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Good Workers and Crooked Bosses: The Effect of Voice Suppression by Supervisors on Employees' Populist Attitudes and Voting

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This study is the first to explore the effect of political socialization in the workplace on populist attitudes. We investigate the effect of workplace voice suppression on employees' populist attitudes and voting. We expect employees who were suppressed by supervisors to hold more populist attitudes and to be more likely to vote for a populist party than employees who were not. We argue that some employees experience voice suppression by supervisors as stressful, so splitting is likely to be employed as a defense mechanism. Splitting is achieved through cognitive distinction and antagonism between "the good workers" and "the crooked bosses." Such a split mental framework can generalize into a worldview that contrasts "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite," a core characteristic of populism. We predict that the extent to which suppression triggers splitting and consequentially incites populist attitudes and voting depends on employees' acceptance of power distance. We test our hypotheses using SEM on survey data from 2990 members of the Dutch labor force. Our results show that experiences of voice suppression are positively related to populist attitudes and populist voting. As expected, this effect is stronger for employees who are less accepting of power distance.

KEY WORDS: populism, splitting, power distance, employee voice suppression, workplace political socialization, generalization

In this article, we focus on day-to-day formative social interactions at the workplace as a source of populist attitudes and voting. Populism has been on the rise over the past decades (Mudde, 2004), especially over the last few years. The year 2017 was often referred to in the media as "the year of populism" (Esler, 2017; Fossett, 2017). The most successful populist campaigns, the U.S. presidential campaign and the U.K. Brexit campaign, articulated the concerns of "the common people." In 2018, populist parties won the parliamentary majority in Italy (Five Star Movement, Lega Nord) and

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Hungary (Fidesz). In the Netherlands, where our study was conducted, before 2002 populist parties held at most about 5% of the seats in parliament (Van Kessel, 2011). The parliamentary elections of 2017 resulted with three Dutch populist parties, the Party for Freedom (PVV), the Socialist Party (SP), and Forum for Democracy (FvD), holding 24% of parliamentary seats.

Parallel with this growing importance of populism in contemporary politics, there is a growing body of research on populism. Scholars have attempted to explain variation in populist attitudes among voters, either by psychological factors such as personality traits (Bakker, Rooduijn, & Schumacher, 2016; Fatke, 2019); a person's position in society, for example, educational level (Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016) and socioeconomic position (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016); or by its correlates with other political attitudes, such as satisfaction with democracy and political trust (Akkerman, Zaslove, & Spruyt, 2017), institutional trust (Doyle, 2011), and satisfaction with government and immigrant tolerance (Rooduijn, 2018).

To explain the recent *rise* of populism, some research examines broad social factors that changed over the recent years, including globalization (Rodrik, 2018), economic inequality and conflicting cultural values (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). Building on this approach, we theorize that recent labor-market changes could also help explaining the rise of populism. Arguably, changes in the nature of work, for example, the growth of the service sector, have led to an increase in horizontal divisions compared to traditional hierarchical class divisions (cf. Oesch, 2006). At the same time, globalization, technological developments, and labor-market flexibilization have changed the position of workers towards employers (Kalleberg, 2013). These developments, together with a decline in collective voice—most notably the decline in union density (Bryson, Ebbinghaus, & Visser, 2011)—left many workers in precarious positions (Moore, 2017) and made the conditions for voicing discontent at work more difficult. As such, workers who want to address discontent at work are in a more vulnerable position now than in previous decades.

Because of this vulnerability, workers who voice their discontent are more prone to suppression of voice by their supervisors. We argue that the experience of supervisor voice suppression, being a reflection of workplace power relations, will influence populist attitudes and voting. As such, we study the potential political consequences of current labor-market developments. By focusing on workplace social interactions, we unravel one of the underlying microlevel mechanisms that might explain the connection between precarization due to globalization and populism as suggested by the winners and losers of globalization hypotheses (Mughan, Bean, & McAllister, 2003). Our research question is: "How does workplace voice suppression by supervisors affect employees' populist attitudes and populist voting?" We test our hypotheses using SEM on survey data from 2990 members of the Dutch labor force.

Theory

What Underlies Populist Attitudes and Voting?

In our article, we follow the conceptualization of populism as "a thin-centered ideology" (Mudde, 2007, p. 23) connected to "thick" ideologies such as socialism, nationalism, and neo-liberalism (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013; Weyland, 1996; Zaslove, 2008). From this perspective, populism lacks a universal ideological core but rather provides a mental frame for thinking about politics. The rhetoric of populist parties is based on the conflict between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite," even though different populist parties define these groups differently (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). Furthermore, populist leaders argue that political power should reside in the hands of those who they posit are "the pure people." These two elements constitute the current dominant definition of populism as an "ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). Juxtapositioning the people and the elite in such a way is a reflection of a Manichean worldview, typical for populist rhetoric, which focuses on the constant battle between good and evil (Hawkins, 2009). The content of populist attitudes reflects this ideological thin core: the conflict between the people and the elite and popular sovereignty ambition. From the perspective of populism as a thin-centered ideology, populist attitudes thus mediate the relationship between populist voting and its antecedents.

Some research explains populist attitudes and voting by static individual-level factors, mainly focusing on one of two elements: the role of personality traits or the role of a person's position in society. Concerning personality traits, research in this direction has found that populist attitudes are partly rooted in basic personality traits, such as low Agreeableness (Bakker et al., 2016), low Openness to Experience (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012), and other aspects of the Big Five personality traits (Fatke, 2019). Although these studies sometimes result in contradictory findings, or findings that differ between countries (cf. Fatke, 2019), they indicate that personality is somehow related to populist attitudes. This is in line with the behavioral genetics approach which argues that political attitudes are partly heritable and that the effect of genetic predisposition on political attitudes might be indirect, mediated by personality traits (Bell, Schermer, & Vernon, 2009).

