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Emotion Narratives on the Political Culture of Radical Right Populist Parties in Portugal and Italy

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Abstract

The growth of radical right politics raises concerns about authoritarian and exclusionary scenarios, while populism is understood as a logic that articulates democratic demands and strengthens political engagement. There is a lack of research on the democratic views of radical right populism. Moreover, the burgeoning literature on these phenomena generally examines either the supply or demand side of politics, neglecting the narrative dimension that emerges from the two intertwining. This article aims to fill these gaps by using the heuristic of the "emotion narrative" that circulates between the supply and demand sides of radical right populist parties to examine their political culture. Assuming that populism creates social identities through the affective articulation of popular demands, focusing on the "narrative of emotions" (and not only on the narrative dimension of particular emotions) allows us to analyse how social and political objects, facts, ideas, and scenarios generate political culture. Through a mixed-methods comparative study of Portugal and Italy, this article assesses the emotion narratives of the parties Chega and Fratelli d'Italia. The dataset includes 14 semi-structured interviews with MPs and an original survey with 1,900 responses regarding political realities (on the democratic system, power structures, ethnic diversity, political history, and role of the media) and hypothetical scenarios (on authoritarianism, the rise of migration and diversity, anti-corruption, securitisation of the state, and expanded use of referendums). The emotion narratives of radical right populist political cultures engender democratic visions rooted in exclusionary identities with positive affection for centralism, authoritarianism, and securitisation of the state, as opposed to innovation and participation.

Keywords

authoritarianism; Chega; democracy; Fratelli d'Italia; participation; political emotions; political supply and demand; populist attitudes; radical right; securitisation

1. Introduction

Democratic erosion worldwide coincides with the rise of the far right, which includes the extreme and radical right. While the extreme right substantially rejects democracy, the radical right opposes liberal democracy in several fundamental aspects (Mudde, 2019, 2022). This trend must be understood in a world where 39.4% of the global population lives under authoritarian regimes and around 45.4% resides in (full [7.8%] or flawed [37.6%]) democratic states, while 15.2% lives in hybrid regimes, where formal democracy and authoritarianism are combined (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2024). Democracies are dynamic and offer diverse resistances to authoritarian oppression and populist upsurges, impacting the persistence and balance of the different political cultures that characterise party systems (Vachudova, 2021). For example, the political crisis of the Italian "first republic" in the early nineties led to the dismantlement of existing political cultures and the formation of one with an ideology predominated by personalism and narrative (Pasquino, 2018).

Studied as political logic, populism shapes social identities and strengthens democratic agonistic engagement (Devenney, 2020; Laclau, 2005; Mouffe, 2018; Palonen, 2020). It induces political cultures in which citizens monitor and criticise representatives (Kaltwasser & Hauwaert, 2020) or engage in participatory processes (Gianolla, 2017; Gianolla et al., 2024). How does this dynamic relate to the long-lasting understanding that populism is a spectre of democracy (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Arditi, 2004; Ionescu & Gellner, 1969; Kazin, 2017) or its shadow (Canovan, 1999; Cossarini & Vallespín, 2019)? What political culture, democratic vision, and democratic engagement do populisms entail? In order to answer these questions, political theorists have distinguished core from secondary populist characteristics. The former assesses populism as a democratic phenomenon, while the latter indicates that it may challenge pluralism, thus becoming exclusionary (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019). The literature on the interplay of populism and democracy is vast and expanding alongside the affective turn in political science (Aslanidis, 2020; Hoggett & Thompson, 2012), opening new paths of inquiry. Analysing populism as a logic (as opposed to an ideology) highlights that populists challenge existing feeling rules by narrating the crises of democratic sovereignty in order to mobilise and unite people against the (rational-bureaucratic) elite (Tietjen, 2023). Through emotion narratives around crisis and grievances, populism urges for change in political cultures by redefining sovereignty with a renewed sense of (inclusionary or exclusionary) belonging.

In fact, the discourse on the crisis of democracy is central to populism (Stavrakakis et al., 2018; Ungureanu & Serrano, 2018). It generates political disenchantment expressed through political grievances (Capelos et al., 2024; Ditto & Rodriguez, 2021; Ivarsflaten, 2008; Marcus, 2021), primarily relating to fear and anger. Research shows that crises' inspired grievances generate anger, rather than fear (Rico et al., 2017). However, the analysis of the emotional processes as complex mechanisms, rather than distinct emotions, identifies fear of insecurity and shame as the root of such anger (Salmela & von Scheve, 2017). Grievances emerge from individual discontent with social and political conditions, generating disaffection and aversion to migrants, as well as predicting radical right populism (RRP) support (Lindholm et al., 2024). Thus, grievances are inducive to psychological mechanisms, emerging from perceived individual marginalisation and loss of self-esteem regarding ideas and objects within the socio-political context (Capelos et al., 2022; Salmela & Capelos, 2021).

On the supply side of politics, frame analysis has been used to study the objects mobilised by RRP (Caiani & della Porta, 2011), while populist attitudes have been measured in relation to the demand side (Castanho Silva

et al., 2020). Although people with stronger populist attitudes do not downplay liberal democracy (Kaltwasser & Hauwaert, 2020; Wuttke et al., 2023), they do not necessarily make demands for greater participation (Ardag et al., 2020) and evidence shows RRP attitudes are conducive to authoritarian outlooks (Marcus et al., 2019). However, a research gap exists regarding the entanglement between supply-side framing and demand-side attitudes, which this article addresses through the perspective of emotions. Overcoming the dualism of reason and emotion in political analysis sheds light on democratic processes (Arias Maldonado, 2016; Bonansinga, 2020; Eklundh, 2020; Marcus, 2002). It also expands the understanding of populism beyond a superficial focus on emotionality as irrationality, exploring the impact of the narrative frames from which it rises (Caiani & della Porta, 2011; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017).

