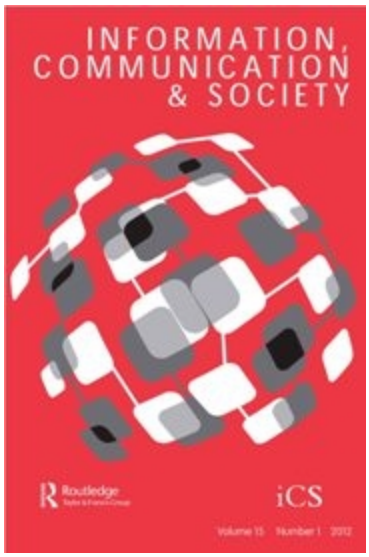
Are digital platforms potential drivers of the populist vote? A comparative analysis of France, Germany and Italy



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Abstract

Populist parties are often argued to be very skilled in using digital media to attract supporters and strengthen linkages with their followers. However, only rarely has research shown this linkage empirically. This study explores whether arguments about the relation between digital platforms and populist voting can be substantiated using comparative survey data in France, Germany and Italy. Digital media include a variety of online platforms that can affect populist vote in different ways. This article addresses the relation between the *political use* of digital platforms and the populist vote. First, it looks at how the use of Social Networking Sites (SNS) and Mobile Instant Messaging Services (MIMS) is related to voting for populist parties. Second, it assesses whether the role of digital platforms is different for supporting digital 'immigrant' and digital 'native' populist parties. Third, it explores country differences in the relation between SNS and MIMS' use and the populist vote. Using original online surveys, the article shows that political activities on SNS and MIMS platforms (sending messages or posting, discussing or convincing others to vote for a candidate) increase the probability of voting for populist parties. However, it also finds that the political use of digital media is associated with the populist vote under certain (and limited) circumstances, that is only for a subset of populist parties. Finally, it identifies important differences in how SNS and MIMS are linked to the populist vote in countries presenting diverse institutional features, web regulations and constellations of media systems.

Keywords: Populist vote, Social Networking Sites (SNS), Mobile Instant Messaging Services (MIMS), digital 'native' populist parties, online surveys.

Introduction

Digital media have been said to greatly contribute to the emergence and success of the populist parties shaking the European party systems (Kriesi, 2014). Online platforms have often been considered natural allies of outsider parties challenging traditional parties and the mainstream media, which they accuse of being spokespersons for the establishment (Bennett & Pfetsch, 2018; Jungherr, Schroeder & Stier, 2019). Indeed, most populist parties appear very skilled at using digital media to attract supporters and strengthen linkages with their followers.

Despite the enduring relevance of the legacy media, in the hybrid media system an important slice of citizens' knowledge of political affairs comes from digital media. Online opportunities for populist actors are, however, not a property of the web as a whole, but they change according to contextual characteristics (Jungherr et al., 2019) as well as the diffusion, use and affordances of different online platforms. Therefore, we posit that diverse online media outlets provide different opportunities for political actors to spread their messages, affecting citizens' likelihood of voting for populist parties, and we analyse this link in France, Germany and Italy. In this article we distinguish between Social Networking Sites (SNS) and Mobile Instant Messaging Services (MIMS). While the relation between the former and populist actors has become an important topic of discussion in the scientific debate, the role of MIMS in political communication has seldom been addressed (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018). Furthermore, a systematic comparison of the association between the political use of SNS and MIMS and the vote for populist parties with varying characteristics in different countries is lacking.

We believe this gap in the literature should be addressed for several reasons. First, the increasing strength of populist parties can be related to recent changes affecting media systems. Digital media allow these actors to establish a direct link with people who often feel marginalized by traditional media (Gerbaudo, 2018). However, only rarely has research shown this linkage empirically. Therefore, this study explores whether often-made statements about the link between digital media – in our case, the political use of SNS and MIMS – and populist voting can be substantiated using comparative survey data. We follow the literature which argues that digital media favour populist parties and their support to demonstrate whether its claims hold. Second, existing research has focused on the internet and SNS without seriously envisioning different affordances of diverse platforms. MIMS tend to work as hybrids between mass and interpersonal communication channels, allowing users greater intimacy, like-mindedness and expression of emotions than SNS. Therefore, it might be possible that the two means work differently in relation to the populist vote. Third, in generically linking the populist vote and digital platforms, differences between parties we label 'digital natives' vs. 'digital immigrants' have not been considered. Indeed, the former might be

more attentive to digital media than the latter in their use of them for political campaigning. Fourth, such differences have not been systematically assessed in a comparative perspective but generally using single case-studies. In contrast, our study aims to explore these relationships in three European countries – France, Germany and Italy – which present different institutional features, web regulations and constellations of media systems, by means of original post-electoral online surveys.

Our findings show that the political use of digital platforms is associated with the populist vote. There are, however, some important nuances to take into consideration. First, the political use of SNS and MIMS seems to affect the populist vote differently, a finding that is supported by somewhat counterintuitive evidence. Second, 'newer' populist parties that have originated in the last decade effectively benefit from digital platforms while 'older' ones do not, and this might suggest that the 'digital' nature of such parties could be a crucial feature for their attractiveness of voters who use more the internet for political information and participation. Third, the strength of this relation varies across countries, with Italy displaying a greater association, Germany a lesser one and France resulting between these two countries. Therefore, the arguments about the affinity between digital media and populist support seems to hold empirically only for specific cases, at least according to our data.

Theoretical framework

The literature has shown that activity on SNS and MIMS can stimulate offline political participation (Boulianne, 2015). These platforms are argued to ease the collection of political information from several sources – from family or friends to mainstream or alternative media sources – which might in turn be used for political mobilization (Gil de Zúñiga, Jung & Valenzuela, 2012). In particular, the political use of the internet is argued to have a positive effect on participation because it represents an interactive way of communicating, which in turn produces a feeling of accessibility to politics (Kruikemeier, van Noort, Vliegenthart & de Vreese, 2014).

Digital platforms and the populist vote

The concept of populism, although contested, revolves around the contrast between the 'pure' people, who should hold sovereignty, and the 'corrupt' elite, which do not act in the interest of the former group (Mudde, 2004). Another conceptualization of populism sees it more as a 'communication style' (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) which leaders use to connect with the people without intermediaries and spread their messages (Gerbaudo, 2018). Therefore, it is worth exploring whether digital platforms, such as SNS and MIMS, provide opportunities for populist parties' communication and attract voters.

We argue that populist parties have an advantage in the online environment vis-à-vis traditional political parties. Digital media allow populist actors to avoid traditional gatekeepers (i.e. journalists), establish direct connections with the people and keep an antagonistic stance with the mainstream parties and media (Kriesi, 2014; Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel, 2017). Moreover, the interactive features of the web generate new chances for users to be involved in decision-making, as it is an environment echoing the direct democracy claims which are often at the core of populist discourse (Mudde, 2004). Eventually, digital platforms vehiculate anti-elitist content that is often unverified or false which tends to favour populist leaders (Guess, Nyhan & Reifler, 2018).

In sum, according to Gerbaudo (2018) there is an 'elective affinity' between online platforms and populism. In fact, they are seen to give representation to the voiceless who are marginalized by mainstream media. Moreover, they allow the creation of groups of like-minded disaffected individuals that can be mobilized against the 'enemies of the people.' Both these features are particularly resounding with populist actors, who tend to deplore the mainstream media as the voice of the establishment and far from the concerns of common people. Specularly, it should be underlined that the features of digital media tend not to advantage the mainstream parties, as they prefer to establish good relationship with mainstream media, do not contest them, and tend to rely on 'facts' in their communication, avoiding spreading information on social media which may hinder their reputation (Schaub & Morisi, 2019).

With the rise of the internet, research has devoted much attention on the relationship between the use of digital tools and political behaviour and attitudes (Zhuravskaya, Petrova & Enikolopov, 2020), and also populism, although to a much lesser extent (Heiss & Matthes, 2017). Most of the available literature linking social media use and populist voting applies a 'supply-side' approach to explaining why the former could affect the latter. The general argument is that the internet and/or social media platforms facilitate the spreading of the messages of populist parties and leaders and that using them or being active on them exposes individuals to such messages (Zhuravskaya et al., 2020), which might, in turn, increase the likelihood of voting for these actors. A study by Groshek and Koc-Michalska (2017) argues that social media use – in particular active use (as posting, sharing, campaigning, forwarding content) in contrast to passive use (as receiving information) – may be linked to an increasing support for populist candidates. The study demonstrates that using Facebook and Twitter was related to an increased likelihood of supporting populist presidential candidates in the 2016 American primary elections. Focusing on the 2016 Trump campaign, Baldwin-Philippi (2019) proves the ability of populists to centre 'the people' through various digital platforms and strategies. Cremonesi and colleagues (2019) show that social media use is positively associated with populist attitudes in Italy.

Only few studies have instead looked into the 'demand-side', that concerns the reasons why voters use platforms and how such use might be driven by partisanship. Regarding the first aspect, studies have shown that individuals with populist attitudes tend to use more frequently information coming from the internet (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos & Kleis Nielsen, 2019; Schulz, 2019), trust less quality media and more commercial or tabloid media (Pew Research, 2018) and also selectively avoid the websites of legacy press media when surfing the internet (Stier, Kirkizh, Froio & Schroeder, 2020). Despite a clear gap in the literature, the linkage between populist attitudes and trust in different media outlets (Fawzi, 2019) provides important indications concerning the relationship between the former and social media platforms. Since platforms are privately owned and driven by profit-seeking goals, they share important characteristics with commercial media. Accordingly, citizens with a populist worldview may be more prone to use them compared with non-populist citizens as they perceive these platforms as weapons in the hands of 'the good people' against 'the corrupt elite.'