As for a person's position in society, the most extensively studied indicators are educational attainment and economic position. A negative relation is found for both (Arzheimer, 2009; Spruyt et al., 2016), which might be because populism reduces the "personal vulnerability," in terms of societal power distribution, of people with lower educational attainment, and a weak economic position (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016, p. 115). In addition to such instrumental motives, several other explanations are suggested for the relation between one's structural social position and the preference for populist parties. These explanations typically focus on correlates of the structural position, like cognitive skills development (Inglehart & Norris, 2016); increased political interest and political efficacy (Spruyt et al., 2016); or the idea that a low economic status sets off a negative affect towards the privileged elite (Hawkins et al., 2012).

Although research findings support the relation of both personality traits and a person's social position to populism, there are also indications that these relations are more nuanced than might be assumed at first. Concerning personality traits, while there is consensus on the idea that people have genetic predispositions for certain core political values, there is widespread agreement on the idea that the manifestation of these predispositions depends on the (sociopolitical) context (Funk et al., 2013). Similarly, it is argued that a person's structural position in society is more likely to result in populist attitudes and support for populist parties in certain societal contexts. The latter is echoed by another strand in the literature on the antecedents of populist attitudes and voting, which focuses on certain societal contexts that may incite populist attitudes. These societal contexts are, for example, circumstances that spur economic and cultural threat (Inglehart & Norris, 2016), corruption (Hawkins, Read, & Pauwels, 2017), and relative deprivation (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016).

While this focus on social context leaves room for a more dynamic approach to populism, what is still missing in the literature is a focus on the microlevel mechanisms that capture the lived experience of these macrolevel contexts. It may, for example, be true that those in a vulnerable position in society are more likely to be confronted with microlevel social interactions that make the power relations that underlie their vulnerable position in society visible and tangible. In our study, we focus on one of the quintessential microlevel contexts for such everyday life interaction: the workplace. In particular, interactions with supervisors can function as a form of political socialization into ideas about those in power (elites), compared to those who are being overpowered (the people). In what follows we develop a theory on the political socialization effect of suppression of voice by the supervisor.

Workplace Political Socialization

Our approach draws upon political socialization theory. Political socialization is the "process by which individuals learn and frequently internalize a political lens framing their perceptions of how power is arranged and how the world around them is (and should be) organized; those perceptions, in turn, shape and define individuals' definitions of who they are and how they should behave in the political and economic institutions in which they live" (Glasberg & Shannon, 2011, p. 47). Political socialization was traditionally thought to take place during childhood and adolescence. Currently, the consensus is that a certain degree of malleability in political attitudes and behavior is expected in adulthood (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995; Sigel, 1989).

The process of political socialization occurs through agents of political socialization that influence people's political knowledge, feelings, evaluations, and ultimately, orientations (Dawson & Prewitt, 1968). Such agents include (but are not limited to): families, education, religion, media, peers, political structures and processes, and employment structures and processes (Dekker & Meyenberg, 1991). Our article focuses on the latter agent of political socialization: the workplace.

The workplace imposes a crucial source of adult political socialization, not only because work is very time consuming and potentially allows for a large number of social interactions, but also because workplace power relations often resemble those in society (Glasberg & Shannon, 2011; Sobel, 1993). We identify two parallels between the workplace and the political realm that enable the "spillover" from work to politics. First, the workplace is often characterized by power disparity due to hierarchical occupational structures (Elliott & Smith, 2004). The unequal distribution of power at the workplace resembles the unequal distribution of power in society, making the workplace a formative environment for learning about power relations. Second, workplace voice is analogous to political voice, as both are essentially actions aimed to change the outcomes at work or in society, respectively. As such, while previous research on workplace political socialization focused on the spillover from participation at the workplace to political participation (Greenberg, Grunberg, & Daniel, 1996; Pateman, 1970; Sobel, 1993), we argue that attitudes about organizational hierarchy and power formed at the workplace can spill over to political attitudes, which are by definition concerned with hierarchy and power.

In general, social power is defined as the ability to influence others (French, Raven, & Cartwright, 1959). Similarly, power within organizations is considered to be the ability to affect organizational outcomes, including other people in the organization (Clegg, Courpasson, & Phillips, 2006). However, according to Clegg and colleagues (2006), when studying power, the focus should not be on the outcomes but rather on the social interactions, as "power is inseparable of interaction" (p. 6). Therefore, we focus on the social interactions between employees and supervisors, arguing that this is where workplace power relations are the most evident. Specifically, we investigate *voice suppression by supervisors* as a quintessential social interaction reflecting power structures of the workplace. Thus, in contrast with previous workplace-socialization research that mainly focuses on structural workplace characteristics (e.g., Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014), we focus on the political socialization through formative interactions at work (see Mutz & Mondak, 2006). This approach is more apt for our research that seeks to explain populism as a dynamic phenomenon, since workplace interactions, as opposed to workplace structure, are more likely subject to change.

Voice Suppression by Supervisor as a Formative Interaction

When employees have an issue at work, they have at least two options within their power to change the outcomes: first, to leave the organization, and second, to use their voice directed at those who control the outcomes (Bacharach & Bamberger, 2004). We define employee voice as any activity of individual employees, groups of employees, or their representatives who are aimed at improving either personal work conditions or the work conditions of an entire group. Examples of such activities include discussing the issue with the supervisor or HR department, submitting a formal complaint, or starting collective action. The phenomenon of voice and responses to it can be understood as indicators of power differences at the workplace. Voice suppression signals overpowering (e.g., by ignoring or punishing the employee) which is made possible by the power disparity between the suppressor and the suppressed. Therefore, experiencing workplace voice suppression by supervisors conveys information about power disparity in the workplace. This might make the notion of power disparity between different groups of people more salient for the suppressed employees, therefore affecting political attitudes.