The consolidated and growing literature on emotions in populism focuses on differentiating varieties of populisms (Caiani & Di Cocco, 2023), discourse and identification processes (Elçi, 2022; Homolar & Löfflmann, 2021; Kenny, 2017; Kotwas & Kubik, 2022; Löfflmann, 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2022), as well as political attitudes and behaviour (Abts & Baute, 2022; Rico, 2024; Verbalyte et al., 2024). Psychologists have extensively demonstrated that emotions are better understood as dynamic processes (Fogel et al., 1992; Kuppens, 2015; Kuppens & Verduyn, 2017; Scherer, 1982, 2009, 2022), with political emotions being necessary for political reasoning, deliberation, and behaviour (Marcus, 2002; Redlawsk, 2006). Moreover, political emotions are imbued in social and cultural practices (van Hemert et al., 2007), articulate party politics (Heaney, 2019; Wedeen, 2002), and shape political cultures (Ahmed, 2014). Political emotions emerge from socio-political discourse and are related to social identities (Goldenberg et al., 2016; Mackie & Smith, 2018). Politicians contribute to shaping the social imaginary in context-dependent discursive practices, creating new norms and normativity based on a representation of social actors as objects (Ahmed, 2004, 2014; Krzyżanowski, 2020). But these narratives are not merely top-down; they circulate in society. We aim to study the "emotion narratives" of RRP parties' political culture as they circulate between the supply and demand sides of politics in Portugal and Italy.

A comprehensive comparative approach should capture populism's ambivalence with respect to political culture, while observing the actor and context in relation to the diffusion of populist frames, as they shape political cultures (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018). This article explores the emotion narratives of RRP parties, comparing Portugal and Italy, countries with several historical similarities and differences regarding RRP. In fact, Portugal has been a European exception to the rise of RRP until recently (da Silva & Salgado, 2018; Santana-Pereira & Cancela, 2020; Zúquete, 2022), while Italy is a country of multiple populisms, including RRP (Blokker & Anselmi, 2020). Portugal's lengthy colonial history and fascist Salazar dictatorship are more recent than Italy's colonial past and fascist Mussolini regime. Moreover, both countries experienced economic and social depression, as well as significant waves of emigration. These legacies shape similarities and differences that make the comparison of RRP emotion narratives very compelling. Chega was founded in 2019 by André Ventura and has since consolidated as the first—and only—RRP party in parliament, reflecting a shift in the country's political landscape. Achieving 18% vote share in the 2024 legislative elections, Chega consolidated as the third party in parliament and pressured the centre-right minority government, which refused to form a coalition. Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) was founded in 2012 by Giorgia Meloni, Ignazio La Russa, and Guido Crosetto. The party emerged within the evolution of the neofascist right that was present in parliament since the 1940s, joining government coalitions as a junior partner in the 1990s. In the 2022 legislative elections, FdI was the most voted party with 26% vote share, becoming the leading force of the right-wing governing coalition. Both parties are strongly identified with

their leaders and claim to strengthen popular participation by reforming representative sovereignty through increased state power, rather than participatory democratic innovations. Although they belong to different groups in the European Parliament and have slightly different positions, especially on international affairs, they share souverainist, conservative, and militarist ideologies.

This article is guided by the question: What political culture is revealed from the analysis of the emotion narratives circulating between supply and demand sides of RRP parties in Portugal and Italy? This entails investigating RRP emotion narratives around the current processes within representative democracy and the alternative envisioned to strengthen the sovereignty of "the people." Through a mixed methodology, the article explores which emotions are "attached" (Ahmed, 2014) to objects, including democratic ideas and ideals, both on the supply and demand sides of politics. Empirical data were collected through an online survey (1,900 responses in total) during the most recent legislative election campaigns of both Italy (2022) and Portugal (2024). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with MPs representing Chega (6) and FdI (8). The following four sections are dedicated to reviewing the theoretical approach and justifying its relevance (Section 2), introducing the mixed-methods approach and design (Section 3), analysing how emotion narratives emerge within supply and demand sides of politics (Section 4), as well as discussing the emotion narratives on the political culture of RRP parties in Portugal and Italy (Section 5). Findings show that the emotion narratives of the RRP supply and demand sides align with ideas of centralised and empowered structures, emphasising exclusionary, authoritarian, and securitisation processes, rather than mechanisms of deliberation or more direct citizen involvement in decision-making.

2. Theoretical Approach

RRP emerged in Europe in the 1980s (Collovald, 2004; Hall, 1980, 2021; Taguieff, 1984), eventually dominating most countries (Mudde, 2019) when compared to the left variation. This process also resulted from the evolving dynamics of the European Union, particularly following the Maastricht Treaty, which introduced significant legislative changes concerning European integration and immigration (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). RRP has helped create political cultures characterised by an opportunistic relationship with liberalism, being critical of globalisation while appropriating it to support Islamophobic discourses. Moreover, these political cultures are associated with the defence of communitarian, monistic, and exclusionary societies (Zúquete, 2015). Investigating political emotions framed by the populist narratives allows for understanding the extent to which democratic ideas of populist supply and demand coincide, as well as the alternative view they build for a representative democracy.

Objects circulating in populist discourse are not reduced to those identified in the three dimensions of the (thin-centred) ideological definition (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Populist phenomena are ambivalent (Biancalana & Mazzoleni, 2020; Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017; Mény & Surel, 2002; Wodak, 2015) and chameleonic (Taggart, 2000). Their political ideas, objects, and frames depend on context and opportunities. Populism thrives on polarised processes of collective identification with moral people opposing corrupt elites and the dangerous "Others," (re)generating social and political behaviour (Aslanidis, 2020). Considering populism as a logic also assumes that populist attitudes exist even in societies without a populist supply (Zúquete, 2022). Accepting that political emotions are constructed by the discourse recipient rather than the speaker (Alcántara-Plá, 2024) implies recognising that these attitudes emerge in the narrative contact of subject and objects, not in the objects themselves (Ahmed, 2014). Emotions become salient when an object

is perceived as personally significant, affecting the subject in relation to something they deeply care about: "We are afraid of something because it can hurt something else we care for, and we rejoice over something because it helps us with something else" (Alcántara-Plá, 2024, p. 5). Narratives define attachment to objects. The deeper object shapes a subject's emotional reactions to (shallow) objects that surface in public discourse. Objects can also be the ingroup or other social groups, as well as ideas and perceptions about them.