In-between the two approaches, Hameleers (2018) claimed that what he calls 'populist mass-self communication' manifests itself at the intersections of the supply-side and the demand-side, since on social media platforms 'all actors can simultaneously and interchangeably take on the role of a sender and receiver of populist ideas' (p. 2178). This makes particularly complicate to clarify the causal order of the relationship between digital information and voting choices. However, recent research has tackled the issue of the direction of such an association, providing robust evidence that digital media use affects populist attitudes or voting, and not the other way around. Schumann and colleagues (2019) show that more frequent use of social media increases the likelihood of voting for populist radical right parties in Germany, showing that there is no evidence of reverse causation. Dealing with a similar problem, Schaub and Morisi (2019) address the issue of causality in the relationship between internet use and populist voting in Italy and Germany, and provide compelling evidence that the former affect the latter, and not the opposite.

Different platforms and the populist vote

Previous research on the opportunities provided by digital media for populist communication does not usually distinguish between different platforms. The extant research generally looks at internet or social media use in general, without considering other digital platforms when studying populist voting. In contrast, we consider the affordances respectively provided by SNS and MIMS in populist communication. Because of the impossibility of summarizing a lengthy and ongoing debate, we rely on the following definition of *affordance*: 'what various platforms are actually capable of doing and perceptions of what they enable, along with the actual practices that emerge as people

interact with platforms' (Kreiss, Lawrence & McGregor, 2018, p. 19).

As already mentioned, SNS have been found to be ideal platforms for personalized communication connecting leaders with followers, and there is growing evidence on their link with populist attitudes or support. However, while SNS have rapidly become one of the interests of media studies, consideration of MIMS and their potential contribution to political communication has been limited, at least in western European countries. MIMS are in fact one of the main tools for political propaganda in the Global South (i.e. Africa, Latin America, South-East Asia), where mobile phones can be the only available devices to access the internet (Balbi & Magaudda, 2018). Nonetheless, as we will discuss below, some interesting aspects of MIMS may help explain their political use in Western countries too, especially that by populist actors.

When comparing SNS and MIMS, it should be noticed that while the latter have been developed for, and are mostly used on, mobile devices (but desktop versions are also available), the former tend to be accessed from different types of hardware. Building on Bossetta's taxonomy (2018), we compare SNS and MIMS in Table 1. *Searchability* refers to the opportunities afforded by a platform to single out new accounts and access their contents. Unlike SNS, where politicians can easily create public pages that can be liked or followed by users, this feature can only be found on some MIMS (i.e. Messenger and Telegram) but not on WhatsApp, where new contacts cannot be searched for and added within the platform. *Filtering* governs how content is displayed to users and how the latter interact with the platform's features. While contents sorted on SNS tend to be filtered, MIMS just displays content chronologically. *Reach* describes the visibility of a post across the stream of contents on SNS. Whilst non-paid Facebook posts only reach a tiny minority of users, MIMS messages are always directly delivered to the addressee. Whereas *targeting* allows focusing on audiences that can be persuaded or mobilized, *analytics* permits monitoring and extracting data, which are used to modify campaigning in real time. Encryption seriously limits datafication in the case of WhatsApp, while secure communication is not set by default in Telegram and Messenger but can be enabled by the user. Consequently, SNS and MIMS can be located at the two extremes of a continuum since most of the above-mentioned characteristics are particularly advanced on the former while they may only be present in a rudimentary way on the latter.

Table 1 about here

Undoubtedly, the features of SNS make them formidable tools for political campaigning. Apparently, the basic qualities of MIMS make them more suitable for interpersonal communication. However, some specific qualities of MIMS may make them interesting platforms for political

communication, too. Comparing four different platforms, Waterloo and colleagues find that expressions of positive and negative emotions are more likely on WhatsApp compared to more public platforms, concluding that 'more private spaces in which one can communicate with a specific close friend allow for looser norms of emotion expression' (2018, p. 1827). Moreover, Dodds (2019) notices that this platform facilitates intimacy and trust between journalists and sources and also comradery and mutuality between different journalists. MIMS allow the creation of small homogeneous groups that, unlike SNS, tend to be characterized by stronger ties. For example, WhatsApp requires personal phone numbers to establish a connection. Consistently, it is perceived as a more personal/intimate medium and used to cultivate homophile relations among people sharing similar political views (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018). While Telegram allows the creation of 'supergroups' with thousands of members, groups on WhatsApp and Messenger can only include up to 250 members. However, they can be scaled up and go viral. The possibility of forwarding messages circulating in groups to personal contacts and other groups potentially expands their audience exponentially.

In sum, messages circulating via MIMS are generally sent from trusted and known contacts and they directly reach users' devices. Compared to SNS, messages circulated through MIMS may have a greater impact as they are distributed from reliable and known sources. Because of these characteristics, MIMS can be conceived as 'a unique combination of mass and interpersonal communication channels' (Malka, Ariel & Avidar, 2015, p. 329). This original mix may facilitate more effective communication as it is based on the exchange of sensitive messages that would be less likely to surface on SNS. Furthermore, as populist communication is heavily based on emotions (Engesser et al., 2017), MIMS appear particularly suited to spreading and amplifying passionate messages among intimate and trustworthy networks. In this light, being active users of SNS or MIMS could be differently related to political choices, such as voting for populist parties. This is because the logic of such platforms assumes activity rather than passivity, which in turn may favour forms of offline participation, as voting for populist candidates or parties which are not well depicted by mainstream media (see Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017). Based on the above-mentioned literature, we formulate the following research questions:

RQ1a) Does the political use of SNS and MIMS increase the chances of voting for a populist party compared to mainstream parties?

RQ1b) Do the greater intimacy, like-mindedness and emotionality afforded by MIMS increase the chances of voting for a populist party more than SNS do?

'Digital native' vs. 'digital immigrant' parties

We cannot classify populist parties in the countries included in the analysis along the left-right continuum because some of them – such as the Five Star Movement (in Italy) – present an eclectic ideology 'combining contradictory or elusive visions on policy issues crosscutting traditional cleavages' (Mosca & Tronconi, 2019, p. 1277). In addition, what unites left and right populist parties is that they share an ideology positing that society is divided in two groups – the 'corrupt elites' and the 'pure people' – and that the general will should be pursued in politics (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). In Europe, populism is often associated with the 'right' and with what comes with it – xenophobic politics, nationalism or opposition to multiculturalism – while populist traits can be found in a variety of actors, including on the 'left' (van Kessel, 2015, p. 2). Furthermore, what also unites left and right populist parties is the dimension of political communication. It has been argued that a different way of identifying populist parties is to apply a conception of populism as a 'strategy' or a 'style' which these actors employ to create a bond with voters (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Populist parties, on both sides, make use of communication emphasizing a link between the leader and the people (Gerbaudo, 2018), and in this regard Reinemann and colleagues argue that 'populist political communication should be restricted neither to the left nor to the right of the political spectrum' (2017, p. 14).

An alternative way to distinguish populist parties is to consider their date of foundation. The economic crisis of 2008 can be understood as a turning point in European politics for two distinct reasons: first, increased economic inequalities generated 'a notable but uneven surge [of populist parties] during crisis' (Pappas & Kriesi, 2015, p. 322); and second, because the spread of SNS and MIMS reached its peak in Europe at the end of that decade, i.e. 2010s (Chadwick, 2013). Therefore, we assume that parties founded during the Great Recession can be considered 'digital natives,' which naturally embed digital platforms in their everyday organization. On the contrary, populist parties that emerged before the economic crisis and the spread of digital media may be labelled 'digital immigrants,' adapting to digital technologies with much more caution, lagging behind in the process of adapting to new means of communication. We are aware that this generational juxtaposition is one of the myths surrounding digital media (Livingstone, 2017) and could be misleading. Nonetheless, similar arguments have been proposed, among others, by Karpf (2012) who notices that 'there are important generational differences between the ways that netroots and legacy organizations use information technology' (p. 18). A path-dependency of organizational cultures (Pettigrew, 1979) could in fact explain different patterns of digital media adoption by diversely-aged parties. According to Gerbaudo (2019), traditional parties are very careful about using digital platforms and consider mainstream media their main campaigning ground, while new-founded ones fully employ digital

media both for external communication and for internal decision-making. Accordingly, we formulate the following research question:

RQ2) Does the political use of SNS and MIMS increase the probability of voting for 'new' rather than 'old' populist parties compared to mainstream parties?

Digital platforms in context

Regarding differences in the countries selected that may affect the use and the role of digital platforms in supporting the populist vote, we can briefly refer to institutional features, the characteristics of party systems, the configuration of media systems and the regulation of internet contents. Compared to the other two countries, the German party system is characterized by greater stability combined with much more stringent web regulation (see Caiani & Parenti, 2013 and also the recent law on hate speech), a lower spread of SNS and a public sphere where newspapers still play an important role compared to digital media. In fact, 78% of Germans watch TV while 50% read the press and 32% use SNS.[1] Germans are very trustful of traditional media and distrustful of digital ones (70% for TV, 70% for newspapers and 17% for SNS respectively). All these features may act as barriers to the effectiveness of populist communication on digital media. From this point of view, Italy is in an opposite situation as it displays a very unstable party system (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2017), limited regulation of internet contents (Caiani & Parenti, 2013) and a TV-centred public sphere associated with widespread use of digital media. TV is watched daily by 90% of Italians, while newspapers are read by 26%, and SNS are used by 37%. Comparatively, Italians tend to display less trust in all kinds of media (56% for TV, 60% for newspapers and 19% for SNS respectively). France occupies an intermediate position between polarized pluralist countries (e.g. Italy) and democratic-corporatist countries (e.g. Germany) (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). France also presents important institutional differences such as semi-presidentialism, which could potentially act as a very powerful driver of personalization and the political use of digital platforms. This effect might, however, be balanced by the fact that our data refer to the 2017 legislative election and not a presidential one. Regarding media use, TV is watched by 77%, newspapers are read by 26% and SNS used by 40%. These media are trusted by 63%, 71% and 27% respectively.[2] Compared to the EU average, Germany displays higher trust in traditional media and lower trust in digital ones, Italy displays lower trust in all media sources while France is located between the two other countries. Accordingly, we expect a

[1] Standard Eurobarometer no. 88 (Autumn 2017) and Eurobarometer no. 464 (April 2018).