Given the similarities between the workplace and the political realm, voice suppression by supervisors can be considered a source of indirect political socialization, meaning the acquisition of attitudes and behaviors that are not in themselves political but influence political attitudes and behaviors (Dekker & Meyenberg, 1991). In case of voice suppression by supervisors, this experience may affect employees' attitudes towards the supervisors, which could then affect attitudes towards the powerful elites in general through the process of generalization (Prewitt, Dawson, & Dawson, 1977). Generalization entails the transposition of values, attitudes, and behaviors developed in one social context to other contexts (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978). Following these notions from generalization theory, we propose that mental frames affected by workplace socialization generalize to mental frames used to think about politics. Specifically, we expect that the split view between the people and the elite generalizes from the workplace to the broader sociopolitical context. In the following section, we develop our theoretical model and specify the hypotheses.

Psycho-Social Effects of Workplace Voice Suppression by Supervisors

Voice suppression by the supervisor conveys not only information about power disparity in the workplace, but it can also be considered a form of conflict, as it implies a discord between the employee and the supervisor. As such, voice suppression by supervisors can represent a stressful event for employees. Employees must integrate this event into existing self-evaluations and their evaluations of the supervisor. Some might find it difficult to integrate the negative evaluations of supervisors that arose due to suppression with the respect they are conditioned to regard for them as workplace authorities. Moreover, employees might struggle to integrate suppression (especially in the form of critique or punishment) with their evaluations of themselves as good employees. As a result of these contradicting evaluations and the confrontational character of suppression, suppressed employees may experience cognitive dissonance and anxiety. Holding contradicting evaluations about oneself or the supervisor is a form of cognitive dissonance, an uncomfortable, anxiety-inducing mental state (Menasco & Hawkins, 1978; Oshikawa, 1972). Anxiety can also arise unrelated to cognitive dissonance, simply as a consequence of the notion that employees cannot control their environment (as they attempted through voicing their discontent).

To alleviate these uncomfortable internal experiences that arise from suppression, employees can employ psychological coping mechanisms. Coping refers to behavior that protects people from being psychologically harmed by problematic social experiences (Pearlin & Schooler, 1978). One such coping mechanism that can be particularly useful for alleviating anxiety in cases of cognitive dissonance caused by voice suppression is *splitting* (also known as "black and white thinking"). Splitting is the polarization of persons into "good and bad" by focusing selectively on their positive or negative attributes (Burton, 2012). Splitting one's perceptions of others as fundamentally either good or bad might help ease the anxiety and keep ambivalence at bay (Gerson, 1984). Rather than extensively using mental resources to comprehend the complexity of the social situation, it might be easier for suppressed employees to hold simplified evaluations: absolutely positive about the workers and absolutely negative about the supervisors. Splitting in this case helps to reduce anxiety and the cognitive load needed to process the suppression event. In some organizations, it may also be adaptive, as it can help employees navigate the organizational setting by staying weary of the "crooked bosses" and siding with the "good workers."

Considering that the hierarchical structures of society and the workplace are comparable with regards to the unequal distribution of power and its consequences for the voices of the less powerful, the split view of the workplace triggered by suppression could easily generalize to a Manichean view of politics. In other words, splitting between the good people and the corrupt elite—a core characteristic of populism—triggered by supervisor suppression at work could generalize to the political realm, thereby forming populist attitudes. Therefore, we expect that:

> *H1*: Employees who experienced voice suppression by supervisors hold more populist attitudes than employees who voiced their discontent but did not experience suppression.

However, we expect that the degree to which voice suppression incites populist attitudes depends on employees' beliefs about power and the proper distribution thereof. While some may believe power in the organization should be equally distributed, others may believe large differences in power are justified and even necessary. Such beliefs regarding power distribution are encompassed in the concept of *power distance*, a cultural value internalized by individuals to varying degrees (Hofstede, 1985), describing the extent to which individuals accept large differences in power and feel authorities should be respected and shown deference (Kirkman, Chen, Farh, Chen, & Lowe, 2009). Those individuals who are less accepting of large differences in power are low on power distance, while those who are more accepting of large differences in power are high on power distance.

With these individual differences in mind, we predict suppression of voice by supervisors will be experienced differently depending on an employee's acceptance of power distance. Power distance as a value guides the interpretation of social events, especially those that signal discrepancy in power. For example, several studies show that the influence of procedural justice on employee outcomes (such as job satisfaction, performance, and absenteeism) may be bounded by employees' acceptance of power distance (Lam, Schaubroeck, & Aryee, 2002; Lee, Pillutla, & Law, 2000; Yang, Mossholder, & Peng, 2007). Similarly, the effect of voice suppression on populist attitudes may depend on employees' acceptance of power distance. Suppression of one's voice by a more powerful employer is for people high on power distance a "normal," justified expression of the social order. Consequently, the higher on power distance employees are, the less cognitive dissonance is caused by suppression, and therefore there is less need for splitting as a coping mechanism. Thus, we predict that suppression is less likely to increase populist attitudes the higher on power distance employees are. On the other hand, for employees low on power distance, suppression by supervisors goes against their values and would therefore more likely be perceived as a conflict. Such an interpretation would likely cause cognitive dissonance and anxiety that lead to splitting. Finally, for these employees, splitting between the good workers and the bad bosses could generalize to splitting between the pure people and the corrupt elite, ultimately increasing populist attitudes. Therefore, we hypothesize:

> *H2*: There is a negative moderating effect of power distance on the relationship between suppression and populist attitudes.

So far, we argued that suppression by supervisors leads to an increase in populist attitudes depending on employees' a priori level of power distance. Furthermore, following the work of Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014), we argue that populist attitudes increase the probability of populist voting. This causal chain is in line with the well-known value → attitude → behavior hierarchy, which posits that core values are reflected in attitudes towards specific people or objects, and these attitudes direct behaviors (Homer & Kahle, 1988; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). Although attitudes and behaviors are generally aligned, when it comes to political attitudes and voting behavior, this concordance is weaker because of the many factors influencing voting behavior, such as party identification or personal interest in specific political issues discussed by the political candidates (Sears, Lau, Tyler, & Allen, 1980). Thus, to examine to what extent suppression by the employer affects voting for populist parties, we include populist voting as the ultimate dependent in the model and hypothesize:

> *H3*: The more populist attitudes employees hold, the more likely they will be to vote for populist parties.

