

# Varieties of Populism in Europe in Times of Crises

Populism is booming across all the nuances of the political spectrum. It occupies relevant positions in national parliaments, in governmental coalitions with mainstream parties or as successful challengers of the political status quo. This volume sheds new light on the topic from different methodological and theoretical angles and offers evidence from a variety of cases on the 'why' and 'how' questions behind populism's emergence and consolidation in Europe over the past 30 years.

The volume, composed of eight chapters, investigates how different populist parties in the European Union have been affected by various crises, disentangling the role of the Great Recession vis-à-vis other factors (such as political and party system factors, but also structural social changes or cultural opportunities) in the growing strength of populist parties in various European countries. More specifically, the volume aims to:

- promote critical discussion on the concept of populism, reflecting on its conceptual 'usability' beyond the traditional party families to which it is usually related;
- use a preliminary theoretical clarification to shed new light on the different ways in which populism has been articulated in the various European countries (either in Continental and Southern Europe, or in the lesser known and studied East-Central countries) since the economic crisis, which has acted as an external shock for many party systems, either giving birth to new political actors or consolidating existing ones;
- investigate the connections between populism and the national contextual political and cultural specificities that can determine the development of different types of populisms across countries, elaborating on different 'configurations' of triggering conditions for populism and reflecting on the limitations of a discrete conceptualisation of the phenomenon.

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The chapters in this book were originally published as a special issue of *West European Politics*.

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# Varieties of Populism in Europe in Times of Crises

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**Manuela Caiani and Paolo Graziano**

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Laurent Bernhard and Hanspeter Kriesi

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Lorenzo Mosca and Filippo Tronconi

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*Economic crisis and the variety of populist response: evidence from Greece, Portugal and Spain*

Marco Lisi, Iván Llamazares and Myrto Tsakatika

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*Assessing the diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe*

Sarah Engler, Bartek Pytlas and Kevin Deegan-Krause

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## Introduction: Understanding varieties of populism in times of crises

Manuela Caiani and Paolo Graziano

### ABSTRACT

This introduction presents the conceptual and analytical framework which constitutes the background for the special issue entitled 'Varieties of Populism in Europe in Times of Crises'. More specifically, this contribution investigates how different populist parties in the European Union have been affected by the recent economic crisis and the more long-lasting political and cultural crises. Analytically, the article disentangles the role of the Great Recession vis-à-vis other factors (such as political and party system factors, but also structural social changes or cultural opportunities) in the growing strength of populist parties in various European countries. It argues that although the economic crisis has without any doubt provided a specific 'window of opportunity' for the emergence of new political actors, which have capitalised on citizens' discontent, long-lasting political factors – such as the increasing distrust toward political institutions and parties – and the more recent cultural crisis connected with migration issues have offered further fertile ground for the consolidation of populist parties in several European countries. Furthermore, as confirmed by the articles presented in the special issue, the various crises have offered differential opportunities for different types of populism – both inclusionary and exclusionary.

This article introduces the conceptual and analytical framework that constitutes the background for the special issue, which investigates how different populist parties in the European Union have been affected by the recent economic and the more long-lasting political crisis (for example, the so-called representative democracy crisis, see Mair 2002). More specifically, the special issue tries to disentangle the role of the Great Recession vis-à-vis other factors – such as political and party system factors, but also structural social changes (e.g. Chiaramonte and Emanuele 2015), or cultural challenges (see Inglehart and Norris 2016) – in the growing

strength of populist parties in various European countries. The crisis has, without any doubt, provided a specific 'window of opportunity' for the emergence of new political actors which capitalised on citizens' discontent. Furthermore, long-lasting political factors, such as the increasing distrust towards political institutions and parties or the redefinition of Western political and party systems (Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Mair 2013), have offered fertile grounds for the consolidation of populist parties.

This contribution – together with the other articles of the special issue – aims, first, at understanding the concept of populism and reflecting on its conceptual 'usability' beyond the traditional parties to which it is usually related. This is particularly relevant since old and new political parties have been labelled as 'populist', but may be perceived very differently in terms of both their electoral appeal and political trajectories. Second, this introduction aims at using this preliminary theoretical clarification to shed new light on the different ways in which populism has been articulated in various European countries (both in Continental and Southern Europe and in the less well-known and studied Central and Eastern European countries) since the economic crisis. This crisis has acted as an external shock in many party systems, either giving birth to new political parties or consolidating already existing ones. Third, the present article investigates the connections between populism and the political and cultural specificities that form the national context, which may determine the development of different types of populisms across countries. Fourth, it reflects on the limitations of a discrete conceptualisation of the phenomenon, suggesting instead that populism should be conceptualised in a continuous mode, as a 'gradational property' (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013: 7–10; for an empirical application, see Caiani and Graziano 2016), making it possible to establish how populism varies across countries and time.

## **Populism, populisms**

Academic attention towards populism has sharply increased in recent years (Kriesi 2014). Yet a commonly accepted definition is still lacking, and scholars still disagree on categorisation, labels, and boundaries between its different manifestations (Mudde 2004). Some also stress that there is an abuse of this term in the public discourse (Caiani and della Porta 2011). One of the main difficulties regarding the definition of populism is that it has been applied (and adapted) to several very different historical phenomena – movements, parties, regimes, and intellectuals – across various periods, and it has often been used in a pejorative sense. Despite the still open debate on conceptual definition and terminology

(Aslanidis 2016; Freedon 2017 – which is beyond the scope of this introduction to address), from a theoretical perspective, populism has been alternatively conceptualised as (see also Caiani and della Porta 2011): (1) a political *rhetoric* that is marked by the ‘unscrupulous use and instrumentalisation of diffuse public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment’ (Betz 1994: 4) and appeals to ‘the power of the common people in order to challenge the legitimacy of the current political establishment’ (Abt and Rummens 2007: 407); or as (2) an *ideology*, which 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* of the people’ (Mudde 2004: 543). The elements of this ‘thin-centred ideology’ (Freedon 2017) concerning the structure of power in society are the references to antagonistic relations between the people and the elite, the idea of restoring popular sovereignty and a conception of the people as a homogeneous body. A specific feature of this ideology is its vagueness, in that it ‘responds to its need to be adaptable’ (Ruzza and Fella 2009: 3). Furthermore, populism has been also defined as (3) a *type of organisation* characterised by the presence of a charismatic (new kind of) leadership (Taggart 2000). In this respect, populism is understood not as an ideology but rather as a political strategy used by the *personalistic* leadership of a populist movement or party to exercise power ‘based on direct, unmediated, non-institutionalised support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers’ (Weyland 2001: 14; for an updated discussion of populism as a political strategy see Kriesi 2018a). In this perspective, populism as an ideology/discourse and populism as a strategy are complementary and tend to ‘go together’ (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Furthermore, in this strand of the literature, a specific focus has been placed on the *special style of communication* (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Tarchi 2002) used by charismatic leaders: populists are successful (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015), due to their role as ‘taboo breakers and fighters against political correctness’ (Mudde 2004: 554).

Moving from definitions to empirical cases, the variety of populist movements (Tarchi 2015) is impressive. When a typological criterion is adopted, the literature distinguishes between right-wing and – more recently – left-wing populist movements: Whereas the latter identify the ‘people’ in socio-economic terms, such as the working class exploited by the bourgeois elite, the former refer to the ethnic nation (Abt and Rummens 2007). Populism, especially among scholars focusing on Europe, is above all found on the extreme or radical right (e.g. the Austrian Freedom Party, the French National Front – now Rassemblement National, etc.; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2008), but it can

also be related – as it increasingly is – to the radical left (e.g. March 2011; Ramiro and Gomez 2016; Stavrakakis and Katzambekis 2014; Zaslove 2008). Beyond populism on the fringes of the political spectrum, observers further underline the growing importance in Western and Central-Eastern Europe of a type of ‘mainstream populism’ (e.g. Tony Blair in the UK; see Mair 2002). There are, furthermore, forms of what may be called ‘hybrid populism’, for instance the Five Star Movement (FSM), which adopts an ideologically eclectic mix of policy positions and does not clearly locate itself on either the left or the right flank of the party system (Roberts 2017a).

More recently, comparative studies, moving beyond the traditional left-wing/right-wing differentiation, have drawn a distinction between *inclusionary* and *exclusionary* populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013), based on three dimensions (material, political, and symbolic) which concern the distribution of resources among social groups, the appeal to forms of political mobilisation going beyond representative democratic channels, and the boundaries of the notion of ‘people’. On all of these three dimensions, inclusionary and exclusionary populist parties differ in the degree of ‘inclusiveness’ envisaged: e.g. favouring mass welfare programmes vs. defending forms of welfare chauvinism; aiming at giving a voice to disregarded groups vs. discriminating among various types of members of the political community; and finally highlighting, for instance, the ‘dignity’ of indigenous populations vs. emphasising symbolic exclusion (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). Speaking more broadly, inclusionary and exclusionary populisms underline different forms of defining the ‘other(s)’ (as well as the ‘imagined community’: Anderson 1991): the economic oligarchy, the media, the judiciary, foreign capital (e.g. in Latin America) form the ‘other’ in inclusionary populism, while in the case of exclusionary European populisms, the ‘other’ is mostly formed of immigrants and people who are ‘culturally different’.

To a certain extent, the inclusionary–exclusionary differentiation contains the distinction between left and right: whereas inclusionary populism is associated with left-wing parties (March 2011), since the 1980s exclusionary populism has been mainly associated with right-wing organisations. Inclusionary, typically left-wing populism, has until recently been considered a primarily Latin American phenomenon, although in the last few years it has also been seen in European countries – such as in Spain with *Podemos* and in France with *France Insoumise*.

In this contribution and in the special issue we are particularly interested in the success of populist parties, which we argue, drawing theoretically from Laclau (2005), depend on the capacity to ‘politicise’ crises in terms of a need to rescue the ‘pure’ people from a greedy and corrupt

**Table 1.** Exclusionary and inclusionary populist parties in 30 European countries (all European Union countries, including the United Kingdom, and adding Norway and Switzerland), by year of foundation.

	<i>Inclusionary populist parties</i>	<i>Exclusionary populist parties</i>	Total
Before 1994	1	22	23
1995–2008	3	26	29
2008–2017	6	7	13
Total populist parties	10	55	65

Source: Authors' calculations based on various secondary sources. See Online Appendix for further details.

elite. Such an elite has been (according to the 'mainstream' populist discourse) profiting from the various crises by imposing technocratic decisions that are unfavourable to the people and – in the case of the European Union, for example – lack clear democratic support. Furthermore, the elite may have taken advantage of the economic crisis and increasing inequality, thus further impoverishing the 'people'. Finally, the elite may have taken advantage of the migration crisis, which enables migrants' cheap labour to put pressure on 'nativist' workers. In this respect, nativist and anti-globalisation claims have fuelled populist support which otherwise would have remained much more marginal in Europe – as it did for almost three decades (from the 1970s to the 1990s).