This article proposes emotion narrative as an original heuristic construct (leading to a thicker theorisation; Gianolla, 2024). Emotion narrative encompasses both positive and negative long-term emotions (Jasper, 2018) generated by conceptualisations of self and other regarding intergroup relations and social identity (Mackie & Smith, 2018). Emotion narratives emerge in relation to objects that may also be characterised by myths, values, objectives, desires, and expectations. They impact political behaviour as they apprise emotion within signifying practice, thus being entangled with cognition (Harding & Pribram, 2004) because political emotions are associated with the working structure of the mind (Marcus, 2021, 2023; Marcus et al., 2019). Emotions stick to objects and are generated in the relationship between subjects and objects (Ahmed, 2014). Therefore, the way objects are narrated generates attachment or aversion, activation or passivity, control or uncertainty in relation to the protection or perceived attainment of (deep) objects. Emotion narratives are thus characterised by (a) long-term (b) social-identity-related collective emotions that (c) emerge through a cognitive-affective narrative entangled with the protection of (deep) objects.

The notion of emotion narratives has been mobilised as an instrument to study the internal narrative of distinct emotions, investigating which narrative stands behind the appraisal of each emotion (Kleres, 2011; Lazarus, 2006; Sarbin, 2001). This approach is important, but does not focus on understanding the narrative of emotions that circulate in society. In contrast with this approach, the present article focuses on the (emotion) narratives at the social, not the psychological level. In other words, we study the "narrative of emotions" as opposed to the "narrative of the (distinct/specific) emotion." The emotions involved are both positive and negative. Although RRP is characterised by grievances and a sense of urgency around the crises that generate anger, fear, shame, and sadness, these are framed alongside pride, joy, (political) love, and admiration.

A final point is the operationalisation of emotion narratives, focusing on the relationship between two levels of objects: a "deep-object," identified as something valuable and vulnerable, and a "shallow-object," representing a threat (negative valence emotion) or an opportunity for protecting (positive valence emotion) the deep-object (Alcántara-Plá, 2024). This approach allows for studying the affective dimension of populist frames, as it identifies objects that are "in need of defending" from the "source of threat," and anticipated change (Heinisch & Mazzoleni, 2017, p. 112). This methodology was designed for a discourse analysis of emotions in political texts. In this article, we expand its use by analysing the resonance of deep- and shallow-objects in 14 semi-structured interviews from the supply side, along with survey data on the demand side. For this purpose, we framed those objects in 12 questions about political realities and 12 questions about hypothetical scenarios. The demand side is scrutinised by comparing emotional responses of voters and non-voters for the RRP parties studied. We thus identify emotions attached to specific objects, both on the supply and demand sides of RRP parties. This method provides insights into how emotional attachments are crafted to defend certain objects (characterised by values and goals), portraying other elements as threats or opportunities. The analytical focus is on the democratic system, power structures, ethnic diversity, political history, role of the media, authoritarianism, the rise of

migration and diversity, anti-corruption, securitisation of the state, and expanded use of referendums. As a result, this article sheds light on how the emotion narratives of RRP shape their political cultures and (un)democratic views.

3. Research Design and Methods

3.1. Sample and Data

This study adopts a mixed-method design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews (duration 30–90 min) with RRP MPs representing the Chega (6) and FdI parties (8), referenced as E01, E02, E03, etc. Interviewees were composed of 3 women and 11 men (M = 53 years; SD = 12.15). A quantitative survey (N = 1,900 respondents; see Annex 1 in the Supplementary File for sample characterisation) was run during the electoral campaign of the most recent legislative elections, September 2022 in Italy and March 2024 in Portugal. The survey included 2 batteries of questions (12 items each). The first reflected political realities/facts (see Figures 2 and 3 in this article and Annexes 2 and 3 in the Supplementary File); the second concerned hypothetical political scenarios (see Figures 4 and 5 in this article and Annexes 4 and 5 in the Supplementary File). Responses were self-reported and delimited to a single option between eight emotions (pride, joy, love, admiration, shame, sadness, fear, and anger) or the option "other" (with the possibility to specify). These emotions were identified by adopting two emotions from each of the four quadrants in the Geneva Emotion Wheel, a validated instrument that distributes emotions by valence (positive vs. negative) and control/power (high vs. low; Scherer et al., 2013). Finally, within the sociodemographic questionnaire, the vote intention variable was operationalised by asking participants about their position from 0 ("I will definitely not vote for this party") to 10 ("I will definitely vote for this party") on each party in parliament. The survey also included an exclusionary populist attitude scale (undergoing psychometric validation; Mónico et al., 2024) with 12 items measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1-*completely disagree* to 7-*completely agree*), evaluating 4 dimensions (Figure 6) suggested by exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis: *anti-elitism* (4 items; Cronbach's alpha of .78 for Pt and .81 for It), *chauvinism* (3 items; α = .76 and .72), *anti-pluralism* (3 items; α = .80 and .87) and *people-centrism* (2 items; α = .63 and .70).

3.2. Procedures and Data Analysis

This study obtained ethical clearance by the Ethics Commission of the Centre for Social Studies of the University of Coimbra. Party MPs were recruited through direct contact or intermediation with press offices and interviewed by authors after signing an informed consent. An ISO-certified enterprise was contracted for survey data collection. Both samples were recruited through an approximation of a non-random "quota sampling" (Chaudhuri, 2019), according to census data in each country (Instituto Nacional de Estatística and Instituto Nazionale di Statistica) concerning gender, age, and education. The survey instructions included information on the aim of the study, completion instructions, and informed consent, which explained the voluntary and anonymous nature of participation, guaranteeing confidentiality of data.

Party MPs' semi-structured interviews were transcribed and analysed using MAXQDA. Two researchers defined and tested the standardised coding procedures, which include: topics (coinciding with 10 topics of reality and scenario collected through the survey), deep-objects (valuable and vulnerable objects), shallow-objects (threat or opportunity for protecting the deep-object), and emotions (relationship between

deep- and shallow-objects). Emotions coding was restricted to the range of eight emotions offered to survey respondents and defined through the Geneva Emotion Wheel.