In sum, as presented in Figure 1, we expect that voice suppression by supervisors increases the likelihood of employees' populist voting by triggering populist attitudes. This effect is weaker the more employees accept power distance.

Methodology

Data

We used the Work and Politics 2017 survey, designed for this article, to test the effect of voice suppression by supervisors on employees' populist attitudes and behavior. The data was collected using TNS NIPObase, a panel of 135,000 respondents in the Netherlands. From this panel, 7599 respondents were selected to ensure representativeness of the Dutch labor force with regards to gender, age, education, and work situation. From this sample, we excluded those who did not work in the past 3 years, those who did not experience an issue at work in the past 3 years, and those whose supervisor was unaware of their voice (because they voiced their issues to other actors). Finally, we excluded 85 employees who experienced both suppressive and supportive responses to their voice by their supervisors due to the unpredictable consequences of such contradicting reactions to voice. This selection left 3257 respondents in our sample, allowing for a comparison of employees who were in the same position regarding experiencing a work-related issue and voicing their discontent but differ in having experienced suppression by the supervisor as a response to that voice.

Measures

When employees voice their discontent, supervisors can react in several ways: They can support voicing, react neutrally, or suppress voicing. To assess employee voice suppression by supervisors, the independent variable, respondents were first asked whether they experienced an issue at work

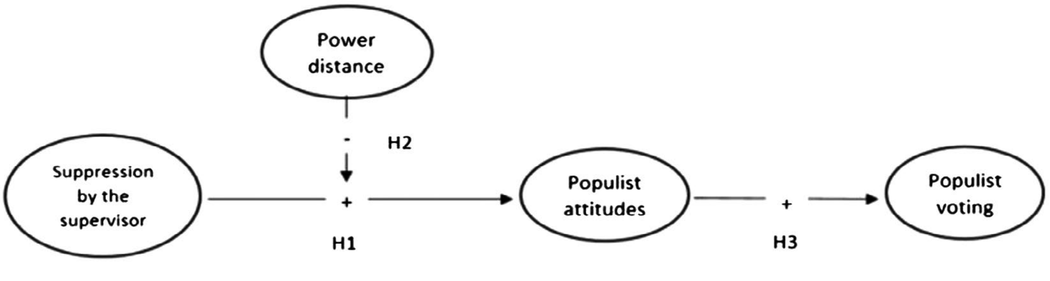

Figure 1. Hypothesized effect of suppression on populist voting.

in the past 3 years. Respondents could indicate multiple issues and were asked to keep their most important issue in mind for subsequent questions. Respondents who experienced an issue were subsequently presented with 12 instances of voice (e.g., voicing to supervisors, coworkers, a union representative, a lawyer, etc.), as well as an opportunity to describe their own experience of voice in case it was not covered by the items. Respondents who voiced an issue were then asked: "After you voiced the issue, did that result in one of the following responses by your supervisor?" Respondents could choose one of the answers from the list or describe a different suppression experience. Reported supervisors' responses to voice were grouped in three categories: voice support ("solved the issue" or "complimented me"), neutral ("gave a good explanation of the issue"), and suppression ("ignored or punished me"; for the full list, see the appendix in the online supporting information). A dummy variable was used as an indicator of suppression by supervisors. Respondents who experienced any of the supervisors' responses from the suppression category were assigned 1, and those who did not experience any were assigned 0. Thus, the suppression variable represents whether or not employees experienced voice suppression by the supervisor at least once in the last 3 years.

To measure power distance, we used three items that tap into beliefs about the distribution of power in the workplace. The items were selected and adapted from Farh, Hackett, and Liang (2007), with a reliability of Cronbach's alpha = .69, which is typical for value measures (Peterson, 1994).

POWD1	The management should make most decisions without employees' involvement.
POWD2	It is necessary that managers often use authority in dealing with employees.
POWD3	Employees who disagree with the management must not express this openly.

For measuring populist attitudes, an existing scale validated in the Netherlands (and beyond) was used (Akkerman et al., 2014). The scale consists of six items and is based on the definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology. The populism scale demonstrated good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .84).

POP1	Politicians in Parliament must be guided by the opinion of the people.
POP2	The main political decisions should be made by the people and not by politicians.
POP3	The political differences between the elite and ordinary citizens are greater than between citizens.
POP4	I prefer to be represented by an ordinary citizen than by a professional politician.
POP5	Politicians talk too much and do too little.
POP6	In politics, making compromises is often a different word for betraying your principles.

Finally, to measure populist voting, we asked respondents to indicate who they voted for in the previous parliamentary elections (2017).[1] Two Dutch political parties are usually classified as right-wing populist parties: The PVV and FvD. Both parties owe their right-wing reputation to anti-immigration policies and Euroskepticism. They also both advocate that "the people," whom they consider to be native Dutch citizens, should hold political power rather than the corrupt political elite. However, while PVV economically leans left and is best described as promoting welfare chauvinism, FvD holds a right-libertarian position. On the other side of the political spectrum, there is the SP, usually classified as left populist. Firmly rooted in a leftist economic tradition, SP posits the workers as "the people" in contrast to "the elite," who they consider to be big businesses. Although populist tendencies of SP lately decreased, it is still generally considered a populist left-wing party because of its rhetoric (Akkerman et al., 2017). Respondents who indicated that they voted for one of the three populist parties were assigned 1 on the populist voting dummy variable. Respondents who did not vote for any of the three populist parties (or indicated that they did not vote or cast a blank vote) were assigned 0.[2]

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[1] While the elections were held in March 2017, data collection occurred several months later (June to September) in order to measure actual voting behavior. It is thus possible that some respondents experienced suppression after the election. It is, however, unlikely that this heavily affects our findings: First, we have no theoretical reasons to expect that voting for a populist party increases the chance of getting suppressed at work, making reversed causality unlikely. Second, the likelihood of suppression occurring in the several months following the election is considerably smaller than the likelihood of it occurring in the 3 years before.