## The crises

The point of departure of the special issue is to consider populist parties' evolution as a function of the economic crisis while not ignoring the existence of other types of crises: political and cultural ones. As already argued with reference to Latin America, populism occurs (and is often framed by political actors) within a crisis scenario (Laclau 1977; Roberts 1995) and therefore in a comparative effort to focus on the drivers of populist parties' success we would like to take inspiration from the 'crisis' approach and focus on the abovementioned crises with reference to European countries.

As a matter of fact, we consider both the political and economic crises as particularly important, since, although populist success in post-war Europe has come in waves (von Beyme 1988: 6), it is its recent combination that – *prima facie* – may have offered opportunities for the electoral expansion of populist parties: as Table 1 shows, it is after 1995 that over 60% of the current populist parties were founded.

According to our data, among the 65 populist parties currently present in Europe (see also van Kessel 2015), 38% have participated in coalition governments or supported minority governments (in Bulgaria, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Norway; Golder 2016). Currently (January 2019), populist parties are in government on their own or as part of coalition

**Table 2.** Emerged, consolidated and marginal inclusionary and exclusionary populist parties in 30 European countries in times of crisis (pre-2008–2017).

	Inclusionary	Exclusionary	Total
Emerged	6	12	18
Consolidated	4	21	25
Marginal	0	22	22
Total Populist parties	10	55	65

Note: the relevance criterion is 4% of vote in national elections (last election before 2008–2017 included).

Legend: Emerged populism = if electoral result <4% before 2008 (i.e. last national election before 2008), but >4% post 2008 (considering 2008–2017 average vote); Consolidated populism = if electoral result >4% before and after 2008; Marginal populism = if electoral result <4% before and after 2008 or = if electoral result >4% before, but <4% after 2008.

governments – as is the case in Austria, Finland, Italy, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland – and provide external support to the government in Spain. Furthermore, these parties have also proven to be influential in a variety of other countries, having members of parliament in more than one legislative term – with various degrees of strength – in 49% of cases. In particular, when considering different ‘stages’ of populist electoral success (i.e. emergence and consolidation: see note on Table 2 for the definition) in Europe, we can identify 18 ‘emerged’ populist parties, 6 of which are inclusionary – a majority of the total number (10). The ‘consolidated’ populist parties are more numerous, with a higher presence of exclusionary populist actors. Marginal populist parties, too, can be found in time of crises – showing that national patterns should always be carefully scrutinised in order to better grasp the domestic political opportunities for populist parties’ success. (For the full list of parties, their classification and performance see the online appendix.)

As already mentioned, beyond the economic crisis we also focus on other crises to better understand the nature of such success. Clearly, the economic crisis (the so-called Great Recession) has played a crucial role in this populist upswing (see Kriesi and Pappas 2015) but in order not to overstate its relevance we need to further grasp what other potential triggers of populist parties’ success may exist. From a merely chronological perspective, on the one hand, in several cases, i.e. in most European countries, new political parties have emerged or consolidated since the crisis. They also have been increasingly prominent in the domestic political scene by governing (for example, the case of the True Finns in Finland, Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás (SYRIZA) in Greece, or the FSM and Lega in Italy) or seriously challenging the existing political parties (for example, Front National – now Rassemblement National – in France, Podemos in Spain, or Alternative für Deutschland in Germany). On the other hand, beyond the Great Recession, there has also been a more long-lasting crisis afflicting European democracies: the political

crisis, which has been labelled a crisis of representative democracy in terms of growing lack of trust in democratic institutions (such as the national parliament or government) and in traditional gatekeepers (such as political parties). It is not by chance that several populist parties have tried to move beyond the classic definition of a political party; their leaders have often labelled their organisations as ‘movements’, not ‘parties’ – see, for example, the Five Star Movement, among others, which may be considered as a good example of a movement-party. Finally, the cultural crisis – exacerbated by the growth of migration pressures in more recent times – reached its peak with the European refugee crisis of 2015 and has also had an important impact on an increasingly negative perception of migration in several European countries – going beyond what the numbers of migrants might suggest (European Social Survey 2017: 9).

As has been noted, if support for populist parties has increased steadily since 1980 in all European countries, ‘the 2009–2012 double-dip recession and the ongoing refugee crisis have helped ... populist parties gain momentum’. Various contributions to this special issue tackle this differential explanation of populist parties’ success and provide convincing analyses of both the evolution and the explanation of such phenomena.

### ***Political crisis and populism***

The first set of explanations deals with the shortcomings of representative democracy (i.e. a *structural crisis* of representation; Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Over recent decades, Europe has witnessed a weakening of traditional party identities and changing party functions (Mair 2002: 5). Mainstream parties have progressively lost ground with respect to the new challengers, which have been better able to represent the ‘losers of globalisation’<sup>1</sup> (either in terms of economic transformations or cultural diversities; Kriesi 2018a: 19) and therefore have obtained increasing electoral success (Kriesi 2014, 2017: 18). According to Kriesi (2018b), the political crisis is the key factor in explaining the recent reinvigoration of populism all across Europe, given that contemporary democracies are representative democracies, where political parties act as the main agents of representation: ‘This crisis may interact and be reinforced by economic crises, but in the final analysis, it is the political component of the joint crises that is decisive for the rise of populism’ (Kriesi 2018b: 16).

There is considerable debate in the literature (e.g. on party competition) regarding the extent to which the rise of (mainly radical right) populist parties should be understood as part of a broader realignment of party systems (e.g. Arzheimer 2009; Carter 2005; Golder 2003, 2016; Hobolt and Tilley 2016; Ivarsson 2008; Kitschelt 2007; Kriesi *et al.*

2008; Lubbers *et al.* 2002; Norris 2005; Rooduijn *et al.* 2017; van der Brug and Fennema 2007). The main argument is that the European party system's long-term restructuring (de-alignment or re-alignment: Roberts 2017b) has provided political space for new parties that are able to mobilise around less structured political cleavages, such as economic insecurity and immigration (Guiso *et al.* 2017). Globalisation and post-industrialisation have led to a decline in class voting and partisan identification, increased political alienation among certain segments of the population, and reduced trust in the political elite (e.g. Betz 1994; Golder 2016). The *functionalist crisis interpretation* (Kriesi 2018b; Mair 2013) would therefore be linked mainly to the increasing inability of mainstream political parties to mobilise voters (also Rydgren 2008): the indicators for this are declining party membership and party identification, declining voter turnout, the increasing volatility of the vote and the declining shares of voters who choose to support mainstream parties. Usually, the higher the electoral volatility, the lower the party membership, the lower the trust in parliament (and government and political parties) and the lower the satisfaction with democracy are, the more profound the political crisis is and, presumably, the more likely populist parties are to succeed (e.g. see Kriesi and Pappas 2015).

### ***Economic crisis and populism***

Another argument is that economic crises facilitate the emergence and success of populist parties (Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Moffit 2015; Ramiro and Gomez 2017; Stavrakakis and Katzambekis 2014; Vasilopoulou *et al.* 2014).<sup>2</sup> As Arzheimer (2009) underlines, with respect to the radical right, 'in line with theory of ethnic competition the extreme right will benefit from high levels of immigration and unemployment' (Arzheimer 2009: 273). Indeed, according to 'relative deprivation' theories, economic hard times are the main causes of populist attitudes (Guiso *et al.* 2017: 4);<sup>3</sup> moreover, economic crises increase political discontent toward representative institutions. These are two factors strongly related to populism. In fact, Hobolt and Tilley (2016) show that the crisis has reshaped the nature of party competition in Europe (through the sanctioning of mainstream parties and preferences over immigration related to the euro crisis). Nevertheless, there are also studies stressing that poor economic performance (including growth, unemployment, and inflation rates) does not explain the success of radical right-wing populist parties (Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Bjørklund 2007). Finally, we may notice that some scholars emphasise that economics may matter for the fortunes of (far-right) parties but only under certain contextual circumstances related

to party competition (e.g. the positioning of the other parties on the issue, as well as the political debate and agenda; Arzheimer 2009; Kitschelt 2007). Although clearly controversial, economic crisis-related explanations are worth using in analyses that aim to understand the electoral success of populist parties in Europe in the shadow of the crisis (e.g. see also Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Roberts 2017a; van der Brug and Fennema 2007). Particularly innovative is the analysis of the interaction between the economic crisis and the rise of inclusionary populism, which has been more recent and which has been so far been scrutinised only to a limited extent (see Font *et al.* 2019).

### **Cultural crisis and populism**

A last set of crisis-related explanations of populist parties is linked to cultural factors. This approach, which interprets populism as a 'silent revolution' (Ignazi 1997), sees the rise of populist parties as a reaction against a wide range of rapid cultural changes that have eroded the values and customs of Western societies (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 30). This explanation may be problematic, since the 'cultural backlash' refers to several potentially unrelated issues – such as anti-immigration attitudes, mistrust in global and national governance, support for authoritarian values, and left-right ideological self-placement. Moreover, the post-materialistic silent revolution dates back to the 1970s and, until very recent times, populist parties have not been as successful as they currently are (Bartels 2017). Studies address the cultural crisis explanation by focusing on the cultural threat posed by 'immigration', including aspects such as anti-immigrant attitudes and migrants' presence within the domestic political community. Indeed, there is strong support in the literature for the cultural grievance explanation at the individual level (Golder 2016). Multiple studies have shown that anti-immigrant attitudes are positively correlated to radical right populist support (Ivaresflaten 2008; Lubbers and Scheepers 2002; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2008; van der Brug and Fennema 2007). Furthermore, it has already been underlined that – when grievances over economic changes, political elitism, and immigration are all considered simultaneously – populist (right) parties perform well when they mobilise over immigration grievances (Ivaresflaten 2008).

However, the hypothesis linking immigration to populism is thus far supported by contrasting empirical evidence. Roberts (2017a: 18), for example, finds that '[t]he level of immigration ... has a statistically significant negative relationship with right populist vote share'. Similarly Vadlamannati and Kelly (2017: 30), using panel data on 27 OECD countries from 1990 to 2014, find 'no direct effect of refugee flows in

explaining electoral support for populist-right parties'.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that immigration 'objectives' figures per se are not by themselves sufficient to grasp the impact of the phenomenon on (populist) voters' reaction, but rather it is possible that more 'subjective' citizens' perceptions (such as for instance citizens' attitudes on immigration) should also be factored into the equation. In this regard, as stressed, populism can benefit from a self-proclaimed crisis; furthermore, it can also be conceived 'as a performance of crisis', capitalising and increasing on citizens' 'sense of insecurity' related to the cultural backlash, rather than on objective figures on immigrant and/or refugee waves, for example. In other words, rather than being a reaction to a pre-existing crisis, populist political actors can construct specific 'failure stories' in line with people's sentiment, and transform them into a perceived crisis (Moffitt 2015). Beyond a cultural-immigration crisis, cultural opportunities coming from the past (such as for instance the fascist or communist legacy respectively in Western and Central-Eastern European countries) need to be accounted for in understanding of the success of populism. As shown elsewhere, similarities and differences between types of populist groups and countries in the framing strategies of populism are linked to the cultural, historical, and political-discursive opportunities (Caiani and della Porta 2011) that determine what kind of ideas are made visible to the public, resonate with public opinion, and are held to be 'legitimate' by the audience (Kriesi 2004: 72).