Survey data was analysed through the statistical software SPSS. In order to differentiate respondents in relation to party preference, a two-step cluster analysis using log-likelihood distance measurement and the Schwarz Bayesian criterion (Kent et al., 2014) was performed with the vote intention variable in Chega/FdI. A multivariate analysis of variance was subsequently conducted to test whether the two clusters in each country differ from each other regarding the four dimensions of populism. The assumptions for the reliable use of this test (Hair et al., 2008) were analysed. Pillai's Trace was used because it is a powerful statistical procedure, robust against modest violations of normality and equality of the covariance and variance matrix, Box's M = 49.51 (Pt) and 75.98 (It), $p < .001$.

Our dependent variable is emotion narratives as a latent construct. To operationalise it, we focus on the emotions that stick (Ahmed, 2014) to objects within the political culture of RRP parties. On the supply side, interviews with MPs were analysed through the discourse analysis of emotions (Alcántara-Plá, 2024). On the demand side, survey responses were focused on political realities/facts in Portugal and Italy concerning the democratic system (survey questions 1r, 2r, 4r); power structures (3r, 7r, 8r); ethnic diversity (5r, 6r, 9r); political history (7r, 10r, 12r); and the role of the media (11r). Moreover, we posed questions on hypothetical scenarios focused on authoritarianism (1s, 2s, 9s, 10s); the rise of migration and diversity (3s, 5s, 7s); anti-corruption (4s, 11s); securitisation of the state (6s, 8s); and expanded use of referendums (12s).

4. Results

4.1. Supply Side: Qualitative Interviews

In interviews, the MPs of Chega and FdI articulated their discourse on a limited range of deep-objects (Figure 1), such as identity (including religion, country's history, and traditions), homeland (including national interest and territory), liberty, security, authority, and family. However, these deep-object emotion

Figure 1. Qualitative discourse analysis of emotions in MP interviews: examples of deep- and shallow-objects.

narratives unveiled shallow-objects related to several focuses of the research, such as the democratic system, power structures, ethnic diversity and political history, rise of migration and diversity, as well as securitisation of the state. The arousal and control of the emotions vary more specifically in relation to context, sense of urgency, and agency attributed to the shallow-objects.

Emotion narratives partially overlap in both countries. Identity constitutes a relevant deep-object, associated to several shallow-objects. For instance, left-wing ideologies (related to the power structure and political system) and ethnic diversity/immigration constitute two shallow-objects. Fear, anger, sadness, and shame emerge as emotions in both cases, but also pride and admiration for what one's country can do for those identified as true refugees, or pride, joy, love, and admiration for the work of one's own party and its leader. In the following excerpt, identity is clearly defined as a vulnerable and valuable deep-object threatened by "the regime" (at the time, the socialist left), eliciting fear:

> For Portugal to be a better country, we have to change the regime….What has to continue is our national identity. So, it's our identity as a people, our identity as a nation. It's the recognition of our history. What has brought us to the 21st century, which is one of the things that sets us apart from the rest of the world today. (E06)

The left wing and its influences are perceived as presenting complex challenges to preserving the cultural fabric of society, which spans its historic past, traditions, religion, and popular culture. Left-wing ideologies and parties are viewed as totalitarian, corrupting the relationship between citizens and state through artificially imbued dependency and emotional attachment to subsistence schemes. This instigates sadness and anger. Interviewees assert that the country's democratic systems are undermined by state control of social, economic, cultural, and moral policies which fracture power structures and erode individual agency. Here, identity connects with the democratic system and social diversity:

> On the issue of sexism, racism, etc.: To begin with, the state also heavily subsidises organisations that promote this kind of discourse. So, I think that, in a way, we can also talk about welfare dependency in these spheres. And, on the other hand, it generates such a feeling of injustice that instead of wanting to work for the collective, for the common good, as they supposedly say, people always maintain their own little niches and, it seems to me…that this disunity and disintegration of the population is much more important than everyone cooperating for greater sustainability, greater cooperation, a state that is in fact fair, social. So, it doesn't necessarily translate into monetary dependence, but it does translate into emotional dependence. I'm glad we're talking about emotions, because in fact whoever frees me from racism and whoever frees me from structural sexism, whoever frees me from homophobia or….I'm not financially dependent, but I am emotionally dependent because the state is, for me, the great father. (E03)

Immigrant, Muslim, Black, and Roma people are shallow-objects considered as threats to the cultural integrity, social cohesion, and social order; however, interviewees disguised their speech with rhetoric of equality before the law. Emotional ambivalence is demonstrated by sadness towards all people obliged to migrate, but also by anger and fear in relation to those defined as "economic migrants." Beyond the cultural threat, migrants constitute a threat to the economic and political system, as the country cannot "contain" them all. Interviewees differentiate between them and "true refugees" (i.e., Ukrainians). When pressured to

explain the difference, even if they maintained that all people in real need (eligible for refugee status as opposed to "illegal" migrants) must be helped, they showed resistance to including other asylum seekers (i.e., from Syria or Ethiopia). Additionally, they demonstrated some fear, dismissing the argument with the impossibility of welcoming people beyond the physical capacity of each country:

> Ukrainian migrants are different because they are fleeing a war. Those fleeing war deserve our attention. We must help them regain the conditions to return home….Economic migrants aim to improve their conditions, which is understandable. However, we cannot accommodate everyone. There must be rules and limits, as established in the annual Flow Decree….Ukrainians are war refugees. And we have a duty to welcome them….Most of those arriving on boats are young men aged 20 to 40. This is a different type of situation; they cannot be considered refugees. (E08)

In relation to the power structure and democratic system, RRP MPs do not reject representative democracy. Instead, they want to reshape it in order to allow those in power to govern according to popular will, which is best represented by Chega and FdI. Their discourse does not envisage innovation, but proximity with the people. However, there are some differences in the analysis of both emotion narratives. These differences are related to the party history (shorter for Chega), structure (more consolidated for FdI), and orientation (stronger ideology for FdI), as well as country-based characteristics (political systems and stabilities). For example, FdI has a keener emotional attachment to territory, both as a symbolic place and as the material constituent of the nation. Democratic politics happen in the territory because that is where the supply side can survey, educate, and compensate the demand side of politics. Chega MPs have a more general narrative related to the people, while their aversion to the socialist elite is much stronger than that held by FdI MPs.

