about social inequality and economic democracy (Barker and DeTamble 2022; Judis 2016; Warren 2020). In this regard, Dani Rodrik (2021: 167) mentions the attitudes of progressive populism in late 19th-century America, which supported free trade 'because they believed protection helped the country's elites and hurt ordinary people'. A recent empirical analysis of economic populist attitudes in the United States further suggests that these dispositions align with 'liberal' or 'progressive' stances, indicating that economic populism may have gained traction within the American left (Barker and DeTamble 2022).

A brief examination of this link between economic populist, sovereignist and globalization attitudes and the populist radical left in our three European countries where such parties are found (i.e. France, Germany and Italy) supports the finding that economic populist and anti-globalization attitudes have a significant but relatively weaker effect on voting for radical left-wing populist parties such as LFI in France, Die Linke in Germany and the M5S in Italy. Importantly, there is no statistically significant effect of economic sovereignist attitudes on support for the populist radical left. This suggests that economic sovereignism may be primarily associated with the populist radical right in Europe, and that this association holds even in contexts where relevant radical-left populist parties are present.

Overall, our study indicates that the relationship between populism, sovereignism and economic globalization may be less straightforward than commonly argued in existing comparative literature. In light of the preliminary findings of this study, more research is needed to delve deeper into the relationship between populism, sovereignism and economic globalization across various locations in the party system, considering different national traditions and legacies beyond the cases examined in this article.

**Supplementary material.** The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2023.28>.

**Acknowledgements.** Previous versions of this article have been presented at the international Workshop 'Sovereignism as a Global Phenomenon? A Comparative Perspective between Europe and the Americas', TU Dresden, March 2022, and at the ECPR Joint Sessions, April 2022. We are grateful to Nicolò Conti, Marianne Kneuer and the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments and suggestions.

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