Our general argument, supported by the various articles in the special issue, is that the crises have interacted in different ways at the national level and that therefore we need to pay specific attention to the context when we analyse the different trajectories of populist parties at the national or regional levels.

Broadly speaking, the crises are 'windows of opportunity' that can be used by the new political parties or for the rebranding of old political parties, which find it relatively easy to build a 'thin-centred ideology', especially in the context of the very widespread social media that further facilitates simplified, unilateral, and antagonistic forms of communication. Furthermore, we may notice that beyond demand side (i.e. crises) contextual factors, meso-level organisational characteristics could be relevant: ideology, organisational structure, and leadership (Art 2011; Carter 2005; De Witte and Klandermans 2000; Goodwin 2006; Mudde 2007) may explain how populist parties take advantage of the macro-level opportunities and constraints. For example, several studies provide evidence that strong party organisations help radical right parties' consolidation (Art 2011; Carter 2005; Lubbers and Scheepers 2002). For these reasons, a contextualisation strategy – which is the one followed in this special issue –

is of utmost importance in order to better grasp the drivers of different variants of populism and the differential levels of electoral success enjoyed by populist parties.

### **The special issue**

Starting from these more recent reflections, in this special issue all the abovementioned three main dimensions or attributes of populism – political rhetoric, ideology, type of organisation/communication style – will be considered, bringing together contributions that explore their empirical manifestations in several European countries and that go beyond the classical division between left-wing and right-wing populism. Each contribution is a stand-alone article in which the author has selected one or more key elements of the analytical framework and has applied it to the selected countries. More specifically, taking into account this scholarly debate, the special issue aims to appraise the ‘degree’ and ‘varieties’ of populism within various political parties, with a particular focus – also linked to the special momentum for European democracy after Brexit – on Europe (south,<sup>5</sup> north, east, and west).

In other words, this special issue aims to combine an analytical perspective with an empirical focus on current populism(s) in Europe. Each article reconstructs the new and complex ways in which populism has manifested itself within the context of the economic and political crisis after 2008. This special issue develops an analytical and empirical approach to the topic, which is decidedly distinct from the most recent normative contributions.

The special issue is composed of seven contributions. First, by comparing three countries (Greece, Portugal, and Spain) badly hit by the 2008 Great Recession, which have experienced important electoral and political turmoil, Lisi, Llamazares, and Tsakatika (2019) assess the various populist features through a content analysis of all the most significant – mainstream and challenger – party documents since 2008. They suggest an explanation that focuses on the economic and political crisis (which affects inclusionary and exclusionary populist parties differently). Finally, they discuss some implications regarding the impact of populism on party system change.

Mosca and Tronconi (2019) focus on the Italian case and investigate the nature and evolution of the not easily classifiable type of populism represented by the Five Star Movement (FSM). By relying on original survey data on the ideological positioning of FSM voters, as well as on the analysis of texts published on the blog of the movement’s leader, Beppe Grillo, they show that the 2013 national elections represented a turning point in Italian politics: a critical juncture related to the mingling of

economic, political, and moral crises that clearly ‘unfroze’ voters and generated a tripolar party system.

With a communications and media-related approach to populism, Bernhard and Kriesi (2019) comparatively examine the levels of populism exhibited by parties in Western Europe. Relying on a quantitative content analysis of 11 national elections in time of crises (2012–2015), they show that populist parties from both the radical right and radical left make use of populist appeals, particularly on economic issues. In this contribution, the economic dimension of populism seems particularly relevant for understanding the success of populist parties.

Surel focuses (2019) on France and assesses the relevance of the notion of ‘exclusionary populism’ for the characterisation of the Front National in the country, making the case that this remains the most appropriate label, even when other labels (such as ‘catch-all populism’) are employed. The analysis is carried out by examining the political discourses as well as various electoral platforms of the party and concludes by studying the ways in which other French parties and political leaders (such as Macron and Mélenchon) have, to a certain extent, adapted to the new ‘populist Zeitgeist’.

Caramani and Manucci (2019), in considering both socio-economic and political-institutional factors, carry out a comparative analysis of eight West European countries and analyse cultural opportunities that may account for populist success. They show that the electoral performance of exclusionary populist parties also depends on the type of re-elaboration of countries’ national past and their collective memories. The added value of this contribution is especially in regard to the cultural crisis and the redefinition of the past as a populist political tool.

Usherwood (2019) focuses on the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and, on the basis of various empirical material (website data and leader’s speeches), analyses its development. It is shown that, although it was born as a single-issue party par excellence, since the mid-2000s the party has changed into a broader party of protest, moving towards a type which could be classified as exclusionary populism. It sheds light on details in our argument that exclusionary populist parties take advantage of broader feelings of discontent and disconnection across a range of socio-economic groups.

Finally, Engler, Pytlas, and Deegan-Krause (2019), using a combination of elite, expert and mass surveys, and extensive fieldwork, analyse the party systems of various countries in Central and Eastern Europe by looking at the degree of populist ideology among major parties (including the degree of inclusion and exclusion expressed by parties). They also investigate the degree of populist rhetoric and forms of organisation. They argue that Eastern and Central European countries can offer a crucial case study

for the investigation of (the multiple gradational qualities of) populism, since in this region the lack of clear solutions to basic problems, austerity measures, and the distrust of elites among uncommitted voters have shaped the political landscape since the fall of communism, and the phenomenon of populism has never been confined only to exclusionary or inclusionary political parties.

In conclusion, we believe that this special issue provides an important contribution to the analysis of contemporary variants of populist parties within the European contexts, highlighting the relevance of a multi-causal analytical framework, which considers three different types of crises – political, economic, and cultural. More specifically, the various articles prove that distinguishing between different types of populist parties (namely exclusionary vs. inclusionary) is particularly important in order to capture the differences and similarities in domestic responses to the crises. In line with Mair (2002) and Kriesi (2018b), it emerges quite clearly that populist parties are especially successful in those cases where the political crisis is pronounced, but that the degree of the parties' success depends on the specific capacity of populist leaders to mobilise in response to the crisis. Furthermore, the economic and cultural crises have a differential impact on the emergence and consolidation of populist parties – the former are more relevant for inclusionary populist parties, the latter are more conducive to the success of exclusionary populist parties. Put differently, the crises per se are windows of opportunity that can be exploited by domestic political leaders or parties who are able to mobilise – via specific 'thin-centred ideologies', rhetoric, and organisation – electorates who are increasingly unsatisfied with the traditional political offer.

## Notes

1. For example, the typical radical right-wing populist voter would be a young male, with a low level of education, who is either unemployed, self-employed, or a manual worker (Arzheimer 2009; Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Lubbers and Scheepers 2002; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; van der Brug 2000).
2. Kitschelt 2007 (as Carter 2005) also argues that radical right parties' ideological appeal on economics is one predictor of their electoral performance. See also the analyses of Lubbers *et al.* (2002) and Ivarsflaten (2005), as well as Norris (2005 on the socio-economic support base of the radical right).
3. Contrary to this expectation, it has also been noted that economic crises increase the relative salience of the economic dimension, on which far right parties have little expertise (Mudde 2014) or potential cross-class support (Ivarsflaten 2005; Evans 2005).
4. Whereas some studies find that larger immigrant communities increase far right parties' support (Golder 2003, 2016; Lubbers and Scheepers 2002; van der Brug and Fennema 2007), others do not find such effects (Arzheimer

and Carter 2006; Lucassen and Lubbers 2012; Norris 2005; on Eastern Europe, see Bustikova 2014; Rydgren 2008).

5. In the special issue there will be a slight over-representation of Southern European countries. The reason is that in this region the impact of the economic crisis has been harder and party system change has been particularly relevant.

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# National past and populism: the re-elaboration of fascism and its impact on right-wing populism in Western Europe

Daniele Caramani and Luca Manucci

## ABSTRACT

The electoral performance of right-wing populism depends on the type of re-elaboration of countries' national past and their collective memories. Complementing socio-economic and political-institutional factors, the article analyses cultural opportunity structures. Given the link between fascist and populist visions of power, it shows that different collective memories of the fascist past and World War II open up or close down the space for right-wing populist parties. Theoretically, the typology includes four types of re-elaboration: culpabilisation, victimisation, heroisation and cancellation. Results of a comparative analysis of eight West European countries based on a novel measurement method point to (1) culpabilisation and heroisation as types of re-elaboration limiting right-wing populist parties' electoral performance, (2) cancellation as a type having an undetermined effect, and (3) victimisation as a type triggering the success of right-wing populist parties.

The success of Alternative for Germany (AfD) in the 2017 federal elections came as a shock to many. Germany is a country that dealt critically with its past and developed a political culture making it unthinkable that right-wing populist discourses and parties would establish themselves. The stigma attached to positions even vaguely reminiscent of a traumatic past had kept right-wing populism at the fringes of the public sphere for decades.

The burden of the past is often evoked to explain the absence in some countries of right-wing populism in both academic and in media outlets.<sup>1</sup> Many scholars mention the fascist legacy as a factor linked to the success of right-wing populist parties (Betz 1988; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Mudde 2007; Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). However, in comparative research

such explanations are only mentioned in passing and quickly abandoned in favour of political-institutional and socio-economic ones. At the same time, the rich historical research on collective memories does not make the link with party politics, focusing mostly on country-specific historical case studies or binary comparisons – often with Germany (Art 2006; Berger 2002; Deighton 2002; Östling 2011; Rousso 1990).

This article connects, comparatively, the legacy of the fascist past and World War II with the success of right-wing populist parties. To what extent does the type of memory and collective re-elaboration of the fascist past block or trigger right-wing populism in different countries? Do certain types of re-elaboration hinder the success of such parties or, conversely, provide a more fertile ground? The article argues that collective memories create more or less favourable ‘cultural opportunity structures’ for this party family.<sup>2</sup>

The goal of the article is to test the plausibility of this hypothesis in a bivariate way using eight West European countries: Austria, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom. The theoretical argument relies on a new typology of re-elaboration (culpabilisation, victimisation, heroisation and cancellation). Methodologically, it uses an ‘in-depth expert survey’ (of scientific literature) to classify countries’ memories, striking the balance between thick case-oriented historical data and analytical relationships.

The article starts by outlining the theoretical argument about the impact of the re-elaboration of national pasts on the electoral performance of right-wing populism. It then presents the typology of re-elaborations and formulates hypotheses about the link between each type and right-wing populism. This is followed by the research design, case selection and operationalisation, and the plausibility test. The conclusion discusses the recent fading of memories.