4.2. Demand Side: Quantitative Survey

In order to differentiate respondents in relation to party preference and to focus on the RRP parties studied, a cluster analysis defined two clusters with a good quality of discrimination (.9 and average silhouette), according to the vote intention for Chega ($N = 1{,}010$; 798 no-vote, 79%; 212 votes, 21%) and FdI ($N = 890$; 672 no-vote, 75.5%; 218 votes, 25.5%). The frequency of emotions for each reality or hypothetical scenario was analysed across the vote intention for Chega or FdI in relation to the political reality and hypothetical scenario (see Figures 2 and 4 in this article and Annexes 2–5 in the Supplementary File). To further elaborate on the emotions characterising the emotion narratives of these specific RRP parties, we focused the analysis on emotions with a differential above 5% between voters and non-voters. These are highlighted in Figures 3 and 5.

Comparing emotions quantitatively and focusing on the differential, more negative than positive emotions stand out in total (67 vs. 46, two occurrences of "other" disregarded in the analysis), for scenarios more so than realities (61 vs. 52), with Chega leading FdI voters (65 vs. 48). Considering emotions across realities, we observe twice the number of differential emotions in Chega when compared with FdI (35 vs. 17), but both parties share the prevalence for negative emotions (19 vs. 10) over positive (16 vs. 7). Comparing emotions across hypothetical scenarios, we observe almost the same number of differential emotions between Chega and FdI (30 vs. 31). For both parties, once again, the prevalence is for negative emotions (18 vs. 20) over positive (12 vs. 11).

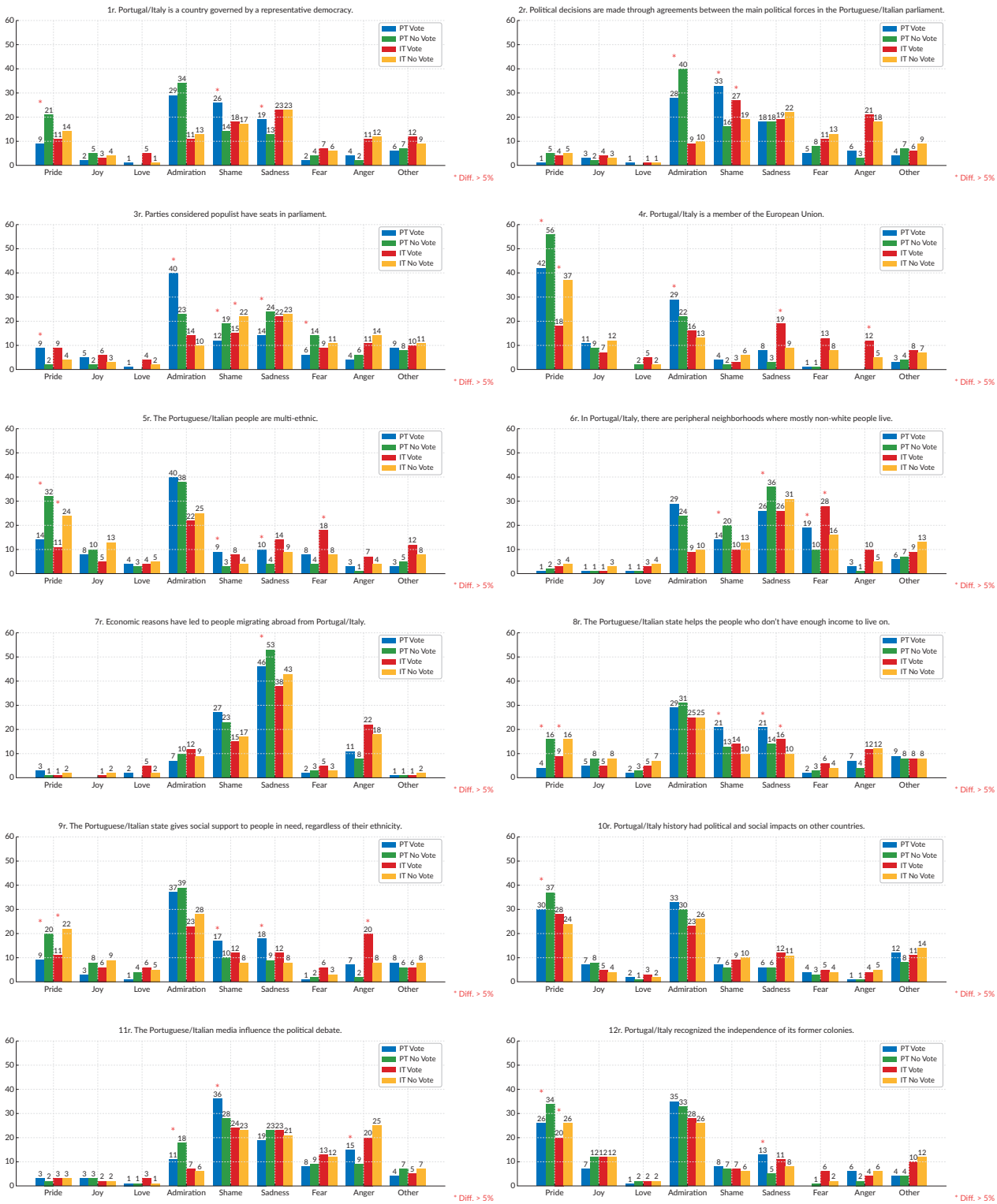

Figure 2. Survey items on political realities; percentage of responses for all emotions reported. Notes: Values rounded to the unit; difference above 5% between voters and non-voters of Chega and FdI indicated with asterisk.

Figure 3. Survey items on political realities; percentage of responses for emotions with difference greater than 5% between voters and non-voters of Chega and/or FdI. Note: Difference above 5% between voters and non-voters of Chega and FdI indicated with asterisk.