Additionally, data on household income, education (low, middle, and high), ethnic background (native, Western migrant, and non-Western migrant), gender, age, and contract type (standard, flexible, or solo self-employed) was collected to control for the confounding effects of these variables.

Data inspection revealed missing values for several socially sensitive variables, specifically, income (22.5%), populist voting (7.2%), and ethnic background (2.2%). No missing values were associated with any of the other variables. This pattern of missing values reveals that the data are not missing completely at random. Rather, the propensity of the missing data might depend on other observed values or on the content of the missing value itself. In such cases, listwise deletion might lead to biased estimations. Alternatively, some authors recommend imputation of the missing values based on the collected data (Donders, van der Heijden, Stijnen, & Moons, 2006). However, considering that in this case values are missing for variables that are notoriously difficult to predict, we opt for excluding income (the variable with the most missings) as a control variable[3] from the analysis and listwise deletion according to missing values on populist voting and ethnic background, leaving 2990 respondents in the testing of the hypothesized model.

Data Analysis

We test the model using structural equation modeling (SEM), with the Lavaan package in R (Rosseel, 2012). SEM is an appropriate method for testing our hypotheses, because rather than testing relationships between variables separately, this method considers the model as an integrated system of equations and estimates all coefficients directly (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989). This allows for the same variable to be simultaneously dependent and independent, thereby providing a favorable way to test hypotheses regarding causal processes. Additionally, it allows for a more accurate use of the information gathered by all scale items, as it uses confirmatory factor analysis and factor loadings rather than a mean-scale product.

The parameters were estimated using diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS), a robust estimator that does not assume multivariate normality. Since our ultimate dependent variable (populist voting) is categorical and the multivariate normality assumption is therefore violated, DWLS was the appropriate choice of an estimator (Mindrila, 2010).

Results

First, descriptive statistics are shown in Table 1 and correlations between variables in Table 2.

Before employing structural equation modeling to test our model, we used confirmatory factor analysis to assess the fit of the measurement model containing two latent variables. Fit indices of this measurement model are presented in Table 3, and the measurement model with estimated factor loadings is presented in Figure 2.

As presented in Table 3, fit indices suggest a good fit, except for χ^2, which is most likely inflated due to the large sample size. Since χ^2 is the original fit index and is the basis for most other fit indices, it is usually reported in SEM results sections. However, as χ^2 depends on variable distributions, sample size, and the number of variables in the model, it should always be interpreted with caution

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[2] Answers “couldn’t vote” and “don’t remember/don’t want to say” were treated as missing.

[3] Controlling for income increases the magnitude of the hypothesized effects. However, since including it in the analysis paired with listwise deletion excludes a big part of the sample on potentially biased (not missing completely at random) criteria, we opt for an approach that is more conservative with regards to our hypotheses, that is, not controlling for income.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Min	Max	M/%	SD
Suppression (1 = experienced)	2990	0.00	1.00	24.48%	
POP1	2990	1.00	5.00	3.62	0.87
POP2	2990	1.00	5.00	2.92	1.03
POP3	2990	1.00	5.00	3.31	0.89
POP4	2990	1.00	5.00	2.87	0.98
POP5	2990	1.00	5.00	3.52	0.98
POP6	2990	1.00	5.00	3.01	1.08
Populist vote (1 = voted for a populist party)	2990	0.00	1.00	23.51%	
POWD1	2990	1.00	5.00	2.01	0.88
POWD2	2990	1.00	5.00	2.37	0.96
POWD3	2990	1.00	5.00	1.99	0.87
Standard contract	2990	0.00	1.00	76.29%	
Flexible contract	2990	0.00	1.00	21.10%	
Solo self-employed (SSE) contract	2990	0.00	1.00	2.61%	
Low level education	2990	0.00	1.00	7.02%	
Middle level education	2990	0.00	1.00	43.98%	
High level education	2990	0.00	1.00	49.00%	
Age (0 = 15 years)	2990	0.00	52.00	26.37	12.31
Gender (woman = 1)	2990	0.00	1.00	49.50%	
Native Dutch	2990	0.00	1.00	91.44%	
Western migrant	2990	0.00	1.00	5.18%	
Nonwestern migrant	2990	0.00	1.00	3.38%	

and combined with other fit indices (Kline, 2011). The RMSEA and SRMR avoid these problems and are therefore more commonly used. In this case, both of these values are lower than .05, which indicates a good model fit (Schermelleh-Engel & Moosbrugger, 2003). Incremental fit indices, such as TLI and CFI, indicate a better fit the closer they are to 1. In this case, both are above .95, indicating a good fit (Hooper, Coughlan, & Mullen, 2008). We conclude that the measurement model is valid and proceed to test the hypothesized model.

Testing the hypothesized model resulted in the path diagram shown on Figure 3 and the fit indices shown in Table 4. It should be noted that Lance's (1988) residual centering technique was used in order to test the model. Usually, moderation effects are tested in SEM by introducing a product term. However, this produces multicollinearity, which can lead to inflated standard errors and unstable regression estimates. Residual centering, on the other hand, allows introducing a product term that does not correlate with its component parts (see Fig. 3) and is therefore the recommended approach (Little, Bovaird, & Widaman, 2006; Steinmetz, Davidov, & Schmidt, 2011). Thus, to avoid multicollinearity and the estimation issues this can cause, we used residual centering when modeling the moderation effect.