### **Towards cultural explanations of right-wing populism**

As a thin ideology, populism is based on people-centrism and anti-elitism. Populist democracy is illiberal and advocates the putative will of the sovereign people unconstrained by procedures, checks and balances, and distortions by intermediary actors. Furthermore, populism has a homogenous and non-pluralistic vision of the people, which leads to distrust of parties as carriers of particularistic interests against the common good. The embodiment of people’s will is based on plebiscitarian mobilisation. As a thick ideology, right-wing populism is characterised by nativism and an exclusionary definition of the ‘other’.<sup>3</sup> Following this definition, various

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studies have analysed the conditions under which right-wing populism emerges and varies across countries based on structures of opportunities.

The more or less successful populist mobilisation in different countries has so far been exclusively linked to the interaction of socio-economic factors (demand side) with political-institutional opportunity structures (supply side). On institutional opportunity structures, research has mainly analysed the openness of the electoral system operationalised through its proportionality.<sup>4</sup> On political opportunity structures, the literature has looked at the electoral strategies of established parties (Arzheimer and Carter 2006). This kind of opportunity structure is based on the strategic interactions between parties and focuses on the changing space of competition (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Kriesi *et al.* 2012).

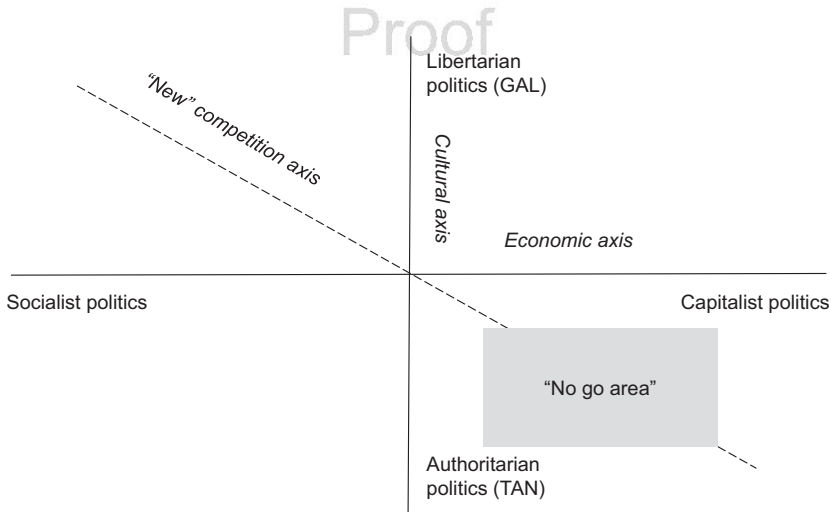
In contrast to socio-economic and political-institutional explanations, cultural explanations have received less attention in comparative research. Although many have noted the relevance of cultural factors such as collective memories of traumatic past events for the study of populism, comparative research has not pursued what seems a promising approach. The in-depth research on different types of re-elaboration is found more prominently among historians.<sup>5</sup> The goal of this article is to bridge comparative empirical research that does not include cultural factors with research that does but not comparatively.

The argument about the stigmatisation of right-wing populist positions has been advanced almost exclusively in relation to Germany. Authors mention the role of the Nazi period and the legacy of the Nazi regime on the emergence of extreme-right parties (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Tarchi 2002). Others have addressed the impossibility of de-criminalising the Nazi past as a factor explaining the lack of success of right-wing populists (Betz 1988). The 'handicap' of the right set by the restrictions arising from the historical burden that weighs on Germany's political culture – the shadow of the Nazi past and the deep stigma attached to right-wing extremism in Germany – also recurs in the literature (Art 2006; Decker 2008).<sup>6</sup>

Hence, as a complement to political-institutional and socio-economic opportunity structures, this article introduces cultural opportunity structures, i.e. what is taboo or socially acceptable based on the re-elaboration of the past. We focus on the restrictions of the ideological space that make it harder for specific parties to succeed, created by a specific relationship with the past, making the 'authoritarian' end of the cultural axis a 'no go area' (Figure 1).<sup>7</sup>

Crucially, the re-elaboration of the past is not the past itself. The relationship to fascism and to the role a country played during World War II matters first and foremost in terms of their re-elaboration, the

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**Figure 1.** The restrictive role of memory on the space of electoral competition.

establishment of a specific collective memory and its progressive objectivation (Burke 1998). The article does not aim at establishing an objective, historical role for each country.<sup>8</sup> Its goal is rather to define which collective memory has emerged from a process of re-elaboration and its impact on the opportunity for right-wing populists to be successful.

Re-elaboration is a process of definition of countries' role during the fascist period and World War II. This process leads to the formation of collective memories as a 'kind of narrative that nations ... tell about themselves, that is subject to moral claims and counter-claims' (Müller 2010: 29, see also Müller 2002). Re-elaboration is obviously a conflictual process, with a politics of re-elaboration and an instrumentalisation of the past driven by memory 'entrepreneurs'. There can be conflicting (or, at least, not homogenous) cultures of remembrance in each country (Berger 2010: 32). Collective memories may also be layered vertically, namely between the elite (intellectual or official) and the people.

Memories change over time and go through stages of memory-building.

- After World War II re-elaboration is blocked in a *silencing phase* of variable duration during which thorny topics are avoided.<sup>9</sup>
- Subsequently, a *self-critical phase* examines a country's role vis-à-vis the fascist past and the war through intellectual and political negotiations.
- The result is a re-elaboration that imposes itself during a *crystallisation phase*.
- Recent years presage a *fading phase*. After the Cold War, memories of fascism and World War II become obsolete and their salience decreases.

Re-elaboration processes are complex, more or less cross-national, academic and official, more or less salient in the public debate, and more or less consensual or polarised. We do not analyse the nuances of the process, the power relationships, the strategies of the main actors (for example, parties) involved in the construction of the collective memory. We treat the process itself as a 'black box'. In the research design, we describe the way in which we operationalise re-elaboration and memories. Before that, the next section specifies the link between fascist past and right-wing populism and formulates the hypotheses.

## **The re-elaboration of the past**

### ***The link between fascist past and right-wing populism***

The argument of the article stipulates a connection between how the fascist past is re-elaborated and the electoral performance of right-wing populism. The way in which the past is re-elaborated makes it more or less likely for right-wing populist features to be accepted or stigmatised. A certain type of re-elaboration may open up or, conversely, close down the opportunity structure for right-wing populism to develop in given countries. Why do we focus on the fascist past and the role of the country in World War II? What is the link with right-wing populism specifically?

We focus on the fascist past, the relationship countries had with fascist regimes, as well as the countries had in either confronting or accommodating fascism before and during World War II because this past – and not another past – is defining for attitudes towards populism today. Fascism has embodied many of the features that denote right-wing populism.<sup>10</sup> Even if manifesting itself at different levels of radicalism, the latter includes core elements of that past.<sup>11</sup> Both ideologies share illiberal elements that include the unconstrained will of the people as well as an unmediated relationship between elite and people typical of the authoritarian end of the cultural axis. The two have a unitary vision of the people as homogenous and non-plural, leading to distrust for parties (and their competition) as carriers of particularistic interests. Most importantly, they have in common a nativist definition of the people based on exclusionary criteria. This link is stronger the more radical parties are.

The aftermath of World War II is the single most important moment of definition of national identity comparable only to state formation in the nineteenth century. Moreover, it is a common European-wide defining moment, a property that countries share, making them comparable. In the 1930s and 1940s, every country was confronted, more or less directly, with fascist regimes and had later to take a position, which crystallised into a collective memory of the country's role during that historical

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juncture. Finally, the re-elaboration of this past takes place in conditions of full democratic mobilisation involving the masses in the formation of a truly collective memory.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, we do not focus on other historical phases such as imperialism, World War I, civil wars or state formation.

### ***A typology of re-elaboration***

Four types of re-elaboration of the past are used to operationalise collective memory. Each type opens or closes to a certain degree the opportunity for populist parties to succeed electorally. The types are the values of the independent variable that we assign to the countries. Two caveats apply to the operationalisation of these types further down. First, countries fit mostly into one type of re-elaboration. Second, most countries' types of re-elaboration remain stable after the crystallisation phase (for most countries since the 1970s).

Ideal types are defined in Table 1. A memory of *heroisation* presents the country as the hero taking full merit for fighting fascist and aggressive external regimes, implying the idea of having been on the right side. It stresses the country's role in maintaining liberal values and democratic institutions, and is solidly anchored in public opinion and official discourse. Alternative or more nuanced narratives about the role of the country in its relation to fascism are unacceptable and marginal.<sup>13</sup>

The opposing re-elaboration is that of *culpabilisation*. Instead of presenting itself as the hero, the country accepts its role as culprit of own (internal) regime. The collective memory is based on taking responsibility for its authoritarian past. The country makes amends and compensates in various forms – symbolically and otherwise – through processes of internal, bottom-up support for the re-elaboration that are shared and have official character. Also in this case, alternative or more nuanced narratives about the role of the country during its fascist past are stigmatised.

**Table 1.** A typology of strategies of re-elaboration of the past.

Locus of fascist regime	Placement of responsibility	
	Internalised (high stigmatisation)	Externalised (low stigmatisation)
Internal	<i>Culpabilisation</i> The country assumes the burden of guilt for the fascist regime and its perpetrations.	<i>Victimisation</i> The country fabricates victimhood of 'external' fascist regimes and denies responsibility.
External	<i>Heroisation</i> The country takes full merit for opposing and defeating fascist regimes and upholding liberal values.	<i>Cancellation</i> The country's role is not problematised and little public debate takes place.

The third and fourth types have in common the avoidance of responsibility. By developing a memory of *cancellation* a country removes its past relation with fascism from the public debate. The country does not thematise its implicit or explicit complicity with, and accommodation of, external regimes. A mainstream official narrative is weak. Various narratives may exist but they are not prominent in the public sphere so no narrative is really stigmatised. The main feature is not the divided nature of collective memory but the absence of it.

On the contrary, in a re-elaboration based on (self-) *victimisation* the collective memory is present. The country does not take responsibility for its own fascist and aggressive past (and role as perpetrator), or its association with such regimes, and plays the victim. It shifts the blame to outside forces of which it claims to be the victim.<sup>14</sup> Rather than scrutinise its own role during fascist periods, it distorts the national experience in a positive light and negatively portrays external forces. As a result, the country's relationship with fascism is embellished.

As types of narratives, we see this variable as a nominal one. However, in terms of acceptance of responsibility or degree of stigmatisation, it can be conceived as an ordinal one. At one extreme is culpabilisation, in which the acceptance of guilt and stigmatisation of fascism is total and existential (+ +). Heroisation is similar, but stigmatisation of fascism is not associated with the need to question fundamental features of identity, collective psychology and national culture (+). At the other extreme is victimisation, in which the responsibility is not only rejected but is also positively altered, and consequently not stigmatised (- -). Cancellation is a milder form, in which responsibility is neither discussed nor altered (-).

### **Hypotheses**

We expect the first two types of re-elaboration (culpabilisation and heroisation) to close down the space for right-wing populism while the two latter types (cancellation and victimisation) open it up. In the two former types, stigmatisation acts as a brake to alternative narratives to the mainstream one. In the two latter types, this is not the case. This leads us to formulate our hypotheses.