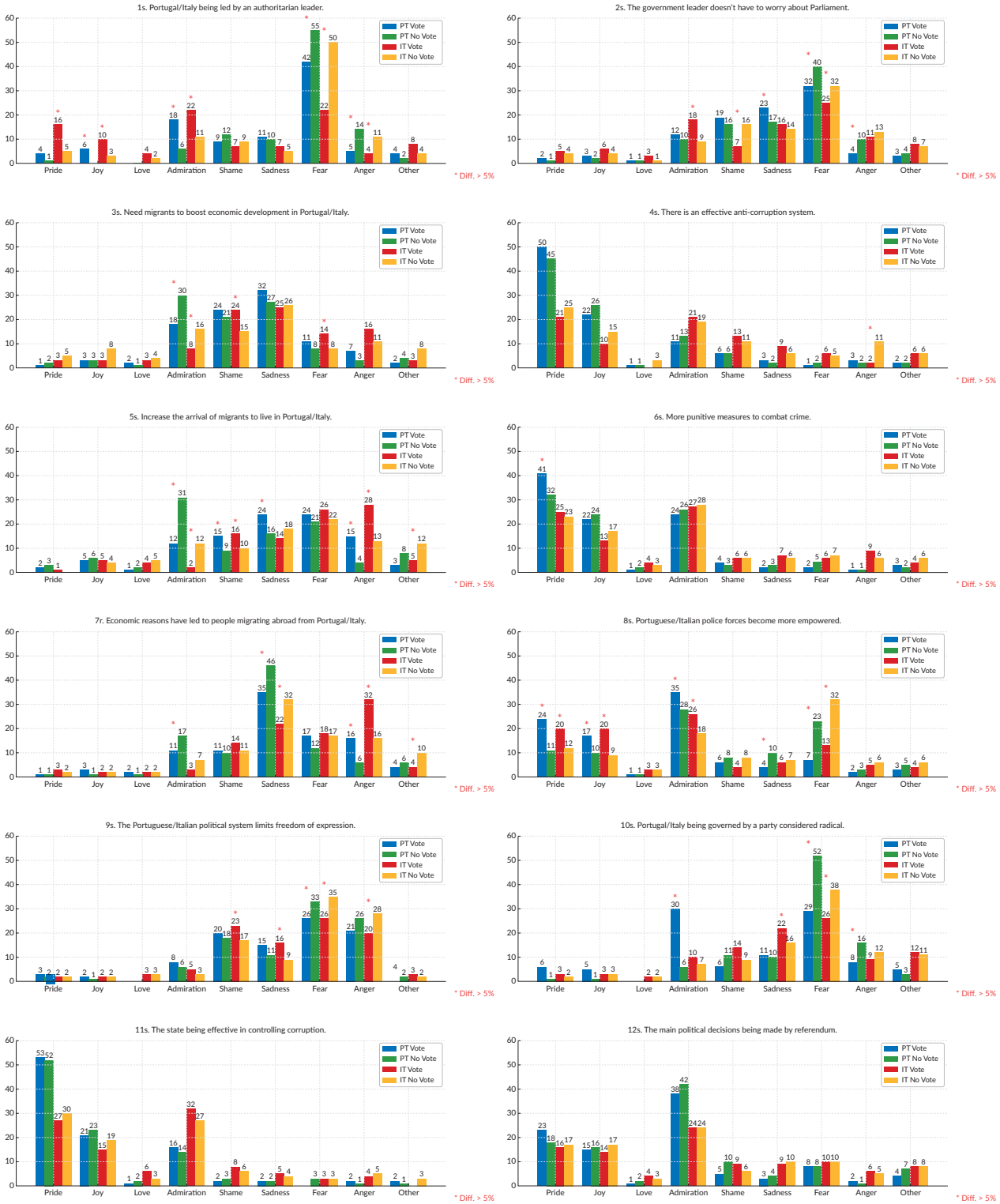

Figure 4. Survey items on hypothetical scenarios; percentage of responses for all emotions reported. Notes: Values rounded to the unit; difference above 5% between voters and non-voters of Chega and FdI indicated with asterisk.