[2] Data on access to and trust in different media outlets in the three countries are reported in the online appendix.

stronger relation between the use of SNS and MIMS and the populist vote in Italy than in Germany, where digital media are less diffused and not very trusted. We do not have particular expectations regarding France because of the above-mentioned ambivalence, which has already been highlighted in previous studies. Consistently, we suggest the following research question:

RQ3) Does the political use of SNS and MIMS increase the probability of voting for populist parties in Italy compared to Germany?

Research design

Data

We test our expectations using three original Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) post-election surveys conducted in France (6/20/2017-7/9/2017), Germany (9/25/2017-10/2/2017) and Italy (3/5/2018-3/28/2018). For each country, samples of 1,750 internet users aged 18-74 years were collected.[3] The samples are representative of the adult population with internet access and are based on quota sampling using age, gender, employment status, education and region of residence. Our surveys were designed to be comparable in terms of both modes of data collection and questionnaires, providing us with an opportunity to test the link between SNS and MIMS political use and the populist vote in different contexts.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable distinguishes voting choices in five categories: a) voting for mainstream parties; b) voting for populist parties; c) voting for other parties (smaller parties with or without representation in national parliaments, or indicated by the respondents in response to an open-ended question); d) abstainers; and e) a residual category including spoilt votes, unidentifiable vote choices, ineligible voters and missing information.

There is quite considerable debate on how to classify populist parties (van Kessel, 2015). We consider the following parties to be populist: *Front National* (National Front) and *La France Insoumise* (France Unbowed) in France; *Alternative für Deutschland* (Alternative for Germany) and *Die Linke* (The Left) in Germany; *Lega* (The League) and the *Movimento 5 Stelle* (Five Star Movement) in Italy. This classification follows recent research on populist parties which attempts to

[3] Due to rounding in the construction of the sample, 1,751 internet users were interviewed in France. The models are estimated after list-wise deletion of missing values for the selected variables of interest (as also reported in Table A4 in the online appendix).

categorise these actors according to a number of characteristics: the salience of the contrast between people and the elite, with one being seen in a positive and the other in a negative light; the idea that the people are part of a homogeneous group and that their interests should be defended against those of the elite; and popular sovereignty (Mudde, 2004; van Kessel, 2015). These characteristics constitute a minimal definition of populism and therefore we stress that additional characteristics which narrow the definition have not been considered.[4]

To address the second research question, we separate parties founded in the twentieth century, such as *Front National*, *Die Linke* and *Lega* (the 'old', or 'digital immigrant', populist parties), from those born during the Great Recession such as *La France Insoumise*, *Alternative für Deutschland* and *Movimento 5 Stelle* (the 'new', or 'digital native', populist parties). The former three parties were indeed founded much before the spread of digital media. The *Front National* was founded in 1972 and despite its long history and changes, it is still considered a 'classic populist party' (Surel, 2019). *Die Linke*, although founded in 2007, is a direct descendant of the post-1989 Party of Democratic Socialism, and thus it has its roots well before the 2010s decade and cannot be considered a 'genuinely new party' (Wuttke, 2020). The *Lega* was founded in 1991 and is the oldest party in the Italian political system. While its current leader, Matteo Salvini, has imprinted important changes to its organization, the *Lega* still presents the look of a traditional party (Biancalana, 2020). In contrast, *La France Insoumise* was founded in 2016 declaring itself being a populist party (Marlière, 2019). *Alternative für Deutschland* was founded in 2013 as a consequence of the financial, migration and Brexit crises hitting Germany (Lees, 2018). Eventually, the *Movimento 5 Stelle* is the oldest among the selected 'new' populist parties as it was founded in 2009, yet this party from the beginning of its history mainly used the internet as a means of communication (Mosca, Vaccari & Valeriani, 2015).

Independent variables

The independent variables of interest are two additive scales measuring comparable activities on SNS (such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc.) and MIMS (such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Telegram and the like). In the first case, we used dichotomous items asking the respondents whether or not in the previous 12 months, when using SNS, they: a) sent a tweet to, or commented on, a post by a national party leader, politician or party; b) discussed national political issues or the [last] general election; and c) tried to convince someone to vote for a specific party leader, candidate or party. In the second case, respondents were asked whether or not in the previous 12 months, when using MIMS, they: a) sent messages about politics, public affairs or the [last] general

[4] The classification of other voting choices is reported in the online appendix.

election; b) discussed politics, public affairs or the [last] general election; c) tried to convince someone to vote for a specific candidate or party. We applied a Mokken scale analysis to assess the reliability of the two scales (Van Schuur, 2003). The Loevinger's H for the SNS and the MIMS scales is 0.55 and 0.67 respectively, which indicates that both are strong. These are similar if we assess the scales for each country. Therefore, we built two summary indices measuring the political use of SNS and MIMS from 0 (no use) to 3 (full use).[5] We should underline that these scales capture the political use of SNS and MIMS and not the exposure to political information or the frequency by which political information is acquired. Nevertheless, it can be argued that being active on such platforms is the result of exposure to political information and messages (see Fletcher & Nielsen, 2018; Lee & Xenos, 2020) which might come from populist actors. Indeed, our strategy is in line with the literature arguing that the political use of social media platforms matters more than simple use for populist voting (see for instance Groshek & Koc-Michalska, 2017).

Controls

The models include a variable classifying respondents in four groups depending on the frequency with which they use media – whether 'traditional' (TV and newspapers) and/or 'digital' (internet and SNS) (Mosca & Quaranta, 2016) – for political information: a) those who make infrequent use of both media; b) those who prevalently use traditional media; c) those who prevalently use digital media; and d) those who frequently use both. The literature also shows that political (dis)trust is related to support for anti-establishment/populist parties (Schumacher & Roodujin, 2013). We use an index of political distrust measuring whether respondents are very confident, confident, not very confident or not at all confident in parties, government and parliament.[6] We then include other variables found to be important to the vote choice: political interest measured on a scale ranging from 1 (not at all interested) to 4 (very interested) and the left-right scale in categories (the reference category 'not located on the left-right scale/missing' and 'radical left,' 'left,' 'centre,' 'right' and 'radical right'). We also include gender, education (the reference category 'low' and 'medium' and 'high'), age (the reference category '18-24' and '25-34,' '35-44,' '45-54' and '55-74') and employment status (the reference category 'not employed' and 'employed'). Finally, we include country dummies to control for country heterogeneity.

[5] We report the estimates from additional models excluding from the scales the items measuring discussion in the online appendix. We do so as such items might be less close to the sphere of institutional politics. Results are consistent with those presented here.

[6] Cronbach's alpha is 0.87 (similar scores are found in the separate samples).

Models

We use multinomial models to address the research questions. First, we include all the independent variables. With this model we assess the expectation that political activities on SNS and MIMS are related to the populist vote. We then include, one at a time, interaction terms between the political activity scales and the country dummies. This allows us to assess whether the associations between political activity and the populist vote are heterogeneous across countries. Given that the coefficients of multinomial models are hard to interpret, especially in the presence of interaction terms (Long, 1997), we use average marginal effects.

Findings

Figure 1 shows the average marginal effects of SNS and MIMS political use on the probability of each vote choice.[7] The left-hand panel shows that an increase of one point on the SNS activity scale increases the probability of voting for a populist party by about 3 percentage points (henceforth p.p.) ($p \leq 0.001$). In contrast, SNS activity is not associated with the probability of voting for mainstream parties. Also, SNS activity is not associated with abstention or with other party choices. Another interesting finding is that the marginal effects of SNS activity on the probability of voting for populist and mainstream parties are different. In fact, a one-point increase on the SNS activity scale increases the probability of voting for a populist party vs. a mainstream party by about 4.4 p.p. ($p \leq 0.001$). Therefore, this online political activity seems to be relevant to understanding the choice to vote for a populist party in contrast to mainstream ones. The right-hand panel shows the associations between MIMS use and the populist vote. In this case, we notice that political activities are only associated positively with the probability of voting for populist parties. A one-point increase on the scale corresponds to an increase in the probability of voting for a populist party of about 1.7 p.p. ($p \leq 0.05$). Instead, these political activities on MIMS are not associated with other vote choices. As before, we notice that there is a statistically significant difference between the marginal effects of MIMS activities on populist and mainstream vote choices. In fact, a one-point increase on the MIMS scale increases the probability of voting for a populist party vs. a mainstream party by about 3 p.p. ($p \leq 0.05$).

These findings provide evidence addressing RQ1a and show that political activity on SNS and MIMS is associated with a populist vote rather than a mainstream vote. This implies that these forms of political activity and the related instruments may favour an exchange of information among

[7] The estimates of the models are reported in the online appendix.

individuals that tend to avoid expressing themselves politically in public, given that their ideas might be controversial or non-mainstream, like those of populist party supporters, and so find the digital space provided by SNS and MIMS more comfortable for their political expression (Wojcieszak, 2010; Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018). Moreover, 'unlike legacy media, social media are built upon the logic of virality, which compels political actors to communicate primarily those messages that users like, comment on, promote, and share within their networks' (Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig & Esser, 2017, p. 1349). However, we find that the role of MIMS is smaller than that of SNS as far as the populist vote is concerned, contrasting with RQ1b.