1. We expect *culpabilisation* to narrow the cultural opportunity structure for right-wing populism. A country whose narrative is defined in condemnation of its role in illiberal regimes is unlikely to tolerate right-wing populism.

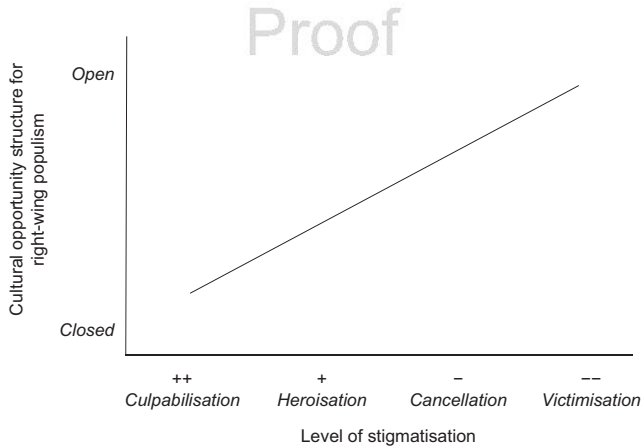
2. We expect *heroisation* to narrow the cultural opportunity structure for right-wing populism. A country whose narrative is defined in opposition to illiberal regimes is unlikely to accept right-wing populism.
3. We expect *cancellation* not to act as a brake to right-wing populism. A country whose narrative does not include a mention of its past role does not stigmatise right-wing populism.
4. We expect *victimisation* to open up the cultural opportunity structure for right-wing populism. A country whose narrative embellishes its past role provides fertile ground for right-wing populism.

Why do we expect culpabilisation and heroisation to close down the space for right-wing populism? In the former case, the collective feeling of guilt makes it shocking and unacceptable to hold values, attitudes and views even remotely associated with a shameful past. Responsibility and guilt have been internalised through socialisation over generations. In the latter case, the collective feeling of pride makes it shocking and unacceptable to hold values, attitudes and views even vaguely aligned with a past that had been fought with sacrifice. It is socially sanctioned.<sup>15</sup>

Why do we expect victimisation and cancellation not to narrow the space for right-wing populism? In both cases the stigma associated with the fascist past or the stance towards such regimes is weak or absent – and contested. At least in part, the past has no negative connotations and is acceptable. In the case of cancellation, this is due to the lack of public debate. In the case of victimisation, the narrative has an active effect on populist performance by shifting the blame away from embellished national right-wing regimes and placing it on others. Responsibility for past actions is not associated with domestic fascist regimes but rather with foreign ones. Fascism is not only not stigmatised but also put in a positive light. The hypothesis is thus that victimisation does more than passively ‘not blocking’. It has a triggering effect. It is not shocking and unacceptable to hold values, attitudes, and views aligned with the fascist past. It is not sanctioned socially.<sup>16</sup> The impact of the opportunity structure for right-wing populism can be represented in linear terms, as in Figure 2.

## Research design

Empirically, this article carries out a ‘plausibility test’ of a novel explanatory factor in comparative perspective. We are interested in assessing the impact of the type of re-elaboration and its role in shaping the cultural opportunity structure. Our focus is on the independent variable. We do not have the goal of producing an encompassing model in which re-



**Figure 2.** Types of re-elaboration, degrees of stigmatisation and opportunity structure of right-wing populism.

elaboration is combined with other explanatory variables.<sup>17</sup> The plausibility test is based on the empirical observation of the association between the type of re-elaboration and levels of right-wing populism.

### **Case selection**

The eight West European countries on which the analysis is based are Austria, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom since the 1970s. The focus on Western Europe allows a certain degree of similarity among the cases in terms of patterns of state formation, nation-building and democratisation (a most-similar-systems design). More importantly, differently than other areas, all countries have been confronted with fascism and World War II. To confront implies that the country could not ignore the presence of fascist regimes: even if simply to declare itself neutral, the country needs to take a stand and, consequently, develops a collective memory of re-elaboration of the past.<sup>18</sup>

We do not include Eastern Europe, where right-wing populism has been prominent since the end of the Cold War, given the communist path after World War II. First, this created a distinct narrative of the role of communism in the fight against fascism based on regime doctrine. Second, it is a heroisation narrative not addressing the authoritarian features of fascist regimes (as communism was authoritarian itself). Third, re-elaboration is possible only with democratisation, which would create a timing difference with Western Europe. Fourth, current efforts at re-elaboration focus on the communist experience rather than on the fascist one, which has been pushed further back in history. This makes left-wing, not right-wing, populism less likely.<sup>19</sup>

We also do not analyse other West European cases (Belgium, Finland or Norway) that would change little in the results. The analysis may 'travel' to non-European cases, but we refrain from extending our interpretations without the same level of empirical scrutiny.

### ***Measurement of the independent variable***

The operationalisation of the type of re-elaboration occurs through the classification of countries into the four types distinguished above. To define a dominant type of re-elaboration for each country, we rely on the wealth and detail of a large bulk of studies, which we have systematically collected and processed analytically. For each country a huge amount of literature on images of the past, debates and conflicts, and processes of re-elaboration is available from history and cultural studies, to sociology and political science. Secondary sources tell us the outcome of decades of research in each country. Our approach is to draw from the riches of these analyses. Contrary to other methods, this approach allows us also to address secondary narratives and change over time.

We treat the literature available as an 'in-depth expert survey'. Instead of surveying experts by means of a questionnaire based on one time-point, we 'survey' what they have written over time. We use major publications for each country and both national and international academic sources.<sup>20</sup> We rely on the degree of agreement between scholars (a sort of 'inter-coder reliability' level) and in case of contradiction, we make an informed decision.

Our choice of period excludes the 'silencing phase'. It is from the 1970s that critical engagement with the past stabilises. Except in cancellation countries, where a debate is absent, the critical engagement revolves around commemorations, trials and books, and key events. This process results in a dominant and ritualised narrative. In Online Appendix 1 (see also Table A1 at the end of this article for an example), we thoroughly document the sources with the page numbers and keywords of the relevant passages on which we base the country classification. It includes the main and secondary narratives, the key events around which the re-elaboration revolves, as well as the bibliographical sources.

### ***Measurement of the dependent variable***

To operationalise right-wing populism, we focus on political parties. Parties provide a specific vision of power and society. It is parties that seek popular legitimation to translate their vision into action and policies. It is votes for parties that reveal the opportunity for such parties to thrive or fail.<sup>21</sup>

The populist vision of power and society is present in different types of parties that we label as right-wing populist. This category includes old and new extreme-right populists (Mudde 2007) but also new and old non-radical right-wing populists (Rooduijn *et al.* 2014; Van Kessel 2015). It is, therefore, a larger category in which parties with different levels of radicalism are included. They are not exactly the same but all share the crucial elements of illiberalism, unconstrained and unmediated interest of the whole, unitary, homogenous and non-plural vision of the people, exclusionary nativism and critique of liberal elites, party competition and parliamentarism. It is because of such commonalities that such diverse parties are linked to fascism.

To determine the overall, 'structural' rank of countries' right-wing populism since the 1970s we consider three indicators:

1. The existence and degree of radicalism of right-wing populist parties.
2. Their duration and size of electoral support, which indicates their acceptance by voters.
3. Their role in the executive, which indicates their acceptance by other parties.

Table 2 shows the aggregate ranking of the eight countries from 1 (lower rank) to 4 (higher rank) based on these indicators.<sup>22</sup> The values given in Table 2 indicate a relative ranking between countries rather than an absolute level of populism. It is realistic to assume that this ranking does not change over time even if the overall levels of right-wing populism increase in every country.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Austria, Italy and Switzerland***

Austria, Italy and Switzerland have a rank-value of 4 based on a number of populist right-wing parties receiving consistently high levels of electoral support since the early 1970s. In Italy and Switzerland, these parties also had substantial executive roles over decades indicating the degree to which they are considered legitimate by other parties. Go Italy, in spite of its low radicalism, has built long-lasting electoral and governmental alliances with the post-fascist National Alliance thus legitimizing it. The coalition also included the Northern League, which allowed them to win elections repeatedly.<sup>24</sup> The Swiss People's Party has been part of the governmental coalition since World War II. We include it as right-wing populist party since the early 1990s when it transformed from a largely agrarian and petit-bourgeois party into a nationalist and xenophobic one stressing anti-elitism, nativism and the sovereignty of the people.<sup>25</sup> In Austria, the participation to the executive was more sporadic. In 2000 of the Austrian People's Party participation to

**Table 2.** Right-wing populist parties in eight countries (1970–2016).

Country	Right-wing populist parties	Duration/ timing	Size (% valid votes)	Radicalism	National executive role	Rank- value
Austria	Freedom Party (FPÖ)	1975 – 2014	5 – 35	High	YES	4
	Future Alliance (BZÖ)	2006 – 2013	5 – 10	High	YES	
	Team Stronach	2013	6	High	NO	
France	National Front	1984 – 2014	10 – 25	High	NO	3
Germany	Republicans	1989 – 2014	1 – 7	High	NO	1
	NPD	2004 – 2014	1 – 2	High	NO	
	German People's Union	1989 – 1998	1 – 2	High	NO	
Italy	Alternative for Germany	2013 – 14	5 – 7	Medium	NO	4
	Northern League	1989 – 2014	5 – 10	High	YES	
	Go Italy	1994 – 2014	17 – 37	Low	YES	
Netherlands	MSI-National Alliance	1972 – 2014	5 – 15	High	YES	3
	MSI-Tricolour Flame	1999 – 2008	2 – 3	High	NO	
	Freedom Party	2006 – 2014	6 – 17	High	NO	
	List Pim Fortuyn	2002 – 2004	3 – 17	High	NO	
	Centre Democrats	1994	1 – 2	Medium	NO	
Sweden	Centre Party	1984	2	Medium	NO	2
	Liveable Netherlands	2002	2	Medium	NO	
	Swedish Democrats	2002 – 2014	3 – 13	High	NO	
Switzerland	New Democracy	1991 – 1994	1 – 7	High	NO	4
	Swiss People's Party	1995 – 2015	15 – 30	High	YES	
	League of Ticino	1991 – 1995	4 – 5	Low	NO	
	Swiss Democrats	1971 – 1999	1 – 4	High	NO	
	Freedom Party	1991 – 1995	4 – 5	High	NO	
United Kingdom	Republican Movement	1971 – 1975	3 – 4	High	NO	2
	British National Party	2004 – 2014	5	High	NO	
	UK Independence Party	1999 – 2015	6 – 27	High	NO	
	Referendum Party	1997	2	Low	NO	
	English Democrats	2009	2	High	NO	

Notes: The table considers elections up to 2016. Electoral figures are approximations and consider only parties with more than 1% of the nationwide votes in national or European (EP) parliamentary elections (lower houses, first ballot in France, and *Zweitstimmen* in Germany, PR seats in Italy) as well as presidential elections (first-ballot figures). Regional and mayoral elections are not considered. Change of names over time are not indicated.