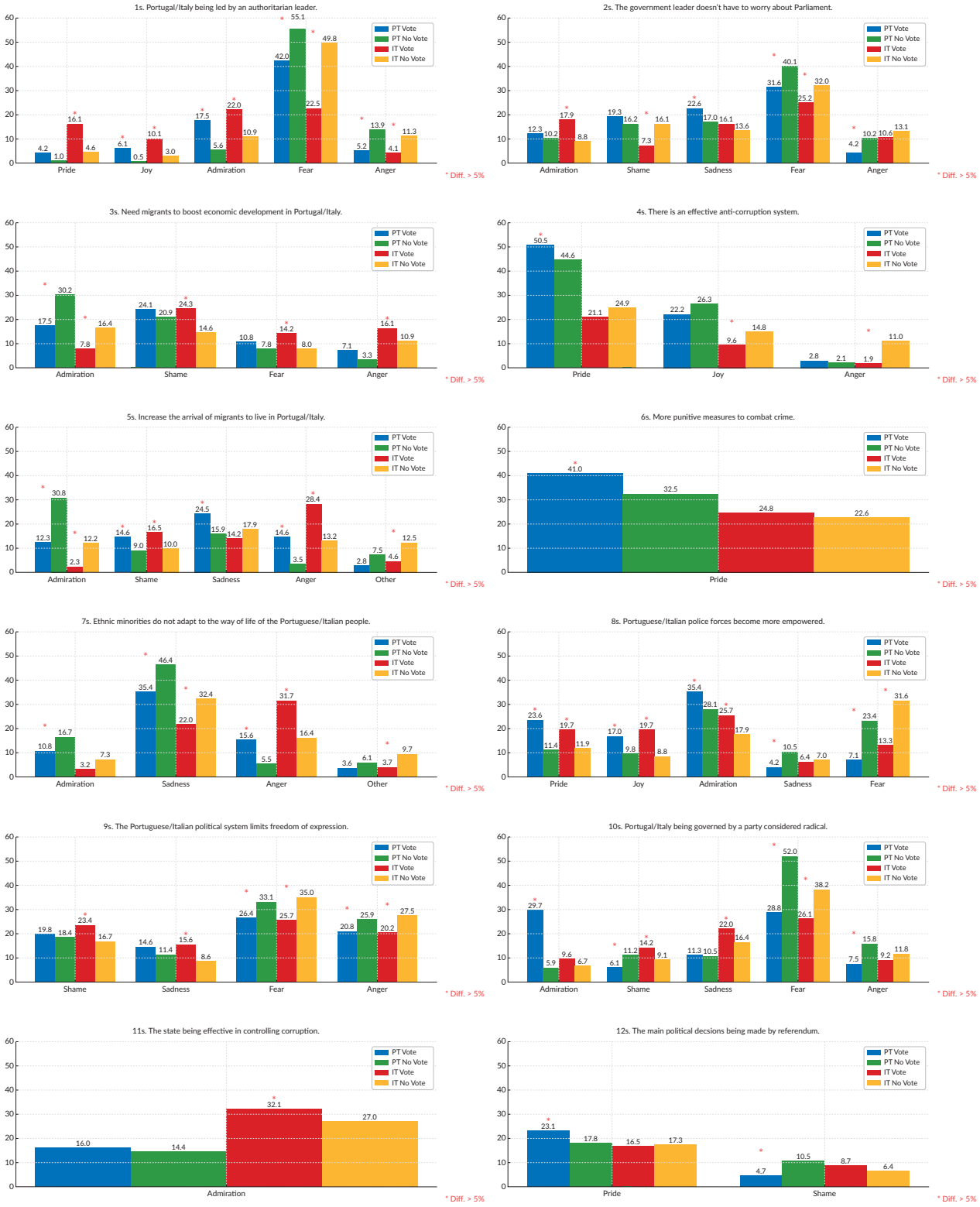

Figure 5. Survey items on hypothetical scenarios; percentage of responses for emotions with difference greater than 5% between voters and non-voters of Chega and/or FdI. Note: Difference above 5% between voters and non-voters of Chega and FdI indicated with asterisk.

When analysing realities in relation to the democratic system (1r, 2r, 4r), the variation is notable between voters and non-voters of RRP parties. Chega voters exhibit less pride and admiration, with more shame and sadness towards representative democracy, less admiration and more shame for parliamentary workings, as well as less pride and more admiration towards the EU. Fewer differences are observed with FdI voters relating to representative democracy. They have more shame for parliamentary works and stronger aversion to the EU, demonstrated by less joy alongside more sadness, fear, and anger. Concerning power structures (3r, 7r, 8r), having populist parties in the parliament constitutes more pride and admiration, accompanied by less shame, sadness, and fear for Chega voters, but more shame for FdI voters. Both party voters feel less pride, along with more shame and sadness in relation to state social welfare. With ethnic diversity (5r, 6r, 9r), both Chega and FdI voters demonstrate significantly less pride and sadness. Instead, they exhibit more fear towards the reality of belonging to a multi-ethnic society and for welfare provisions regardless of ethnic origin of the recipient, as well as more fear and less pride of peripheral non-white neighbourhoods. Chega voters also indicate more shame and sadness, while FdI voters show more anger. Political history (r10, r12) instils less pride for voters of both parties in relation to recognising the independence of former colonies. For Chega voters, there is also less joy and more sadness, while the external impact of Portugal's history generates less pride. Finally, the role of the media (r11) invokes less admiration, but rather, more shame and anger in Chega voters.

Examining scenarios focusing on authoritarianism (1s, 2s, 9s, 10s), the possibility of the country being ruled by an authoritarian leader evokes more joy and admiration with less fear and anger for voters of both parties. They also feel less fear of a leader who does not have to obey parliament, a radical government, or restricted freedom of expression. Chega voters show significantly more admiration, along with less shame, fear, and anger about radicalism in the government. Furthermore, they express more sadness and less anger about a leader irresponsive to the parliament, as well as more sadness and shame around restrictions on the freedom of expression. FdI voters indicate more pride for authoritarian leadership, more admiration and less shame for a leader irresponsive to government, more shame and sadness for limitations on the freedom of expression, as well as more sadness for government radicalism. Considering the rise of migration and diversity (3s, 5s, 7s), both parties' voters indicate less admiration around benefitting from migration and increased immigration, which also fosters more shame and anger, with less sadness and more anger when migrants fail to integrate. However, the increase in migration also generates more sadness for Chega voters, while the need for migrants for economic development incites more shame, fear, and anger in FdI voters. Anti-corruption (4s, 11s) is not an object mobilising many emotions for either party. Chega voters feel prouder of an effective anti-corruption system, which gives FdI voters less joy and anger, along with more admiration. In relation to the securitisation of the state, both parties' voters feel more pride, joy, and admiration, alongside less fear, than non-voters about strengthening the police. Chega voters also feel more admiration and pride for punitive measures. To conclude, the scenario that main political decisions are made by referendum (r12) only generates more pride and less shame in Chega voters.

The multivariate analysis of variance taking populism dimensions in function of Chega and FdI voters and non-voters showed a significant multivariate effect in the Portugal and Italy samples, Pillai's Trace = 0.127 and 0.125, $F = 36.45$ and 31.73, $p < .001$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.127$ and 0.125, respectively. For both countries, univariate tests (see estimated marginal means in Figure 6) showed statistically significant differences and effect sizes for the *anti-pluralism* dimension: $F(1.1008) = 139.95$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.122$ for Portugal; and $F(1.888) = 110.57$, $\eta_p^2 = 0.111$ for Italy; $p < 0.001$.