Figure 1 here

What about the effects of SNS and MIMS political use on voting for populist parties once we distinguish between 'old' and 'new' ones? To address this question, we turn our attention to Figure 2 which shows the average marginal effects of the two scales measuring activity on the probability of making the various vote choices. As before, we see that while the role of SNS and MIMS political use is not positively associated with other vote choices, it seems to be relevant to voting for 'new' populist parties but not for 'old' ones. In fact, a one-point increase on the SNS and MIMS use scales corresponds to increases in the probability of voting for 'new' populist parties of about 2.8 p.p. ($p \leq 0.000$) and 1.3 p.p. ($p \leq 0.05$) respectively. Furthermore, if we compare the roles of SNS and MIMS use in voting for 'old' or 'new' vs. mainstream parties, we find that using SNS or MIMS does not increase the probability of voting for 'old' populist parties with respect to mainstream parties. Instead, using SNS and MIMS increases the probability of voting for 'new' populist parties vs. mainstream parties by 4.2 p.p. ($p \leq 0.001$) and 2.6 p.p. ($p \leq 0.05$) respectively. These results seem to indicate that 'new' populist parties benefit more from digital media use, answering RQ2.

Figure 2 here

We now address RQ3, which asks whether there are country differences in the associations between SNS and MIMS political use and voting for populist parties. Figure 3 shows the average marginal effects of SNS and MIMS political use on the probability of voting for populist or mainstream parties in the three countries.[8] We see that an association between SNS political use and

[8] The estimates of the models are reported in the online appendix. We omit the associations between SNS and MIMS use and other vote choices from the discussion.

the populist vote is not present in all countries. In fact, in France and Italy a one-point increase on the SNS scale corresponds to increases in the probability of voting for populist parties of 3.4 ($p \leq 0.01$) and 4 p.p. ($p \leq 0.01$) respectively, while in Germany the association is not statistically significant. Regarding MIMS use, we notice that this association is only significant in Italy (3.8 p.p., $p \leq 0.01$), while in France and Germany it is not.

Figure 3 here

Finally, we explore the same differences while distinguishing between 'old' and 'new' populist parties. The average marginal effects are reported in Figure 4. Regarding the role of SNS use, in no country is this variable associated with the probability of voting for 'old' populist parties, while in France and Italy it is associated with the probability of voting for 'new' populist parties but not in Germany. In fact, in France SNS use increases the probability of this vote choice by 2.6 p.p. ($p \leq 0.01$) and in Italy by 4.9 p.p. ($p \leq 0.000$). This finding suggests that also other factors might be at play in the relationship between SNS use and the populist vote, that have to do with the characteristics of *France Insoumise* and the *Movimento 5 Stelle*. Indeed, both parties have been labelled as 'digital parties.' As noted by Gerbaudo (2019) 'the term digital party attempts to capture the common essence seen across a number of quite diverse political formations that have risen in recent years, and which share the common attempt of using digital technology to devise new forms of political participation and democratic decision-making' (p. 7). They might attract voters more accustomed with digital platforms. Indeed, the above-mentioned parties introduced digital innovations allowing supporters and members to be more involved in their everyday life. There might thus be a special relationship between the voters who use SNS as a tool of political information and parties, such as these ones, which emphasize the role of digital platforms in politics. Nevertheless, this relationship seems to hold only for a subset of populist parties, so it cannot be generalized beyond these cases. Lastly, the role of MIMS use across the three countries is like that seen above: the variable is only associated with voting for 'new' populist parties in Italy (3.5 p.p., $p \leq 0.010$).

Figure 4 here

Conclusion

To summarize, the empirical analysis has shown a relation between the political use of SNS and MIMS and populist voting, providing support to many scholarly claims (RQ1a). However, we

have found that SNS use increases the likelihood of voting for populist parties more than MIMS use (RQ1b). This disconfirms our argument, which was built on the greater degree of intimacy afforded by MIMS vis-à-vis SNS. In this concluding section we can only advance a tentative interpretation of this unexpected result.

First, because of financial constraints and restricted technical skills of their staff, populist parties (especially in Western countries) may be more inclined to invest in and concentrate their limited resources on SNS rather than MIMS. Second, since SNS tend to be visited by users for a longer period during the day than MIMS, the visibility of populist parties and leaders may be perceived to be greater on such platforms, pushing them to look after their presence there more. Third, because of interdependency mechanisms typical of hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2013), contents published on SNS (often used by journalists as information sources) have a greater possibility of travelling 'from the desktop to the television screen' than those on MIMS (Bennett, 2003, p. 164). There are then potential indirect benefits in being present on SNS that are less likely to exist on MIMS since the virality and metrics of SNS contents can prove very important in attracting traditional media coverage (Klinger & Svensson, 2015).

Regarding our second research question (RQ2), we have only found partial evidence that digital media tend to only favour populist parties. In fact, only some of the parties we called 'digital natives' seem to benefit more from the political use of SNS and MIMS than 'older' populist parties, which have a longer history and originated in a different landscape where traditional media were absolutely dominant and central. In fact, out of three parties we classified as 'digital natives' only two display a clear relation with the political use of SNS and only one with the political use of MIMS. Accordingly, we should take into consideration alternative explanations downplaying the generational differences between the populist parties included in our study while focusing on their digital nature. From this point of view, we can notice that while *Alternative für Deutschland* is certainly very skilled in the use of social media (Serrano, Shahrezaye, Papakyriakopoulos & Hegelich, 2019), differently from *La France Insoumise* and *Movimento 5 Stelle* the development of participatory platforms to involve its supporters in the life of the party is lacking. Unfortunately, our survey did not ask about the use of such platforms nor allows us to explore this relation in other digital parties active in the countries we considered.[9] From this point of view the differences emerged between the populist parties we addressed could be related to the digital nature of these parties and the actual involvement of their supporters in their digital platforms.

Finally, we addressed country-specific differences with our third research question (RQ3).

[9] For example, only 9 respondents declared their vote for the German Pirate party in our survey.

Our findings show that the relation between the political use of digital media and populist voting varies significantly across France, Italy and Germany. While Italy displays a stronger influence of SNS and MIMS on the populist vote, this relation is lighter in France and only holds for SNS, and it completely disappears in Germany for both types of platforms. As stated above, differences in institutional features, media systems and web regulations help interpreting this outcome. In a reinforcing pattern, government surveillance and concerns about privacy are culturally sensitive issues in Germany (Valeriani & Vaccari, 2018) coupled with a comparatively tougher regulation of the web, a less widespread use of digital media and a greater role of traditional media in the national media system. The Italian case could be put at Germany's antipodes: a relatively deregulated digital environment, wider diffusion of digital media and a lower degree of trust in different media outlets coupled with a very fragile and volatile party system (Chiaramonte & Emanuele, 2017) which is particularly open to challengers. The case of France – where SNS are relevant in influencing the populist vote but MIMS are not – is located between Italy and Germany, confirming Hallin & Mancini's classification (2004) of the country as one displaying a media system mixing features of the continental and Mediterranean types, to which Germany and Italy respectively belong.

Last, it is worth noticing that digital platforms are moving targets, which makes any observation provisional and highly subject to the passing of time. Because of the continually changing nature of SNS and MIMS it is extremely difficult to study and interpret the linkage between digital platforms and the populist vote. For example, in recent times more constraints on the use of WhatsApp as a tool for political propaganda have been enacted by the application of the European General Data Protection Regulation (May 2018) and by the imposition of stricter limits on the forwarding function (from 20 to 5 recipients) by the platform itself to contrast the spread of fake news, thus reducing the virality of contents circulating on the platform and shifting it towards being a more private messaging app. Even stricter measures have been implemented as consequence of the Covid-19 crisis. To test how the platform works when the focus moves from popularity to contents, Instagram has recently hidden 'like' counts in a selected group of countries. Facebook might soon follow 'the like ban,' perhaps reducing the importance of virality for these platforms and their attractiveness in the eyes of traditional media outlets.

Despite ongoing changes in the platform ecosystem, our contribution seems to confirm the importance of digital media for a new breed of populist parties and shows, however, a pivotal role of SNS, a lighter but significant role of MIMS, the importance of contextual national characteristics in magnifying or limiting this linkage and the relevance of the features of the specific parties considered. Of course, the analysis shown here presents limitations that are related to the cross-sectional design

of our surveys and the scope of the comparison. Thus, future research should look further into the link between digital media use and populist voting addressing such problems.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that this study has some limitations that should be addressed in future research. Indeed, the measurement of the political use of SNS and MIMS does not allow us to assess the extent to which individuals find populist messages via selective or incidental exposure, thus directly affecting their voting preferences. That being said, it is also important to stress that research on the relation between the use of digital media and populist attitudes suffers from a clear myopia on the demand-side which needs to be seriously addressed in future studies. Despite this evident imbalance between supply and demand of populist ideas we believe roles of senders and receivers are increasingly blurred. While the reasons why populist actors tend to rely on digital platforms have been clarified, the motivations pushing citizens to use them needs to be further substantiated. One reasons for this could be that digital platforms generate unconstrained and safe places where diverse actors can freely consume, share and exchange ideas that tend to be silenced in traditional media outlets (Hameleers, 2018). Further research is needed to shed light on this complex intertwining.

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Table 1: Main differences between SNS and MIMS.

Platform	Searchability	Filtering	Reach	Sophistication of Targeting/Analytics
SNS	High-medium	High	Low	High-medium
MIMS	Medium-low	Low	High	Low

Source: own adaptation from Bossetta (2018).

Figure 1: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream or populist parties or making other vote choices, with 95% confidence intervals.