We validated the degree of radicalism of political parties through the Comparative Manifesto Project (which, however, does not include smaller parties) and the Chapel Hill expert survey data (which, however, starts only in 1999). Early timing refers to the presence of right-wing populists earlier than the fall of the Berlin Wall.

the executive was controversial prompting the EU to issue a strong condemnation. The party is nonetheless very radical and electorally successful, and in 2016 their candidate nearly won the presidential election.

### **France and the Netherlands**

France and the Netherlands have a rank-value of 3 because of the more reduced support that right-wing populist parties receive and their more recent growth. From other parties the *cordon sanitaire* against them is strong and, consequently, they have never had executive roles. The only exception is a short-lived external support of the Dutch Freedom Party (PVV) to the minority cabinet coalition participation in 2010. In France,

the National Front, despite its radical nature, is the only such party and it has rarely achieved more than 10 percent of votes in national elections. In elections to the European Parliament, it is only since 2014 (in regional elections only since 2015) that it has increased its support in parallel with de-radicalization. In the Netherlands right-wing populist parties have existed in the last 15 years through the political entrepreneurship of Wilders and Fortuyn.

### ***Sweden and United Kingdom***

Sweden and the UK have a rank-value of 2. Right-wing populism in both countries is, compared to France and the Netherlands, much more recent (i.e. in the last two–three years). In the United Kingdom, it is only since the 2015 national election and in the 2014 European elections that the UK Independence Party has emerged. Historically, right-wing populist parties have been marginal. Furthermore, the UK Independence Party is less radical than, say, the British National Party, and is mainly anti-EU without strong authoritarian traits. In Sweden, not before the 2014 national election do the Swedish Democrats receive more than 12 percent of the votes. The only short-lived previous case of right-wing populism is New Democracy in the 1990s. In neither country have these parties ever assumed executive functions.

### ***Germany***

We rank Germany as the country with the least right-wing populism based on the fact that even recently no party has emerged with support similar to, say, that of the UK Independence Party or the Swedish Democrats. Since 2005, populism in Germany is usually associated with The Left. The Republicans have only once reached about 7 percent of the votes (in 1989, in European elections). Otherwise, all figures would be around 1 to 2 percent. Alternative for Germany is until 2016 mostly an anti-Euro party with an economic and financial agenda with relative success in only one European and one national election (2017) so far in Eastern *Länder*. The barrage from other parties towards right-wing populists is total and they never had any executive role.

### **Analysis**

The analysis proceeds in two steps. First, we determine the type of re-laboration for each country (the values of the independent variable) by classifying countries into the four types defined above. Second, we test

whether these types open or close the opportunity structure for right-wing populism as hypothesised.

### ***Assigning the type of collective memory***

The extensive analysis of each country is presented in the tables in Online Appendix 1 (see also Table A1 for an example). Each country has been classified into a type of re-elaboration. We base the classification on the sources quoted and extract the essence of these analyses in core concepts. As it appears in Table 3, one single narrative does not characterise the entire collective memory for all countries. In some cases, other narratives co-exist with, or challenge, the main one. The summary table therefore also lists secondary narratives. The degree to which the main narrative is dominant in a country's collective memory is captured by the values in the last column.<sup>26</sup>

Sources are unanimous in identifying the narrative of (West) Germany, Britain and Austria. Germany is the model of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a country that reckoned with its own role during fascism and World War II by carrying out a thorough critique (Art 2006; Herf 2002). A culture of contrition, responsibility and the burden of guilt has dominated the political culture of the Federal Republic, leading it to accept its role as culprit and make amends. Although a process of normalisation took place after reunification, this narrative has remained predominant (Berger 2002).<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, the position of the literature is unanimous that such a process has not taken place in Austria (often the counter-example to Germany). Austria portrays itself as the 'first victim' of Nazism through the shift of responsibility, which is denied (externalisation). This involves self-delusion, amnesia and alteration. It is a case of victimisation narrative (Art 2006; Bischof and Pelinka 1997; Pick 2000). British collective memory, on the contrary, is one of heroisation, stressing the merit of fighting fascism. The portrayal of its role is one of victory, as an indomitable bastion against evil supported by superior values. Not only standing against, but also liberating Europe from fascism is presented as a heroic moment in official and public celebrations (Berger 2010; Deighton 2002). In all three cases, no other memories have gained any credible acceptance.<sup>28</sup>

The table also indicates a value of 100 for Sweden. However, this case is more problematic than the previous three because cancellation is, in fact, absence of a narrative and refusal to talk about the past. Yet the literature is unanimous in claiming that this is precisely what happened in Sweden (Johansson 1997; Östling 2011). Small-state realism justifies the avoidance of public debate without resulting in victimisation. Similarly, the country did not take responsibility for any aspect of its role in World

War II. The literature instead points to purging memories and a hypocritical stance in sweeping uncomfortable truths 'under the carpet'. Other, very minoritarian narratives exist but they are not strong enough to warrant a lower value than 100.

These four countries present homogenous types of re-elaboration. The remaining four countries fit two of these types but not as neatly. Italy and France are cases of victimisation similar to, but not as clearly as, Austria. The Netherlands and Switzerland are cases of cancellation similar to, but not as clearly as, Sweden.

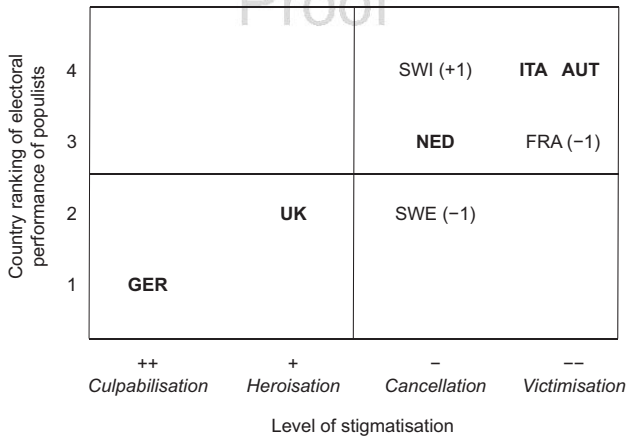
France and Italy share with Austria a narrative of victimisation. One finds elements of self-delusion and removal. Moreover, both deny responsibility and shift blame externally to German occupation (Focardi 2013; Gildea 2002). The victim status is reinforced by narratives about the exceptionalism of the fascist past (in terms of aberration, interlude or parenthesis) linked to a positive image of Italian and French people as inherently good and well-meaning, and linked to an embellished image of the fascist regime in Italy and Vichy (Del Boca 2005; Rousso 1990). However, the victimisation narrative is paralleled by a second one stressing the role in fighting fascism, more so in France than in Italy. This is why we do not give a value of 100. A consistent chunk of these collective memories relies on a heroised role during the resistance on which the post-war republican legitimacy is based.<sup>29</sup> Stressing heroisation avoids assuming responsibility, as this role redeems the country from responsibility and acts as a facilitating factor.

The Netherlands and Switzerland share with Sweden a narrative of cancellation, again with the caveat that one rather deals with the absence of a narrative. Indeed, sources reveal the lack of relevance and the reluctance in confronting the past, deliberate policies of underplaying the relationship to fascist regimes and of selective representations (Bovenkerk 2000; Brants 2000; Ludi 2004, 2006). Public opinion is described as ignorant about the country's past and the public record avoids explicit mentions. In both cases, small-state realism is used to justify the absence of critical examination. In Switzerland, in addition, the lack of occupation in spite of being surrounded by fascist powers has activated a significant narrative of heroisation, with a small country standing up to defend its neutrality, but not to the same extent as France's active resistance role both on the left and right. In the Netherlands, the occupation allows for a significant narrative of victimisation (for example, in the image of 'reluctant collaborators') reinforced by the myth of the good Dutch (similar to Italy) and by the victim status granted by great powers at the end of the war. For these reasons, we give 80 to the Netherlands and Switzerland on the cancellation narrative, reserving space for minor narratives of victimisation and heroisation respectively.<sup>30</sup>

Table 3. Country classification.

Country	Type of re-elaboration	Keyword(s) in sources and timing	Secondary narrative	Fit with type
1. Austria	Victimisation	Victimisation, amnesia. Waldheim affair (mid-1980s), Vranitzky speech in 1991	Uncertain or non-existent.	100/0
2. France	Victimisation	Aberration, victimisation. De Gaulle's death, Paxton (1972), Barbie trial (1983)	Heroisation (Gaullist and communist <i>résistance</i> ) and cancellation of responsibility of 'collaboration' and Vichy regime.	70/30
3. Germany	Culpabilisation	Guilt, contrition. Adornos' <i>Aufarbeitung</i> (1960s), <i>Historikertrek</i> (1980s), Bitburg (1985).	Practically absent except for attempt to 'normalise' and alleviate burden of guilt.	100/0
4. Italy	Victimisation	Victim of internal/external dictatorship. <i>Sdoganamento</i> (clearance) of fascist party (1994).	Heroisation (communist <i>resistenza</i> ) and cancellation of responsibility for support to fascist regime.	80/20
5. Netherlands	Cancellation	Denial, oblivion. Publication of De Jong (1978), Blom's inaugural lecture (1983).	Victimisation: impossibility to act differently due to occupation. Myth of the good Dutch.	80/20
6. Sweden	Cancellation	Playing down, memory purge, realism. Publication of Boethius (1991) and the decade of debate.	Uncertain or tending towards victimisation (small-country realism).	100/0
7. Switzerland	Cancellation	Public ignorance as policy, realism. Nazi gold and Bergier commission (1990s).	Heroisation (neutrality) as small country between fascist Italy, Nazi Austria-Germany and Vichy France.	80/20
8. United Kingdom	Heroisation	Victor nation, defeated fascists. Churchill's <i>Finest Hour</i> speech and memoirs.	Uncertain or non-existent.	100/0

Note: The table summarises the evidence and the sources in Online Appendix 1. 'Fit with types' is a subjective value given by us on a scale from 0 to 100 about the degree of ambiguity of a country belonging to a given type of re-elaboration. The value is not based on the degree of agreement between sources. Secondary narrative considered only if not stigmatised (for example, revisionism).



**Figure 3.** The association between collective memory and right-wing populism.

### **Testing the plausibility of the hypotheses**

The second step of the analysis is to test if the levels of right-wing populist performance vary across country according to the types of re-elaboration as hypothesised. Results are visualised in Figure 3. Five of eight countries display levels of populist performance in line with our expectations. These are depicted in bold characters along the diagonal. For these cases, expected and empirical values of populist performance correspond. For three cases, however, the empirical levels of populism are either one rank ‘too high’ or ‘too low’ compared to the expected one. For France (a predominant narrative of victimisation) we expected a higher populist ranking (4 instead of 3). Similarly, for Sweden (cancellation) we expected a ranking of 3 instead of 2. In Switzerland (mostly a case of cancellation) the ranking is higher than expected (4 instead of 3). It is therefore mainly the cancellation type that is indeterminate, whereas the other types yield mostly results as expected.