The fit indices presented in Table 4 indicate that the model describes the data well (RMSEA and SRMR lower than .05 and TLI and CFI higher than .95). The only fit index that is not consistent with the others is χ^2, which is significant, likely due to the large sample size (as it was already significant in the measurement model, as shown in Table 3). Furthermore, the paths shown in Figure 3, which can be interpreted as standardized regression paths, are all significant and in the expected direction, thereby elaborating the trends already noticed in the correlation matrix (Table 2). Thus, we accept the hypothesized model, thereby confirming all hypotheses. We proceed to examine the indirect paths of the hypothesized model (Table 5) to assess whether suppression ultimately affects populist voting.

Table 5 shows that there are significant indirect effects of having experienced suppression by supervisors in the last 3 years on populist voting, with populist attitudes as a mediator. Furthermore,

Table 2. Correlation Matrix

	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
1. Suppression	1														
2. Populist attitudes	.090***	1													
3. Populist voting	.040*	.379***	1												
4. Power distance	−.045*	−.054**	.007	1											
5. Standard contract	−.020	.053**	−.036*	.054**	1										
6. Flex. contract	.016	.046**	.042*	.051*	−.930***	1									
7. SSE contract	.013	.024	−.012	.015	−.285***	−.088***	1								
8. Edu. low	.052**	.162***	.172***	.027	−.066***	.059**	.025	1							
9. Edu. middle	−.012	.226***	.170***	.054**	.012	−.004	−.022	−.257***	1						
10. Edu. high	−.016	−.311***	−.256***	−.068***	.023	−.027	.008	−.278***	−.857***	1					
11. Age	.048**	.055**	.018	−.156***	.215***	−.224***	.001	.011	.066***	−.071***	1				
12. Gender	−.021	−.058**	−.058**	−.092***	.011	.016	−.072***	−.091***	−.027	.075***	−.106***	1			
13. Native	−.013	−.032	−.023	−.023	.053**	−.051**	−.011	.019	.026	.036	.050**	.000	1		
14. Western	.007	−.013	.009	.003	−.026**	.021	.014	−.021	−.021	.033	.000	−.001	−.760***	1	
15. Nonwestern	.012	.033	−.001	.032	−.050	.052**	.000	−.005	−.013	.016	−.077***	.001	−.616***	−.044**	1

Note. As opposed to Table 1, which includes item-level descriptives, in Table 2, correlations of populist attitudes and power distance are obtained using a mean product of those scales rather than the items that they consist of for an easier overview.

$*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Table 3. Fit Indices of the Measurement Model, $N = 3257$

χ^2	187.473 ($p < .000$)
Df	26
RMSEA	.042
RMSEA 90% conf. int.	.037–.048
SRMR	.038
CFI	.984
TLI	.978

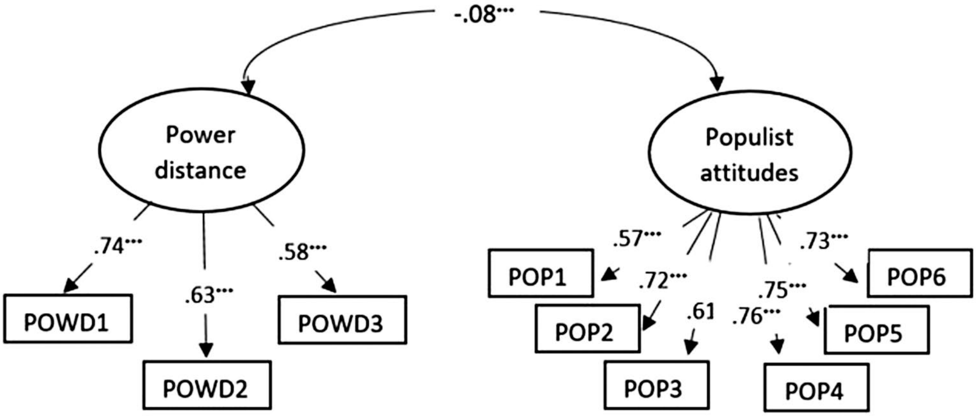
-.08***
Power distance
Populist attitudes
.74***
.63***
.58***
POWD1
POWD2
POWD3
.57***
.72***
.61
.76***
.75***
.73***
POP1
POP2
POP3
POP4
POP5
POP6

Figure 2. Path diagram of the measurement model. $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

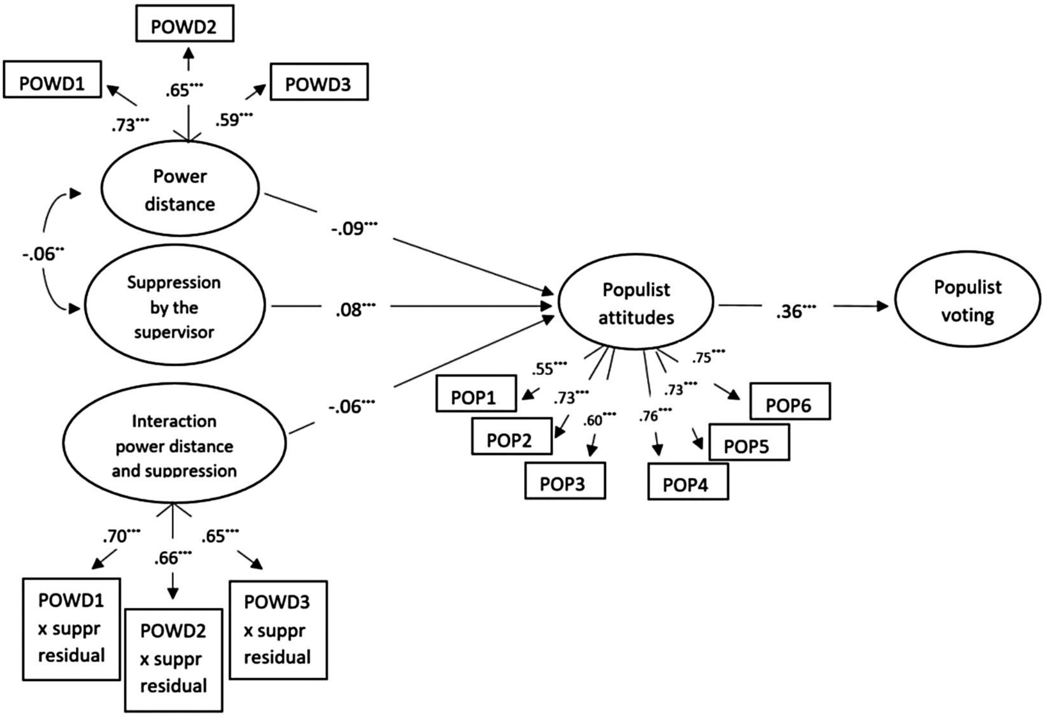
POWD2
POWD1
POWD3
.65***
.73***
.59***
Power distance
-.06**
Suppression by the supervisor
Interaction power distance and suppression
-.09***
.08***
-.06***
Populist attitudes
.36***
Populist voting
.55***
.73***
.60***
.76***
.73***
.75***
POP1
POP2
POP3
POP4
POP5
POP6
.70***
.66***
.65***
POWD1 x suppr residual
POWD2 x suppr residual
POWD3 x suppr residual