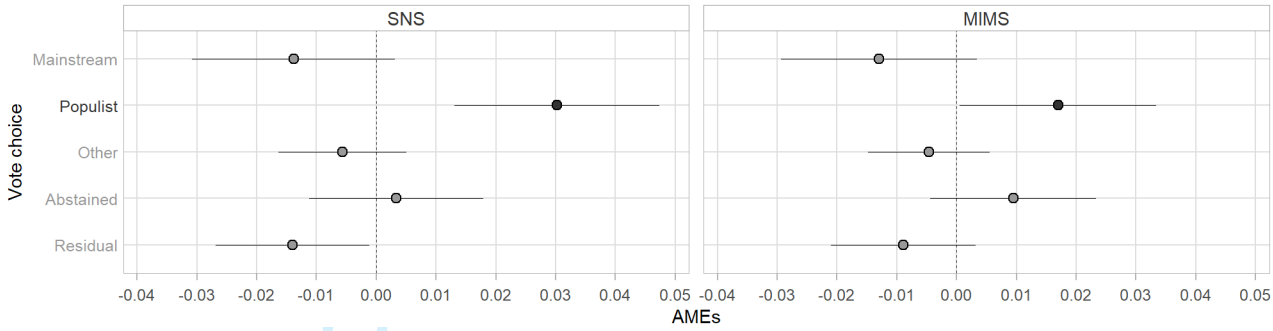


Figure 2: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream, 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties or making other vote choices, with 95% confidence intervals.

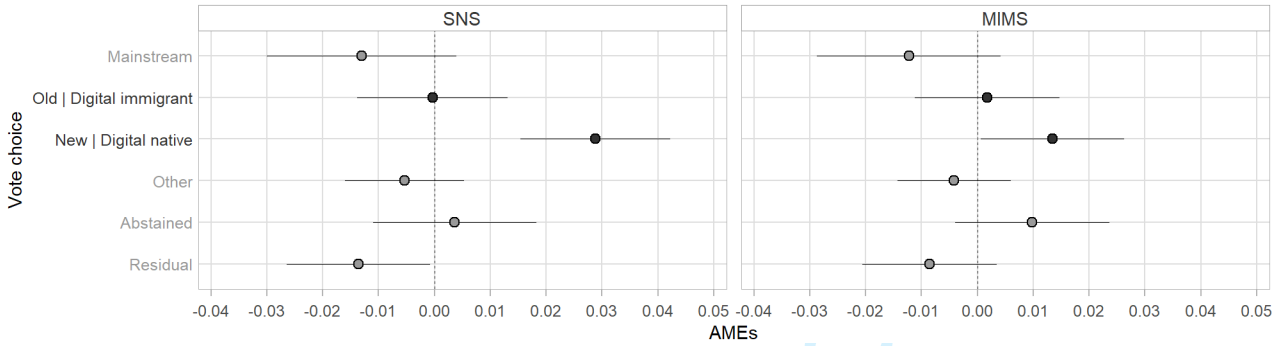


Figure 3: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream or populist parties in France, Germany and Italy, with 95% confidence intervals.

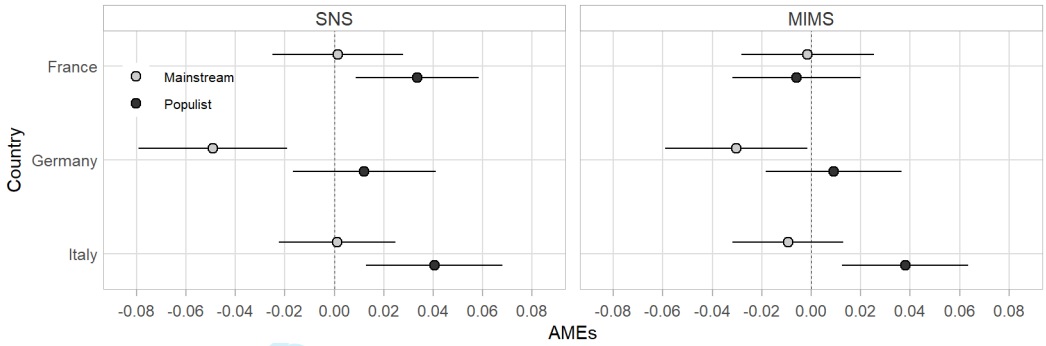
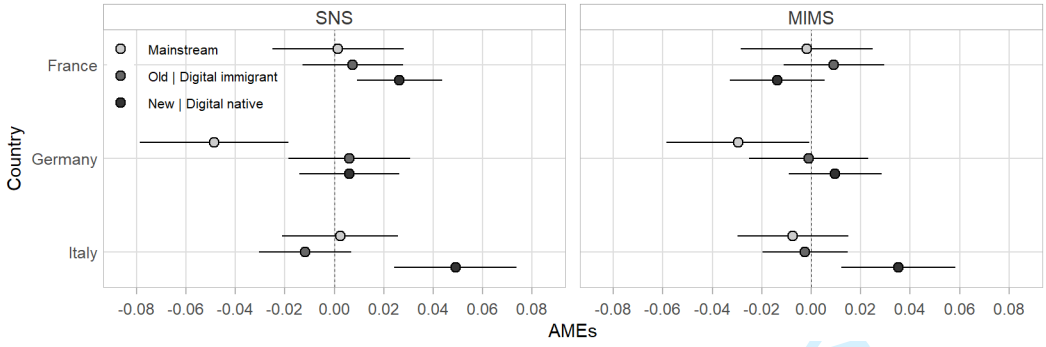


Figure 4: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream, 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties in France, Germany and Italy, with 95% confidence intervals.



Online Appendix

Table A1: Access to different media outlets in the selected countries

Country	TV		Newspaper		SNS	
	%	Delta	%	Delta	%	Delta
France	77	-4	26	-2	40	-2
Germany	78	-3	50	+22	32	-10
Italy	90	+9	19	-9	37	-5
EU average	81		28		42	

Source: Standard Eurobarometer no. 88 (Autumn 2017). Note: Delta indicates differences to the EU average.

Table A2: Trust in different media outlets in the selected countries

Country	TV		Newspaper		SNS	
	%	Delta	%	Delta	%	Delta
France	63	-3	71	+8	27	+1
Germany	70	+4	70	+7	17	-9
Italy	56	-10	60	-3	19	-7
EU average	66		63		26	

Source: Standard Eurobarometer no. 464 (April 2018). Note: Delta indicates differences to the EU average.

Table A3: Classification of parties.

Mainstream parties
France: La République En Marche! (The Republic Onwards!), Les Republicains (The Republicans), Mouvement Democrate (Democratic Movement), Parti Socialiste (Socialist Party).
Germany: Christlich Demokratische Union (Christian Democratic Union), Christlich Soziale Union (Christian Social Union), Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany), Freie Demokratische Partei (Free Democratic Party), Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen (Alliance 90 / The Greens).
Italy: Partito Democratico (Democratic Party), Forza Italia (Go Italy!).
Other parties
France: Debout la France (France Arise), Europe Écologie – Les Verts (Europe Ecology – The Greens), Lutte Ouvriere (Workers' Struggle), Nouveau Parti Anti-Capitaliste (New Anti-capitalist Party), Parti Communiste Francais (French Communist Party), Parti Radical De Gauche (Left radical Party), Union des Democrates et Independants (Union of Democrats and Independents).
Germany: Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands (National Democratic Party), Piratenpartei Deutschland (German Pirate Party).
Italy: Insieme (Together), Civica Popolare (Popular Civic List), +Europa (+Europe), Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy), Italia agli Italiani (Italy to the Italians), Liberi e Uguali (Free and Equal), Noi con l'Italia (Us with Italy), Potere al Popolo (Power to the People).

Table A4: Descriptive statistics.

	France		Germany		Italy		Range	
	Prop./ Mean	SD	Prop./ Mean	SD	Prop./ Mean	SD	Min	Max
Vote choice classifications:								
Mainstream	0.302		0.558		0.154		0	1
Populist	0.244		0.224		0.478		0	1
'Old' / 'digital immigrant' populist	0.145		0.121		0.145		0	1
'New' / 'digital native' populist	0.099		0.102		0.333		0	1
Other	0.081		0.039		0.129		0	1
Abstained	0.304		0.092		0.124		0	1
Residual	0.068		0.087		0.115		0	1
SNS political use	0.589	0.934	0.454	0.814	0.707	0.959	0	3
MIMS political use	0.471	0.948	0.449	0.858	0.692	1.023	0	3
Political information:								
Neither (traditional/digital)	0.214		0.138		0.185		0	1
Prevalently traditional media	0.189		0.188		0.143		0	1
Prevalently digital media	0.074		0.104		0.080		0	1
Both (traditional/digital)	0.523		0.570		0.592		0	1
Political distrust	2.955	0.740	2.693	0.723	3.175	0.655	1	4
Political interest	2.922	1.001	3.506	0.699	2.915	0.837	1	4
Political discussion	0.381		0.338		0.396		0	1
Left-right scale:								
Not identified	0.302		0.195		0.292		0	1
Radical left	0.082		0.041		0.072		0	1
Left	0.199		0.302		0.183		0	1
Centre	0.121		0.266		0.103		0	1
Right	0.185		0.182		0.247		0	1
Radical right	0.111		0.015		0.103		0	1
Gender:								
Male	0.491		0.513		0.572		0	1
Female	0.509		0.487		0.428		0	1
Age:								
18-24	0.118		0.104		0.125		0	1
25-34	0.189		0.196		0.179		0	1
35-44	0.212		0.176		0.245		0	1
45-54	0.210		0.246		0.238		0	1
55-74	0.271		0.278		0.213		0	1
Education:								
Low	0.158		0.152		0.265		0	1
Medium	0.458		0.561		0.516		0	1
High	0.385		0.287		0.219		0	1
Employment:								
Not employed	0.368		0.279		0.339		0	1
Employed	0.632		0.721		0.661		0	1
N	1409		1475		1500			

Note. N refers to the number of observations after the list-wise deletion of missing values for the selected variables.