According to hypotheses 1 and 2, culpabilisation and heroisation narrow the space for right-wing populism. In the bottom-left quadrant, we find the two cases in our sample that display these types of re-elaboration and which, accordingly, rank lowest (Germany) or second-lowest (Britain). We do not find any countries in the upper-left quadrant as these two types of re-elaboration block the success of right-wing populism.<sup>31</sup>

According to hypotheses 3 and 4, cancellation and victimisation do not act as a brake to right-wing populism or open up the space for its success. In the upper-right quadrant we find five cases that display these types of re-elaboration and which, accordingly, rank highest (Austria, Italy and Switzerland) or second-highest (France and the Netherlands), as these two types of re-elaboration do not block the success of right-wing

populism. We find only one country in the bottom-right quadrant. This does not mean that the 'error' in the position of Sweden is larger than that of France or Switzerland because it finds itself in the 'wrong' quadrant.

It appears from Figure 3 that cancellation leads to three different ranks of populism. This goes against hypothesis 3, which states that, on the one hand, cancellation does not act as a brake to right-wing populism (a passive effect), but, on the other, it does not trigger it either (an active effect). We expected this to result in a high level of right-wing populism due to the absence of stigmatisation, but not in the highest level either as for victimisation. Contrary to the hypothesis, Switzerland has 'too much' populism compared to what we expected, also considering that its secondary narrative is one of heroisation, which should pull down the ranking according to our second hypothesis. Sweden, on the other hand, has 'too little' populism compared to what we expected. For the Netherlands, we find the expected level of populism. However, it is difficult, given the random effect of cancellation, to trace this back to this specific type of re-elaboration, also given the presence of a secondary narrative of victimisation. Because of these 'errors' we cannot confirm hypothesis 3. The variation between the three countries in this column cannot be traced back to a uniform type of re-elaboration and might be explained by factors other than the type of re-elaboration of fascism and World War II.<sup>32</sup>

According to our last hypothesis, a narrative of victimisation has an active effect on populist performance by shifting the blame away from embellished national right-wing regimes and placing it on others. Fascism is not only not stigmatised but also put in a positive light. The hypothesis is thus that victimisation does more than passively 'not blocking'. It has a triggering effect. Austria and Italy have the highest rank of right-wing populism and are in line with this hypothesis. France is included in the same quadrant but is a rank below what we expected. This goes against our hypothesis. However, this is true only if one disregards the presence of a secondary narrative of heroisation (which pulls down the right-wing populism rank according to hypothesis 2), and the fact that the fascist experience in France was less pronounced than in Italy and Austria, and almost completely deprived of a positive image. A narrative of heroisation is present also in Italy. However, it is mainly a communist narrative that divides the collective memory and therefore does not weaken the victimisation narrative. The heroisation narrative is distinct from the victimisation one. In France, there is a nationally cohesive heroisation narrative shared by left and right, which does not divide collective memory but rather weakens the victimisation one.

## Conclusion: fading memories?

Our contribution is to have operationalised and tested the plausibility of the impact of a variable (the type of re-elaboration of the past) to which the literature has frequently but unsystematically pointed. We have tested its mediating effect on the electoral performance of right-wing populism in a long-term perspective. Our results support the cultural opportunity structure hypothesis. The association is strong in spite of some deviations, which, however, are of degrees and not direction, and explained either through secondary narratives or the lack of clear effect of one type of re-elaboration only, namely cancellation. Overall, we think that we can add, in a complementary way to political-institutional and socio-economic factors, a significant portion of explanation of the long-term cross-national ranking of right-wing populism.

Does the argument outlined in this article still hold in times witnessing a dramatic populist wave wiping across Europe? Collective memories are not fixed and processes of re-elaboration are dynamic and subject to constant re-elaboration. In particular, memories related to a distant trauma may fade away. In times of deep economic and identity crises, can the 'braking' role of collective memories still be maintained in accounting for various levels of right-wing populist performance across countries?

At the time when both political-institutional (cartelisation) and socio-economic conditions (inequality, immigration) provide favourable conditions for right-wing populism, the brake effect provided by certain types of the past's re-elaboration loses strength. In the post-ideological world after the Cold War and with generational change, the stigmatisation of distant past experiences loses its bite and is perceived as an empty ritual. The loosening of the blocking effect of certain collective memories contributes to sharpen the feeling of danger for a society less immune to populism and its anti-liberal elements. The success of Alternative for Germany in the 2017 general election best exemplifies the loosening of taboos, even if it is mostly limited to former communist Eastern Germany. Rather than collective memories, it is specific policies on the 'demand side' to decrease inequality that are invoked to counter the populist waves (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Where does this leave the role of collective memories and types of re-elaboration?

It is impossible to say what will happen to collective memories in the long term. In the short term, it is plausible that they will weaken, with 'materialist' concerns gathering renewed salience vis-à-vis cultural narratives. Inequality, security and financial crises may be responsible for the current shift away from the path given by the crystallisation phase. Yet it is unlikely that differences between countries in the type of re-elaboration will be fundamentally altered. The type of re-elaboration operated by

Germany or the United Kingdom may fade but it will maintain a stronger blocking effect compared to, say, the one operated in Austria or Italy. Differences between countries persist in spite of an overall loosening of the stigmatisation brake. Possibly, these differences between countries may even be strengthened. Political cultures with strong stigmatisation may reinforce their warnings regarding the danger of populist sirens while others – in particular, complacent heroisation cultures – may be caught off-guard for not having been inoculated against these dangers (an alternative hypothesis that shall be considered in future research).

This calls for further and more focused analysis of recent periods, as well as long-term longitudinal comparisons possibly based on alternative empirical measures of narratives and memories such as more or less automated content analysis of a variety of primary sources. Theoretically, too, the new typology of re-elaboration that we propose in this article can be further developed to include other past events such as imperialism, military or party dictatorships, and civil wars, as well as a larger pool of countries outside the European or even the Western context. Methodologically, this would lead to the creation of a ‘memory dataset’. Finally, analytically, further research should attempt the combination of the impact of memories with other factors to obtain a more encompassing model to explain right-wing populism. At any rate, it seems to us that cultural factors are useful to explain cross-national differences.

## Notes

1. *Die Zeit* stated that ‘Austria has consistently presented itself as the first victim of fascism and has dealt with the past, if at all, timidly. The Germans started reckoning with the past at the beginning of the 1960s. ... There is no respectable right in Germany and the non-respectable right, such as the NPD or the Republikaner, were systematically marginalised’ (2 October 2013). On release of the copyright of *Mein Kampf* in 2015, *The Economist* reported on Germany’s dealing with the past. The *Financial Times* reported on the obstacle for populist movements in Spain from memories of Franco’s regime (13 June 2016) and on Alternative for Germany breaking a taboo in *Länder* elections (9 September 2016).
2. The debate on terminology turns, tellingly, around German concepts: *Aufarbeitung* (originally by Adorno, which translates as ‘working through’) and *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (‘coming to terms with the past’), which for Adorno involves silencing rather than self-critical engagement. This article uses ‘re-elaboration’ as it has the same root as *Aufarbeitung*.
3. This definition of populism includes elements from the work of Canovan (1999), Mény and Surel (2002), Mudde (2004), Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008) and Hawkins (2009), among others. The right-wing nature of populism is given by its focus on the exclusionary definition of the people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

4. See Abedi (2002) and Carter (2002). Other institutional elements include presidential systems, federal structures and direct democracy. A more radical type of threshold is outright bans.
5. For comparative work on European countries see Ekman and Edling (1997), Judt (1992), Langenbacher *et al.* (2012), Lebow *et al.* (2006) and Pakier and Str ath (2010). See Online Appendix 1 for single-country studies or binary comparisons.
6. Similar points can be found in Heinisch (2002), Mudde (2007), Fella (2008), Bornschier (2012) and Rovira Kaltwasser (2015).
7. The limitation of purely political opportunity structures appears in Kitschelt and McGann's (1995: 221; see also 3 and 28 – 42) quote: 'the political opportunity structure of the German extreme right was ... constrained by the long-term historical legacy of Germany's Nazi past'. Koopmans and Olzak (2004) speak of 'discursive opportunity structure' and Albertazzi and McDonnell (2008) of 'ideological opportunity structure'.
8. Berger, for example, distinguishes perpetrators (Austria, Germany, Italy), victims (France, Netherlands, Britain) and neutrals (Switzerland) or sometimes villains and heroes (Berger 2010). As we argue below, this is not necessarily how countries redefined their role, even if the type of military action (such as suffering Nazi occupation, upholding neutrality, perpetrating aggression or fighting the Nazi regime) provides the handhold for given narratives.
9. During this phase, no stigmatisation exists allowing populist right-wing movements such as *Poujadisme* or *Qualunquismo* to emerge. Even in Germany, 'the memory of those responsible for the attempt on Hitler's life on 20 July 1944 was used to draw a distinction between evil Nazis and good Germans' (Berger 2010: 121). On this phase, see Pakier and Str ath (2010).
10. See Eatwell (2017). Similarly, others have spoken of right-wing populism in terms of a proto-totalitarian ideology (Abts and Rummens 2007: 406, 422). Kitschelt and McGann (1995: 43) list the commonalities between fascist and new radical right parties. Of course, no perfect overlap is stipulated as fascism includes para-militarism, corporatism, totalitarianism and imperialism among other things.
11. New and old-style radical right parties succeed under different conditions (Golder 2003; Ignazi 1992; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). We apply our hypothesis about the impact of re-elaboration to both insofar as both share these core common elements.
12. Berger (2010: 199) asks, 'was the Second World War ... really a common lieu de m emoire shared by the nations of Europe, or are there national differences in how the conflict is remembered?' In either case, the reference is to a common event.
13. The term *Salonf ahigkeit* (sometimes also *b urgerlich*) refers to positions that are respectable and acceptable (Art 2006: 103) in a given society at a certain time. The term also refers to social boundaries – beside spatial and temporal ones – with permissibility varying along class lines (as, for example, across news outlets).
14. Victimisation is available only to countries which were – at least to a certain extent – perpetrators, and does not apply to actual victim countries.
15. Alternatively, it may be argued that heroisation increases nationalist sentiments and, therefore, prepares favourable conditions for right-wing populism. This, however, is not our hypothesis.