Figure 3. Path diagram of the hypothesized model, standardized estimates. Control variables included in the analysis but not visible in the figure. $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Table 4. Fit Indices for the Hypothesized Model, $N = 2990$

	Hypothesized Model
χ^2	287.961 ($p < .000$)
df	146
RMSEA	.018
RMSEA 90% conf. int.	.015–.021
SRMR	.021
CFI	.989
TLI	.985

there is a significant indirect effect of the interaction between power distance and suppression on populist voting (also through populist attitudes as a mediator).

In order to better understand the moderating role of power distance, we presented the interaction effect of power distance and suppression on populist attitudes graphically (Fig. 4). We divided our sample into three groups: low, medium, and high on power distance. Respondents who score within ±1 standard deviation around the mean of power distance compose the medium category, while those who score lower or higher form the low and high category, respectively.

As shown in Figure 4, for employees who score high or medium on power distance, there is no effect of having experienced suppression of voice by the supervisor on populist attitudes. It seems that having experienced suppression is positively related with populist attitudes only for employees low on power distance. Thus, the hypothesized moderation effect is confirmed.

Finally, Table 6 shows the proportion of variance in the dependent variables explained by the model (including control variables). The model explains approximately 15% of variance in populist attitudes and 19% of variance in populist voting, which is quite a large part of variance explained considering the nature of the dependent and independent variables in the model.

Discussion

All hypothesized paths were significant, thus confirming the three hypotheses. First, the results support the notion that employees who experienced voice suppression by supervisors at least once in the last 3 years hold more populist attitudes. Furthermore, there is a negative moderating effect of power distance on the relationship between suppression and populist attitudes. Additional analysis reveals that suppression has a positive effect on populist attitudes only for employees low on power distance. Finally, the more populist attitudes employees hold, the more likely they are to vote for a populist party. Moreover, our results suggest that people who were exposed to a sole experience of suppression in the last 3 years are more likely to vote for a populist party than people who did not experience suppression, as suggested by the significant indirect effect. These effects are relevant for explaining populist attitudes and voting behavior, even though the parameter estimates might seem relatively small at first glance (approaching standardized estimates of .10). Considering that political attitudes are known to be influenced by a great variety of factors, such as genetics and early upbringing (Hatemi et al., 2009), adult political socialization is expected to yield effects of relatively modest magnitude. Thus, our finding that people who experienced suppression by the supervisor in the previous 3 years demonstrate stronger populist attitudes and are more likely to vote for a populist party than the people who did not experience suppression is, in fact, intriguing.

As is often the case with survey research, the cross-sectional nature of this study urges some caution when drawing conclusions. There are three things to keep in mind when interpreting the results. First, the possibility of equivalent or near equivalent models (that yield the same fit indices despite describing different relationships between variables). In this case, the role of power distance could alternatively be of a mediator rather than a moderator (indicating that suppression changes power

Table 5. Indirect Effects of the Hypothesized Model

	Standardized Estimate
Power distance → populist voting	−.033***
Suppression → populist voting	.028***
Interaction → populist voting	−.023***

***$p < .000$.

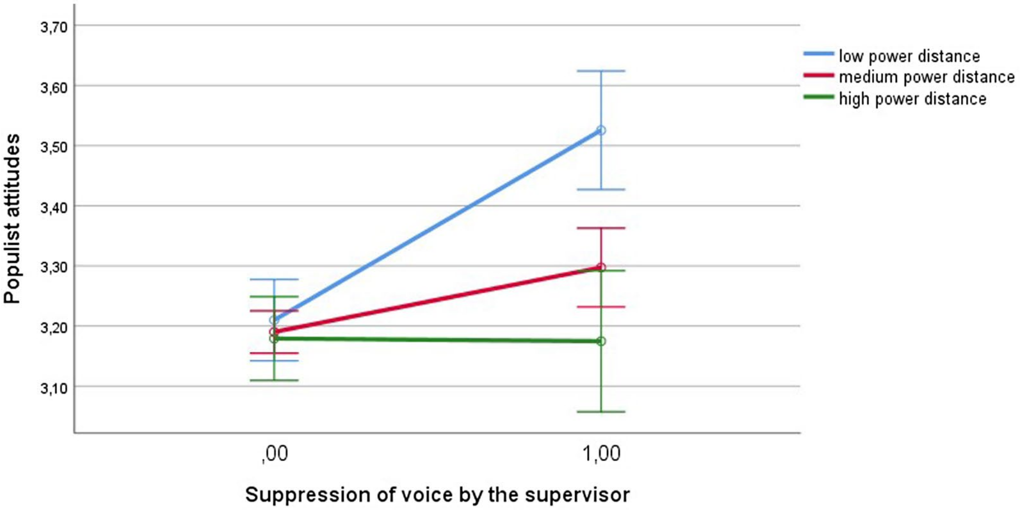

Figure 4. Interaction effect of power distance and suppression of voice by the supervisor on populist attitudes. [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

Table 6. Explained Variances of the Main Variables

Variable	Explained Variance
Suppression	0.008
Power distance	0.059
Interaction term	0.011
Populist attitudes	0.148
Populist voting	0.192

distance as a value, which then generates populist attitudes). However, as mentioned in the theory section, in most management studies so far, power distance is found to play the role of a moderator (Lam et al., 2002; Lee et al., 2000; Yang et al., 2007). This corresponds with our understanding of power distance as a (relatively) stable value which drives the interpretation of suppression.