Table A5: Multinomial model predicting vote choice.

	Populist	Other	Abstained	Residual
SNS activities	0.166**	-0.003	0.076	-0.105
	(0.058)	(0.084)	(0.071)	(0.093)
MIMS activities	0.115*	0.001	0.117	-0.046
	(0.056)	(0.080)	(0.068)	(0.088)
Political information (r.c. Neither):				
Prevalently traditional media	-0.090	-0.263	-0.217	-0.423*
	(0.158)	(0.222)	(0.171)	(0.206)
Prevalently digital media	0.219	0.014	0.216	0.279
	(0.195)	(0.271)	(0.210)	(0.240)
Both	0.018	-0.436*	-0.337*	-0.356*
	(0.142)	(0.199)	(0.155)	(0.179)
Political distrust	1.024***	0.608***	0.776***	0.504***
	(0.067)	(0.098)	(0.080)	(0.096)
Political interest	0.074	0.073	-0.513***	-0.425***
	(0.063)	(0.090)	(0.067)	(0.083)
Political discussion	0.030	0.274	0.011	0.064
	(0.099)	(0.145)	(0.124)	(0.148)
LR scale (r.c. Not identified):				
Radical left	0.306	1.183***	-0.353	-0.959**
	(0.199)	(0.253)	(0.241)	(0.331)
Left	-0.594***	0.021	-1.163***	-1.665***
	(0.130)	(0.193)	(0.154)	(0.189)
Centre	-1.018***	-0.451*	-1.091***	-1.143***
	(0.147)	(0.228)	(0.164)	(0.179)
Right	-0.409**	-0.457*	-0.881***	-1.398***
	(0.131)	(0.212)	(0.153)	(0.187)
Radical right	0.399*	0.734**	-0.429	-1.406***
	(0.198)	(0.264)	(0.230)	(0.357)
Female (r.c. Male)	-0.146	-0.029	-0.278**	-0.183
	(0.088)	(0.128)	(0.105)	(0.126)
Age (r.c. 18-24):				
25-34	0.100	0.009	0.051	-0.632**
	(0.175)	(0.237)	(0.183)	(0.222)
35-44	0.146	-0.360	-0.424*	-0.554*
	(0.173)	(0.243)	(0.188)	(0.217)
45-54	-0.026	-0.362	-0.888***	-0.964***
	(0.170)	(0.234)	(0.191)	(0.218)
55-74	-0.047	-0.421	-1.049***	-0.962***
	(0.167)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.217)
Education (r.c. Low):				
Medium	-0.208	0.191	-0.460**	-0.086
	(0.122)	(0.192)	(0.141)	(0.167)
High	-0.573***	0.243	-0.591***	-0.341
	(0.134)	(0.204)	(0.157)	(0.193)
Employed (r.c. Not employed)	0.172	0.128	0.227	0.276
	(0.102)	(0.147)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Country (r.c. France):				
Germany	-0.421***	-1.131***	-1.303***	0.004
	(0.112)	(0.186)	(0.132)	(0.167)
Italy	1.054***	1.114***	-0.559***	1.023***
	(0.114)	(0.152)	(0.134)	(0.164)
Intercept	-3.040***	-3.110***	0.956**	0.280
	(0.347)	(0.502)	(0.370)	(0.448)

Note. The reference category is 'mainstream'. Estimates are log-odds. Standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R-sq. = 0.1589. N = 4384. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A6: Multinomial model predicting vote choice distinguishing between 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties.

	Old	New	Other	Abstained	Residual
SNS activities	0.059	0.242***	0.002	0.078	-0.096
	(0.073)	(0.065)	(0.084)	(0.071)	(0.093)
MIMS activities	0.068	0.138*	0.006	0.117	-0.042
	(0.070)	(0.063)	(0.080)	(0.068)	(0.088)
Political information (r.c. Neither):					
Prevalently traditional media	0.053	-0.233	-0.270	-0.219	-0.434*
	(0.193)	(0.188)	(0.222)	(0.171)	(0.206)
Prevalently digital media	0.165	0.238	0.020	0.217	0.282
	(0.248)	(0.223)	(0.271)	(0.210)	(0.240)
Both	0.094	-0.046	-0.439*	-0.337*	-0.360*
	(0.176)	(0.164)	(0.199)	(0.155)	(0.179)
Political distrust	0.904***	1.103***	0.617***	0.780***	0.513***
	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.098)	(0.080)	(0.096)
Political interest	0.003	0.128	0.078	-0.511***	-0.420***
	(0.076)	(0.074)	(0.090)	(0.067)	(0.083)
Political discussion	-0.030	0.088	0.278	0.011	0.069
	(0.123)	(0.116)	(0.145)	(0.124)	(0.149)
LR scale (r.c. Not identified):					
Radical left	0.430	0.233	1.171***	-0.360	-0.969**
	(0.247)	(0.221)	(0.253)	(0.241)	(0.332)
Left	-0.304	-0.808***	-0.002	-1.170***	-1.681***
	(0.166)	(0.151)	(0.193)	(0.154)	(0.189)
Centre	-1.315***	-0.886***	-0.438	-1.082***	-1.137***
	(0.222)	(0.166)	(0.228)	(0.165)	(0.179)
Right	0.113	-0.837***	-0.502*	-0.896***	-1.434***
	(0.161)	(0.153)	(0.212)	(0.153)	(0.187)
Radical right	1.380***	-0.928***	0.634*	-0.433	-1.486***
	(0.216)	(0.252)	(0.265)	(0.230)	(0.358)
Female (r.c. Male)	0.001	-0.273**	-0.035	-0.280**	-0.195
	(0.108)	(0.104)	(0.128)	(0.105)	(0.126)
Age (r.c. 18-24):					
25-34	0.180	0.044	0.008	0.053	-0.633**
	(0.230)	(0.202)	(0.237)	(0.183)	(0.222)
35-44	0.241	0.076	-0.364	-0.426*	-0.558*
	(0.226)	(0.200)	(0.243)	(0.188)	(0.217)
45-54	0.136	-0.151	-0.370	-0.889***	-0.972***
	(0.221)	(0.197)	(0.234)	(0.191)	(0.218)
55-74	0.070	-0.144	-0.426	-1.051***	-0.968***
	(0.219)	(0.194)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.217)
Education (r.c. Low):					
Medium	-0.270	-0.174	0.194	-0.456**	-0.081
	(0.146)	(0.140)	(0.192)	(0.141)	(0.167)
High	-0.628***	-0.539***	0.244	-0.587***	-0.338
	(0.163)	(0.157)	(0.204)	(0.157)	(0.193)
Employed (r.c. Not employed)	0.180	0.188	0.126	0.225	0.276
	(0.126)	(0.120)	(0.147)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Country (r.c. France):					
Germany	-0.348*	-0.422**	-1.145***	-1.304***	0.001
	(0.136)	(0.145)	(0.186)	(0.132)	(0.168)
Italy	0.395**	1.570***	1.110***	-0.546***	1.047***
	(0.139)	(0.135)	(0.152)	(0.134)	(0.164)
Intercept	-3.442***	-4.021***	-3.118***	0.938*	0.247
	(0.432)	(0.413)	(0.502)	(0.370)	(0.449)

Note. The reference category is 'mainstream'. Estimates are log-odds. Standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R-sq. = 0.1586. N = 4384. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A7: Multinomial model predicting vote choice including the interaction between countries and political activities on SNS.

	Populist	Other	Abstained	Residual
SNS activities	0.137	-0.194	-0.060	-0.123
	(0.086)	(0.133)	(0.095)	(0.158)
MIMS activities	0.117*	0.007	0.123	-0.042
	(0.055)	(0.080)	(0.068)	(0.087)
Country (r.c. France):				
Germany	-0.448***	-1.408***	-1.566***	-0.112
	(0.130)	(0.219)	(0.154)	(0.187)
Italy	1.086***	1.048***	-0.554***	1.099***
	(0.140)	(0.182)	(0.160)	(0.189)
Country × SNS activities:				
Germany × SNS activities	0.056	0.504**	0.485***	0.232
	(0.116)	(0.194)	(0.135)	(0.198)
Italy × SNS activities	-0.038	0.129	0.013	-0.165
	(0.114)	(0.162)	(0.140)	(0.197)
Political information (r.c. Neither):				
Prevalently traditional media	-0.093	-0.255	-0.204	-0.419*
	(0.158)	(0.223)	(0.172)	(0.206)
Prevalently digital media	0.210	-0.002	0.200	0.268
	(0.195)	(0.272)	(0.211)	(0.240)
Both (traditional/digital)	0.013	-0.436*	-0.339*	-0.361*
	(0.142)	(0.199)	(0.155)	(0.179)
Political distrust	1.023***	0.607***	0.779***	0.507***
	(0.067)	(0.098)	(0.080)	(0.096)
Political interest	0.076	0.077	-0.508***	-0.417***
	(0.063)	(0.090)	(0.067)	(0.083)
Political discussion	0.029	0.272	0.004	0.056
	(0.099)	(0.145)	(0.124)	(0.149)
LR scale (r.c. Not identified):				
Radical left	0.300	1.176***	-0.361	-0.972**
	(0.199)	(0.253)	(0.241)	(0.332)
Left	-0.597***	0.017	-1.166***	-1.672***
	(0.130)	(0.193)	(0.154)	(0.189)
Centre	-1.017***	-0.437	-1.073***	-1.134***
	(0.147)	(0.228)	(0.165)	(0.179)
Right	-0.414**	-0.462*	-0.886***	-1.407***
	(0.131)	(0.212)	(0.153)	(0.187)
Radical right	0.394*	0.730**	-0.432	-1.417***
	(0.198)	(0.264)	(0.230)	(0.357)
Female (r.c. Male)	-0.148	-0.038	-0.287**	-0.188
	(0.088)	(0.128)	(0.105)	(0.126)
Age (r.c. 18-24):				
25-34	0.105	0.017	0.046	-0.624**
	(0.175)	(0.237)	(0.183)	(0.222)
35-44	0.149	-0.360	-0.435*	-0.552*
	(0.173)	(0.244)	(0.188)	(0.217)
45-54	-0.021	-0.358	-0.899***	-0.956***
	(0.170)	(0.235)	(0.192)	(0.218)
55-74	-0.042	-0.420	-1.056***	-0.949***
	(0.167)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.217)
Education (r.c. Low):				
Medium	-0.207	0.189	-0.462**	-0.080
	(0.122)	(0.192)	(0.142)	(0.168)
High	-0.570***	0.249	-0.583***	-0.336
	(0.134)	(0.204)	(0.157)	(0.193)
Employed (r.c. Not employed)	0.173	0.133	0.236	0.278
	(0.102)	(0.148)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Intercept	-3.023***	-3.009***	1.015**	0.269
	(0.351)	(0.506)	(0.373)	(0.454)