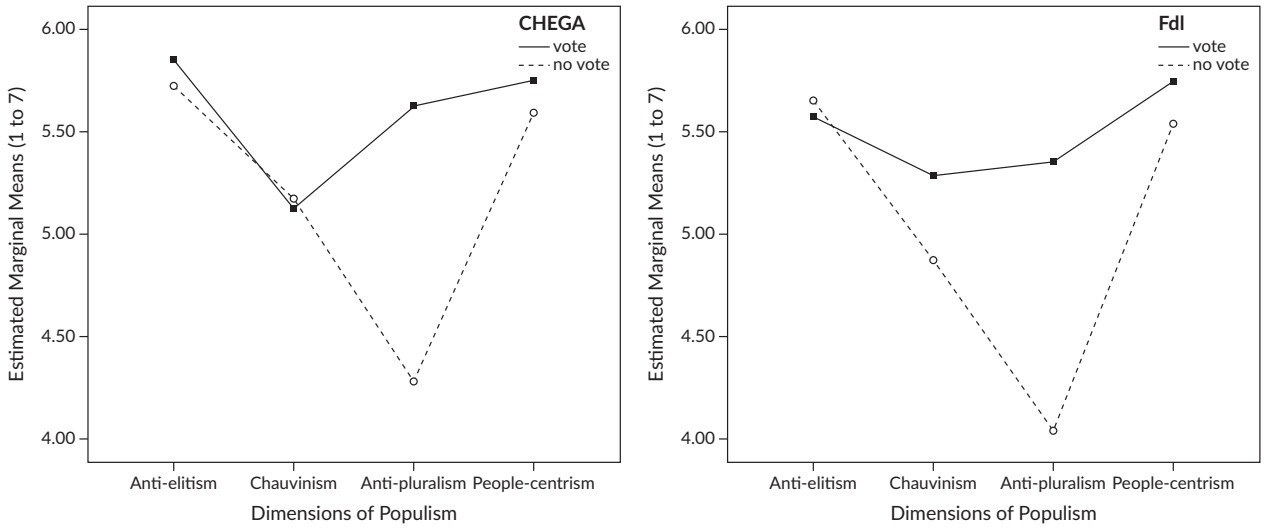

Figure 6. Dimensions of populism for Chega and FdI voters and non-voters.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The above findings suggest that the political culture of the RRP is highly consistent across Portugal and Italy. It produces a deep emotional divide within the electorate, characterised by contrasting perceptions of national identity and the role of out-groups in society. There are significant differences between the emotions expressed by Chega and FdI voters versus those expressed by non-voters, especially on issues of power structure (i.e., authoritarian scenario), multi-ethnicity, and immigration. RRP tends to centralise representative power; indeed, centralisation of power is on the agenda of both parties, while the use of participatory and direct democratic institutions is not central. The emotion narratives are polarising, with the political solutions envisaged by both the supply and demand sides appearing less inclusive, more nationalist-exclusionary, and culturally chauvinist. Both parties also recognised the weakness of the current political system in terms of securing executive power. They proudly emphasise that they work in the interest of the "nation." In their view, democratising the political system means strengthening the power of those who serve the interests of the people—as opposed to the (left-wing) elites who serve their own interests or those of globalist and foreign actors. The question of advancing democracy is therefore not about innovating the way people participate, but rather about how the people are represented and feel protected. Sadness and anger appear in MPs' discourses when they associate freedom or the nation with the state of the political system which is challenged by the shallow-object of the leftist elite. But pride emerges when they refer the opportunity constituted by their own party—and its political initiative—as shallow-object. Compared with FdI, Chega's emotion narrative is stronger in relation to reality than in the hypothetical scenario, suggesting that Chega, as a new party, is more hostile towards the current state of democracy. This dynamic may also be reflected in the projected governmental position of the FdI at the time of the data collection. As opposed to FdI, Chega was projected as a growing party, but unlikely to be part of a governmental coalition.

Confronted with factual political information, individuals inclined to vote for Chega show strong negative emotions towards democracy (less pride and admiration, more shame and sadness) and the welfare of undeserving others (less pride, more shame, sadness, and anger), while sympathising with authoritarian leadership perspectives (more admiration, less fear and anger). The negative entanglements with otherness are interpreted as responses to perceived shortcomings or threats within the current system.

The securitisation of the state also stands out, with the scenario analysis revealing more pride, joy, and admiration, shouldered with less sadness and fear around strengthening of the police. Chega voters also show sympathy for a radical government and a higher demand for anti-corruption measures. The sadness–pride axis underlines the complex struggle articulated by Chega and FdI MPs, characterised by a national pride deeply rooted in history, culture, and traditions, perceived as threatened not only by left-wing politics, but also by out-groups such as migrants and minorities. This perception shapes the political discourse and resonates strongly with their electorates. This emotional polarisation is further exacerbated by the rhetoric mobilised by MPs to frame an empathetic (sadness and anger for migrant's inhuman conditions) discourse within a human rights perspective, while highlighting the logistical and moral challenges posed by immigration. Immigration as a shallow-object of threat evokes anger when arguing that Portugal and Italy should accept anyone who adapts to the culture, customs, and rules of the country. Immigration also generates fear in the scenario of being an external force instigating cultural change. In fact, the demand side expresses negative emotions in relation to the fact that welfare can be abused by migrants, indicating that the security provided by the state is valuable and vulnerable. A critical attitude towards the media only emerges in Portugal, probably due to Chega's open hostility towards the traditional media and the "*cordon sanitaire*" that the party experiences.

This study has a number of limitations. Love never appears as a differential emotion, and, in the interviews, it mainly appears in Italy with respect to politics, home, and territory. This raises the relevant question regarding the discretionary nature of the choice provided in a specific list of emotions. If, from our theoretical perspective, there is no strong reason to focus on a certain number of basic emotions, we also assume that emotions can vary according to the context and the labels used for indicating responses. Furthermore, some of the variables in the analysis are tested with only one item (role of the media and expanded use of referendums). While further questions could be asked regarding the same variable, the balance between variables tested and survey items must be considered, which could lead to fewer variables being tested with more items. Overall, the discourse analysis of emotions, developed by Alcántara-Plá (2024) based on Ahmed (2014), proves to be an insightful analytical tool to explore the emotion narratives of political parties and further investigation is encouraged. The systematisation of information and the identification of deep-objects often goes beyond the written text and requires a very attentive contextual analysis. On this basis, this method allows for detecting implicit as well as explicit emotions, and for identifying deep-objects that circulate in the emotion narrative, although not explicit in all texts. This advantage appears particularly appropriate for the analysis of emotion narratives.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The research data are currently held at the authors' R&D centres (CES and CINEICC) and can be consulted upon request.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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