Second, the possibility of reversed causality should be considered. Ideally, we would have collected the data on political attitudes and voting before and after the suppression experience to be able to make causal claims with more certainty. Theoretically, it is possible that the voice of employees who hold populist attitudes is more likely to be suppressed if holding populist attitudes is associated with voice behavior that reflects their negative attitudes towards the elite. However, in this case we theorized that voice suppression affects populist attitudes rather than the other way around, building on the political socialization theory, generalization theory, and workplace-spillover theory.

A final potential limitation of our study may be that workers who hold more populist attitudes end up in more suppressive work environments. Intentional self-selection into suppressive working context is, however, not very plausible because it is unlikely that job seekers will be aware of it before entering the workplace. Furthermore, the extent to which people can choose their work environment is limited. A similar argument is often made in interethnic contact research by arguing that self-selection into ethnically homogeneous work environments, based on preexisting ethnic prejudice, is not very likely (Kokkonen, Esaiasson, & Gilljam, 2015). However, some workplace factors, such as hierarchy and one's position in it, may act as selection criteria. For example, low-skilled workers more often work in lower hierarchical ranks. If lower ranks are more vulnerable to suppression, this could mean that low-skilled workers are more likely to experience suppression by the supervisor. When low-skilled workers hold more populist attitudes than high-skilled workers, a self-selection bias could be in play. However, controlling for educational level in order to reduce such self-selection problems did not alter the results of our study. Still, we cannot completely rule out potential self-selection biases. Thus, for more empirical certainty regarding equivalent models and reversed causality, a future longitudinal replication is recommended.

The results of our study contribute to the literature on work-to-politics spillover and provide new insights into the theoretical debate on populism. The main contribution to the spillover literature is identifying social interactions as key triggers of political socialization, rather than the traditionally discussed hierarchical company position (Kitschelt & Rehm, 2014) or the nature of work tasks (Kohn & Schooler, 1969).

Similarly, our contribution to the populism literature consists in focusing on social interactions as triggers of populist attitudes and voting, instead of focusing on characteristics of people's structural position in society, such as education (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016) and economic position (Spruyt et al., 2016). While our explanation is new, it is complementary to the existing literature, as social interactions that reflect suppression can help to explain the established effects of structural position. In other words, social interactions, specifically suppression, are likely to act as mediators between structural position and populist attitudes as a reflection of power structures, thereby making them salient.

Apart from the theoretical implications, the results of our study also have important practical implications. Although one might argue that the effect is relatively small—having experienced voice suppression by supervisors in the last 3 years yields a 0.08 standard deviation increase in populist attitudes—it has substantial consequences in practice. Namely, 25% of the employees in our representative sample experienced suppression of voice during a period of only the previous 3 years, while most employees in the Netherlands have a working life of at least 40 years; this means that the average employee is likely to experience voice suppression at some point. Therefore, we argue that the magnitude of our findings regarding the effect of voice suppression on populist attitudes and voting has actual political relevance. Moreover, while genetics and early upbringing typically cannot be influenced, the prevalence of suppression at the workplace *can* be addressed within a given organization or even within society as a whole.

Conclusion

Employee voice suppression by supervisors provides a fertile ground for cognitive dissonance and anxiety. To ease the discomfort that is produced by these mental states, employees shift to a cognitive framework that splits the social world into two antagonistic groups, the people and the elite (a core characteristic of populist attitudes). This is more likely to happen the less accepting of power distance employees are. Finally, the more populist attitudes employees hold, the more likely they are to vote for populist parties. Therefore, suppression of voice by supervisors, at least for people less acceptant of power distance, increases the likelihood of populist voting indirectly, through first increasing employees' populist attitudes.

Although the experience of suppression is an individual-level factor, it should also be considered at a systemic level. Considering employee voice suppression as dependent on societal developments allows for acknowledging its possible connection to global societal trends. Possibly, recent labor-market developments that increase insecurity (e.g., globalization and its “winners and losers”; “the gig economy”; labor flexibilization) create conditions that allow for more suppression. Given our findings that suppression increases the likelihood of populist voting, this trend could be at least partly responsible for the increase in populism that we observe on both the demand and supply side of politics. Furthermore, there are indications that on average, as part of a cultural change, the acceptance of power distance decreased over the past decades in European societies (Beugelsdijk, Maseland, & Van Hoorn, 2015). We found that the positive effect of voice suppression on populist attitudes only works for those low in acceptance of power distance. In a cultural context of decreasing acceptance of power distance, our findings on the political socialization effect of employee voice suppression are more relevant than ever.

Finally, the process of political socialization in itself is often not intended to be political. Such unintentional political socialization takes place when political influence is exerted by an actor who did not intend to do so (Dekker & Meyenberg, 1991). Our article finds that supervisors are important actors in unintentional political socialization. It is advisable to create awareness among management, supervisors, and the general public about this important but often overlooked influence that the actions of supervisors have on their employees. Moreover, since the causal chain elaborated here is rather long, starting with experiencing a problem at work, there are multiple instances in which the process, if so desired, can be altered through interventions.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's web site:

Table S1. Full List of Items Measuring Employee Voice Suppression and Their Frequencies