Note. The reference category is 'mainstream.' Estimates are log-odds. Standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R-sq. = 0.1606. N = 4384. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A8: Multinomial model predicting vote choice including the interaction between countries and political activities on MIMS.

	Populist	Other	Abstained	Residual
SNS activities	0.172**	0.005	0.075	-0.104
	(0.058)	(0.084)	(0.071)	(0.093)
MIMS activities	-0.016	-0.155	0.101	-0.026
	(0.090)	(0.133)	(0.091)	(0.156)
Country (r.c. France):				
Germany	-0.483***	-1.198***	-1.409***	-0.050
	(0.124)	(0.205)	(0.149)	(0.181)
Italy	0.965***	1.010***	-0.467**	1.064***
	(0.132)	(0.174)	(0.153)	(0.182)
Country × MIMS activities:				
Germany × MIMS activities	0.142	0.167	0.202	0.109
	(0.114)	(0.202)	(0.130)	(0.193)
Italy × MIMS activities	0.166	0.206	-0.154	-0.107
	(0.113)	(0.157)	(0.136)	(0.188)
Political information (r.c. Neither):				
Prevalently traditional media	-0.090	-0.261	-0.210	-0.418*
	(0.158)	(0.222)	(0.172)	(0.206)
Prevalently digital media	0.219	0.012	0.217	0.283
	(0.195)	(0.271)	(0.210)	(0.240)
Both (traditional/digital)	0.023	-0.427*	-0.337*	-0.356*
	(0.142)	(0.199)	(0.155)	(0.179)
Political distrust	1.020***	0.602***	0.779***	0.507***
	(0.067)	(0.098)	(0.080)	(0.096)
Political interest	0.068	0.064	-0.511***	-0.424***
	(0.063)	(0.090)	(0.067)	(0.083)
Political discussion	0.031	0.274	0.002	0.056
	(0.099)	(0.145)	(0.124)	(0.149)
LR scale (r.c. Not identified):				
Radical left	0.311	1.189***	-0.364	-0.968**
	(0.199)	(0.253)	(0.241)	(0.332)
Left	-0.596***	0.020	-1.168***	-1.673***
	(0.130)	(0.193)	(0.154)	(0.189)
Centre	-1.020***	-0.454*	-1.085***	-1.141***
	(0.147)	(0.228)	(0.165)	(0.179)
Right	-0.408**	-0.454*	-0.890***	-1.408***
	(0.131)	(0.212)	(0.153)	(0.187)
Radical right	0.405*	0.744**	-0.442	-1.415***
	(0.199)	(0.264)	(0.230)	(0.358)
Female (r.c. Male)	-0.148	-0.033	-0.279**	-0.185
	(0.088)	(0.128)	(0.105)	(0.126)
Age (r.c. 18-24):				
25-34	0.106	0.016	0.038	-0.635**
	(0.175)	(0.237)	(0.183)	(0.221)
35-44	0.155	-0.350	-0.431*	-0.555*
	(0.174)	(0.244)	(0.188)	(0.216)
45-54	-0.023	-0.360	-0.894***	-0.966***
	(0.170)	(0.235)	(0.191)	(0.218)
55-74	-0.048	-0.423	-1.045***	-0.956***
	(0.168)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.217)
Education (r.c. Low):				
Medium	-0.218	0.180	-0.457**	-0.088
	(0.122)	(0.192)	(0.142)	(0.168)
High	-0.571***	0.245	-0.589***	-0.340
	(0.134)	(0.204)	(0.157)	(0.193)
Employed (r.c. Not employed)	0.179	0.137	0.227	0.278
	(0.102)	(0.148)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Intercept	-2.958***	-3.009***	0.957*	0.276
	(0.350)	(0.506)	(0.372)	(0.452)

Note. The reference category is 'mainstream'. Estimates are log-odds. Standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R-sq. = 0.1600. N = 4384. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A9: Multinomial model predicting vote choice distinguishing between 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties and including the interaction between countries and political activities on SNS.

	Old	New	Other	Abstained	Residual
SNS activities	0.056	0.248*	-0.197	-0.060	-0.123
	(0.105)	(0.107)	(0.133)	(0.095)	(0.158)
MIMS activities	0.071	0.140*	0.011	0.124	-0.038
	(0.070)	(0.063)	(0.080)	(0.068)	(0.087)
Country (r.c. France):					
Germany	-0.412**	-0.380*	-1.425***	-1.566***	-0.113
	(0.157)	(0.173)	(0.218)	(0.154)	(0.187)
Italy	0.504**	1.638***	1.047***	-0.538***	1.127***
	(0.167)	(0.169)	(0.182)	(0.160)	(0.190)
Country × SNS activities:					
Germany × SNS activities	0.129	-0.045	0.507**	0.485***	0.229
	(0.142)	(0.148)	(0.194)	(0.135)	(0.198)
Italy × SNS activities	-0.164	-0.085	0.127	0.012	-0.160
	(0.143)	(0.130)	(0.162)	(0.140)	(0.197)
Political information (r.c. Neither):					
Prevalently traditional media	0.058	-0.240	-0.262	-0.205	-0.429*
	(0.193)	(0.189)	(0.223)	(0.172)	(0.206)
Prevalently digital media	0.159	0.229	0.004	0.202	0.272
	(0.248)	(0.223)	(0.272)	(0.211)	(0.240)
Both (traditional/digital)	0.090	-0.054	-0.439*	-0.339*	-0.365*
	(0.176)	(0.164)	(0.199)	(0.155)	(0.180)
Political distrust	0.906***	1.100***	0.615***	0.782***	0.515***
	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.098)	(0.080)	(0.096)
Political interest	0.009	0.129	0.081	-0.506***	-0.412***
	(0.076)	(0.075)	(0.090)	(0.067)	(0.083)
Political discussion	-0.037	0.088	0.275	0.003	0.061
	(0.123)	(0.116)	(0.145)	(0.124)	(0.149)
LR scale (r.c. Not identified):					
Radical left	0.420	0.225	1.166***	-0.368	-0.981**
	(0.247)	(0.221)	(0.253)	(0.241)	(0.332)
Left	-0.309	-0.811***	-0.007	-1.172***	-1.687***
	(0.166)	(0.151)	(0.194)	(0.155)	(0.189)
Centre	-1.311***	-0.889***	-0.424	-1.064***	-1.129***
	(0.222)	(0.166)	(0.229)	(0.165)	(0.180)
Right	0.104	-0.842***	-0.506*	-0.901***	-1.441***
	(0.161)	(0.153)	(0.213)	(0.154)	(0.188)
Radical right	1.374***	-0.938***	0.634*	-0.431	-1.488***
	(0.216)	(0.252)	(0.265)	(0.230)	(0.358)
Female (r.c. Male)	-0.000	-0.274**	-0.045	-0.289**	-0.200
	(0.108)	(0.104)	(0.128)	(0.105)	(0.126)
Age (r.c. 18-24):					
25-34	0.178	0.050	0.015	0.048	-0.627**
	(0.230)	(0.202)	(0.237)	(0.183)	(0.222)
35-44	0.242	0.083	-0.365	-0.437*	-0.556*
	(0.226)	(0.199)	(0.244)	(0.188)	(0.217)
45-54	0.139	-0.145	-0.367	-0.901***	-0.965***
	(0.221)	(0.197)	(0.235)	(0.192)	(0.218)
55-74	0.077	-0.139	-0.426	-1.060***	-0.957***
	(0.219)	(0.194)	(0.231)	(0.190)	(0.217)
Education (r.c. Low):					
Medium	-0.271	-0.171	0.191	-0.459**	-0.077
	(0.146)	(0.141)	(0.192)	(0.142)	(0.168)
High	-0.629***	-0.535***	0.250	-0.580***	-0.334
	(0.163)	(0.157)	(0.204)	(0.157)	(0.194)
Employed (r.c. Not employed)	0.178	0.186	0.130	0.233	0.278
	(0.126)	(0.120)	(0.148)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Intercept	-3.456***	-4.024***	-3.010***	0.999**	0.243
	(0.436)	(0.419)	(0.506)	(0.373)	(0.454)

Note. The reference category is 'mainstream'. Estimates are log-odds. Standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R-sq. = 0.1603. N = 4384. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table A10: Multinomial model predicting vote choice distinguishing between 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties and including the interaction between countries and political activities on MIMS.

	Old	New	Other	Abstained	Residual
SNS activities	0.060	0.250***	0.011	0.077	-0.095
	(0.073)	(0.066)	(0.084)	(0.072)	(0.093)
MIMS activities	0.079	-0.121	-0.156	0.100	-0.032
	(0.105)	(0.119)	(0.133)	(0.091)	(0.156)
Country (r.c. France):					
Germany	-0.349*	-0.562***	-1.213***	-1.412***	-0.055
	(0.150)	(0.161)	(0.205)	(0.149)	(0.181)
Italy	0.430**	1.415***	1.008***	-0.454**	1.088***
	(0.159)	(0.155)	(0.174)	(0.153)	(0.183)
Country × MIMS activities:					
Germany × MIMS activities	0.000	0.300*	0.169	0.204	0.113
	(0.140)	(0.150)	(0.203)	(0.130)	(0.193)
Italy × MIMS activities	-0.056	0.289*	0.203	-0.153	-0.099
	(0.138)	(0.138)	(0.157)	(0.136)	(0.188)
Political information (r.c. Neither):					
Prevalently traditional media	0.052	-0.232	-0.268	-0.212	-0.428*
	(0.193)	(0.188)	(0.222)	(0.172)	(0.206)
Prevalently digital media	0.165	0.242	0.018	0.219	0.287
	(0.248)	(0.223)	(0.271)	(0.211)	(0.240)
Both (traditional/digital)	0.093	-0.036	-0.430*	-0.336*	-0.359*
	(0.176)	(0.164)	(0.199)	(0.155)	(0.179)
Political distrust	0.902***	1.100***	0.612***	0.782***	0.515***
	(0.083)	(0.080)	(0.098)	(0.080)	(0.096)
Political interest	0.002	0.121	0.069	-0.509***	-0.419***
	(0.076)	(0.074)	(0.090)	(0.067)	(0.083)
Political discussion	-0.031	0.090	0.278	0.003	0.062
	(0.123)	(0.116)	(0.145)	(0.124)	(0.149)
LR scale (r.c. Not identified):					
Radical left	0.427	0.246	1.180***	-0.372	-0.976**
	(0.247)	(0.221)	(0.253)	(0.241)	(0.332)
Left	-0.306	-0.811***	-0.003	-1.176***	-1.688***
	(0.166)	(0.151)	(0.193)	(0.154)	(0.189)
Centre	-1.317***	-0.886***	-0.439	-1.078***	-1.135***
	(0.222)	(0.166)	(0.228)	(0.165)	(0.180)
Right	0.110	-0.836***	-0.499*	-0.905***	-1.441***
	(0.161)	(0.153)	(0.212)	(0.153)	(0.188)
Radical right	1.377***	-0.927***	0.640*	-0.442	-1.492***
	(0.216)	(0.253)	(0.265)	(0.230)	(0.358)
Female (r.c. Male)	-0.001	-0.277**	-0.039	-0.280**	-0.197
	(0.108)	(0.104)	(0.128)	(0.105)	(0.126)
Age (r.c. 18-24):					
25-34	0.177	0.045	0.014	0.040	-0.638**
	(0.230)	(0.203)	(0.237)	(0.183)	(0.221)
35-44	0.242	0.086	-0.355	-0.434*	-0.559**
	(0.226)	(0.201)	(0.244)	(0.188)	(0.217)
45-54	0.137	-0.152	-0.369	-0.896***	-0.975***
	(0.221)	(0.198)	(0.235)	(0.191)	(0.218)
55-74	0.073	-0.151	-0.428	-1.047***	-0.964***
	(0.219)	(0.195)	(0.230)	(0.190)	(0.217)
Education (r.c. Low):					
Medium	-0.274	-0.191	0.183	-0.454**	-0.085
	(0.146)	(0.141)	(0.192)	(0.142)	(0.168)
High	-0.633***	-0.536***	0.248	-0.585***	-0.339
	(0.163)	(0.157)	(0.204)	(0.157)	(0.194)
Employed (r.c. Not employed)	0.179	0.196	0.135	0.226	0.279
	(0.126)	(0.120)	(0.148)	(0.123)	(0.144)
Intercept	-3.435***	-3.870***	-3.017***	0.945*	0.249
	(0.434)	(0.417)	(0.505)	(0.372)	(0.453)

Note. The reference category is 'mainstream'. Estimates are log-odds. Standard errors in parentheses. Pseudo R-sq. = 0.1598. N = 4384. Sig.: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Figure A1: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream or populist parties or making other vote choices, with 95% confidence intervals. The AMEs are estimated from models specified as in Table A5. The scales measuring activities on SNS and MIMS exclude the items capturing discussion. The additive scale sums the number of activities; the dichotomous scale measures whether either activity was performed.

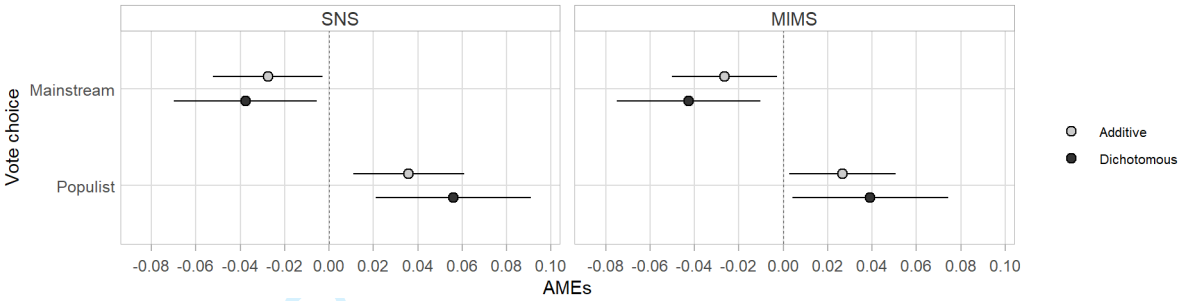


Figure A2: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream, 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties or making other vote choices, with 95% confidence intervals. The AMEs are estimated from models specified as in Table A6. The scales measuring activities on SNS and MIMS exclude the items capturing discussion. The additive scale sums the number of activities; the dichotomous scale measures whether either activity was performed.

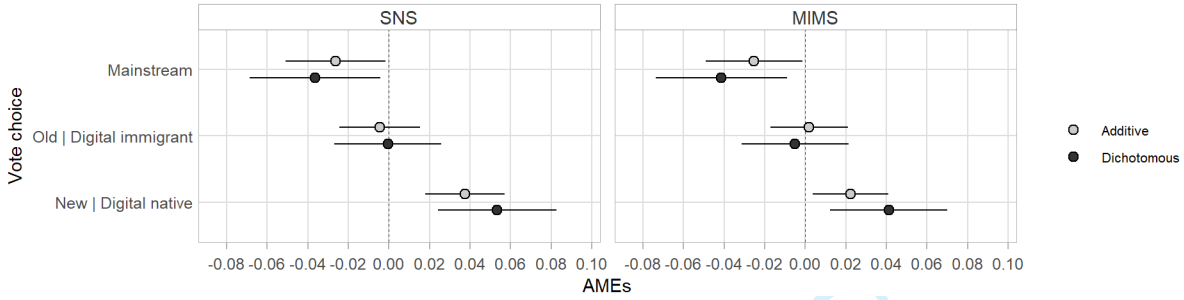


Figure A3: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream or populist parties in France, Germany and Italy, with 95% confidence intervals. The AMEs are estimated from models specified as in Tables A7-A8. The scales measuring activities on SNS and MIMS exclude the items capturing discussion. The additive scale sums the number of activities; the dichotomous scale measures whether either activity was performed.

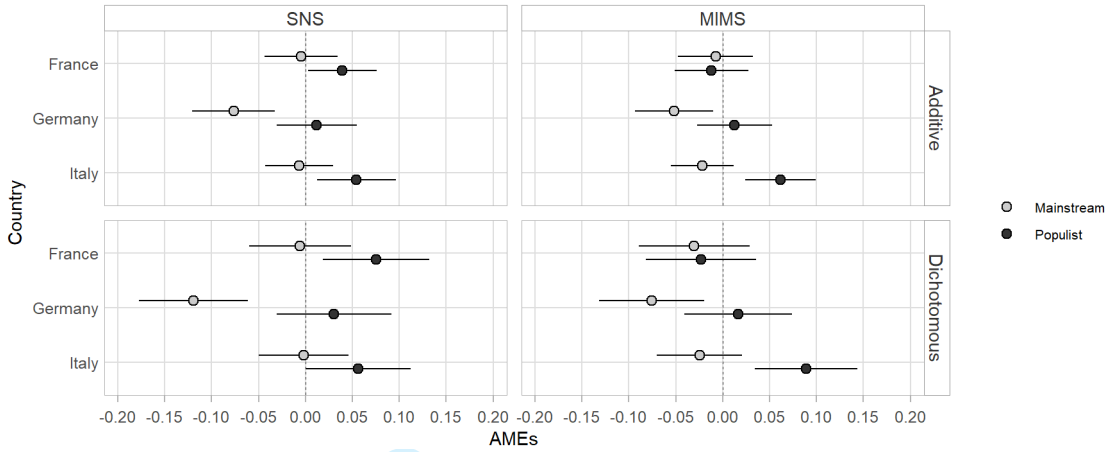


Figure A4: The average marginal effects of using SNS and MIMS for political activity on the probability of voting for mainstream, 'old' – 'digital immigrant' – or 'new' – 'digital native' – populist parties in France, Germany and Italy, with 95% confidence intervals. The AMEs are estimated from models specified as in Tables A9-A10. The scales measuring activities on SNS and MIMS exclude the items capturing discussion. The additive scale sums the number of activities; the dichotomous scale measures whether either activity was performed.