16. There is a difference between 'opening up' and 'not closing down'. While the former implies activation, the latter is passive in the same way as lying involves an action and omitting does not. However, as it would be difficult to argue that omitting does not involve action, the two are equivalent. On strategies of 'deciding to forget', see Proglia (2011).
17. This is intended for future research. Similarly, re-elaboration as a mediating 'blocking' factor does not distinguish whether specific types are necessary or sufficient conditions.
18. The choice of these eight countries is linked to the project collaboration (see Acknowledgements).
19. These comparative issues also concern Germany with its roughly 30 years of experience as the German Democratic Republic. This is a divided case as it appears in the success that right-wing populist movements such as Pegida and Alternative for Germany, as well as neo-Nazi parties such as the NDP or the Republicans enjoy in the Eastern *Länder*.
20. The choice of publications is based on: (1) an extensive review of key texts, (2) the degree to which publications are cited, (3) a check of the list by country experts (see the Online Appendix 2 for details). We are confident that we did not miss large chunks of academic studies that would alter our classification. The number of studies varies between countries. Tellingly, in the cancellation type it has been harder to find sources, as it were, because little debate has taken place.
21. We keep the focus on parties even if some of them are highly personalised and controlled by individual mavericks.
22. We base the ranking on votes rather than seats as the latter are influenced by the electoral system. The same applies to the executive role as coalitions are more likely under PR. However, the participation in coalitions indicates the acceptance of these parties by other parties (cross-party legitimization and absence of 'barrage').
23. Van Kessel (2015) provides a similar ranking with three levels (limited, reasonable and substantial) on seven of our eight countries. Rooduijn *et al.* (2014) rank five of our eight countries as unsuccessful, successful or very successful. Both rankings largely overlap with ours.
24. As we focus on right-wing populism we do not include the Five-Star Movement which received more than a quarter of the votes in the 2013 elections (and about a fifth in the 2014 European elections). According to Comparative Manifesto Project data, it is the most left-wing programme to be presented in Italy since 1945.
25. Given direct democracy, the role of this party is even stronger as it appeals directly to the people through popular initiatives. This reinforces the unmediated relationship with the people who have repeatedly approved initiatives launched by them.
26. Values add up to 100. A value of 80 means that a minority narrative is present and accepted in the public debate. A value of 100 means that only one narrative has legitimate status. 'Negationists' exist also in homogenous collective memories but cannot be considered an accepted narrative. We speak of secondary narrative and deliberately not of a counter-narrative as the latter implies that they are not part of a same memory.
27. The table in Online Appendix 1 indicates that this is not the case for Eastern Germany, to which an 'East European' model of re-elaboration can

- be applied wherein communism sees itself as opposed (either as a victim or as a hero) to fascism.
28. For Germany and Britain, the effect is reinforced by narratives stressing that the same roles apply to World War I.
  29. The heroisation narrative is stronger in France than in Italy because the resistance in Italy was mainly a narrative from the communists while in France it is a narrative of national cohesion carried forward by both left and right (Gaullism). The fact that in Italy this narrative was carried mainly by a communist left made it unacceptable to large parts of the political spectrum.
  30. Sources also show that the silencing phase is very long for countries with cancellation narratives. The critical confrontation takes place late (1980s and 1990s) compared to other types.
  31. We prefer not to generalise the argument to other countries with a fascist past (Japan, Portugal, Spain and Greece, as well as some Latin American countries), or to the US and the Commonwealth, without in-depth analysis.
  32. These can be pre-existing and long-lasting cultural factors affecting levels of stigmatisation that are not modified by this type of re-elaboration. Factors other than cultural ones refer to institutional-political conditions (direct democracy in Switzerland), or socio-economic conditions (social-democratic welfare in Sweden). This calls for future multi-variate analysis.

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Proof

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## Appendix

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**Table A1.** Coding Evidence by Country: Example Table for Austria (for all country tables see Online Appendix 1)

<i>Source</i>	<i>Pages</i>	<i>Keywords</i>
<b>Master narrative: victimization</b>		
Art (2006)	42 – 43	First victim.
Art (2006)	103, 137	Revisionist, lost occasion.
Art (2007)	338	Amnesia, culture of victimization, denial of responsibility.
Art (2011)	363	No and, eventually, very delayed apology.
Art (2011)	366	Polarization on role as victim.
Berger (2010)	121 – 22	First victim, distance from responsibility.
Berger (2012)	83	Convenient myth of first victim, historical amnesia.
Berger (2012)	86 – 93	Strategy of nation-building through victimization.
Bischof and Pelinka (1997)	3	Victim.
Judt (1992)	96	Relief of any responsibility.
Ludi (2004)	118	Victim theory, refutation of evidence.
Mitten (1992)	Entire text	Absence of confrontation with past.
Pick (2000)	198	Victim, self-delusion, failure to recognize responsibility.
Uhl (2006)	40 – 41	Victimization in Declaration of Independence.
Uhl (2006)	40 – 41	Occupation by force in 1938, “innocentation”.
<b>Secondary narrative: uncertain or not existent</b>		
Berger (2010)	126	Partial revision of victim theory, perpetrator nation.
Ellinas (2010)	48 – 50	Bloc of debate, denial of Nazi past for 40 years.
Riedlsperger (1998)	28	Partly different view from population compared to elites.
Uhl (2006)	61 – 63	Co-responsibility thesis after Waldheim affair.
<b>Turning points</b>		
Art (2006)	9	Waldheim’s affair of 1986.
Berger (2012)	112	Vranitzky’s speech in 1991 and Israel visit in 1993.
Berger (2012)	113 – 14	Arrest of David Irving as negationist in 2005.
Ellinas (2010)	48	Reder affair (return in Austria in 1986).
Uhl (2006)	43 – 44	<i>Rot-Weiss-Rot Buch</i> in 1946.
Uhl (2006)	44	Movie “1 April 2000” of 1952.
Pick (2000)	199	Vranitzky’s speech of 1991.
Pick (2000)	Entire text	Moscow Declaration of 1943.

**Other sources consulted:** Berger and Conrad (2015), Bukey (2000), Pauley (1981), Uhl (2012), Wodak (1990).

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 [Cited 12 times; book cited 35 times]
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(continued)

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Table A1. Continued.

Source	Pages	Keywords
[Cited 58 times]		
Berger, S. and C. Conrad, C. (2015). <i>The Past as History</i> . Palgrave: Macmillan.		
[Cited 11 times]		
Bischof, G. and A. Pelinka (eds.) (1997). <i>Austrian Historical Memory and National Identity</i> . New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.		
[Cited 45 times]		
Bukey, E.B. (2000). <i>Hitler's Austria: Popular Sentiment in the Nazi Era</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.		
[Cited 88 times]		
Ellinas, A. (2010). <i>The Media and the Far Right in Western Europe: Playing the Nationalist Card</i> . New York: Cambridge University Press (Chapter on Austria, pp. 41 – 75).		
[Cited 100 times]		
Judt, T. (1992). The Past Is Another Country. <i>Daedalus</i> 121: 83 – 118.		
[Cited 327 times]		
Ludi, R. (2004). Waging War on Wartime Memory: Recent Swiss Debates on the Legacies of the Holocaust and the Nazi Era. <i>Jewish Social Studies</i> 10: 116 – 52.		
[Cited 14 times]		
Mitten, R. (1992). <i>The Politics of Antisemitic Prejudice: The Waldheim Phenomenon in Austria</i> . Boulder, CO: Westview.		
[Cited 101 times]		
Pauley, B.F. (1981). <i>Hitler and the Forgotten Nazis: A History of Austrian National Socialism</i> . Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.		
[Cited 74 times]		
Pick, H. (2000). <i>Guilty Victim: Austria from the Holocaust to Haider</i> . London: I.B. Tauris.		
[Cited 44 times]		
Riedlsperger, M. (1998). The Freedom Party of Austria: From Protest to Radical Right Populism. In Betz, H. G. and S. Immerfall (eds.), <i>The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies</i> . New York: St. Martin's Press (pp. 27 – 43).		
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Uhl, H. (2006). From Victim Myth to Co-Responsibility Thesis. In Lebow, R.N., Kansteiner, W. and C. Fogu (eds.), <i>The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe</i> . Durham, NC: Duke University Press (pp. 40 – 72).		
[Cited 22 times; book cited 150 times]		
Uhl, H. (2012). <i>Transformationen des österreichischen Gedächtnisses</i> . Innsbruck: Studien Verlag.		
[Cited 22 times; book cited 150 times]		
Wodak, R. (1990). The Waldheim Affair and Antisemitic Prejudice in Austrian Public Discourse. <i>Patterns of Prejudice</i> 24: 18 – 33.		
[Cited 29 times]		

## Populism in election times: a comparative analysis of 11 countries in Western Europe

Laurent Bernhard  and Hanspeter Kriesi

### ABSTRACT

The article comparatively examines the levels of populism exhibited by parties in Western Europe. It relies on a quantitative content analysis of press releases collected in the context of 11 national elections between 2012 and 2015. In line with the first hypothesis, the results show that parties from both the radical right and the radical left make use of populist appeals more frequently than mainstream parties. With regard to populism on cultural issues, the article establishes that the radical right outclasses the remaining parties, thereby supporting the second hypothesis. On economic issues, both types of radical parties are shown to be particularly populist. This pattern counters the third hypothesis, which suggests that economic populism is most prevalent among the radical left. Finally, there is no evidence for the fourth hypothesis, given that parties from the south do not resort to more populism on economic issues than those from the north.

In the first decades immediately following World War II, populism was a rather marginal phenomenon in Western Europe (Gellner and Ionescu 1969). In contrast to many other regions, conventional wisdom had long maintained that populism would have a hard time establishing itself in this part of the world (Priester 2012: 11). However, in the course of the last 30 years, this has fundamentally changed. Numerous parties commonly labelled as populist have managed to establish themselves as powerful players in the political landscapes of their respective countries.

Indeed, populist success stories are apparent across the entire region. In electoral terms, the Coalition of the Radical Right (SYRIZA) from Greece (35.5%) is now the strongest party of this type, followed by the Five Star Movement (M5S) from Italy (32.7%), the Swiss People's Party

(29.4%) and the Danish People's Party (21.2%). More recently, several populist parties have even been part of national governments. The most striking case concerns the Greek populist coalitions between SYRIZA and the Independent Greeks (ANEL), as well as the Five Star Movement and Lega in Italy. Other populist forces in office include the Progress Party in Norway, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ).

Following the influential definition provided by Mudde (2004: 543), the article conceives populism as a 'thin ideology that believes society to ultimately be separated into two homogenous 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'. This minimal conceptualisation allows for the analytical advantage of studying the populist phenomenon in various forms and comparatively across countries (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). As far as the operationalisation of the populist ideology is concerned, the article relies on the communication of political actors. Our measure of populism essentially includes three types of appeals – people-centrism, anti-elitism and demands for popular sovereignty, which correspond to the three ideational elements in Mudde's definition.<sup>1</sup>

The empirical part of this article relies on a quantitative content analysis of press releases collected in the context of 11 national election campaigns that occurred between 2012 and 2015. We consider all parties that obtained at least 4% of the vote in these elections. The main research interest focuses on the role played by party families. The article argues that parties from both the radical right and the radical left outclass mainstream parties in terms of populism (first hypothesis). In addition, the article takes a closer look at issue dimensions. The second and third hypotheses expect radical right parties to be more populist on cultural issues and the radical left to be more populist on economic issues. In addition, the article examines the presumed divide between the south and the north of Europe. As a result of the severity of the Great Recession, the fourth hypothesis posits that parties from the south of Europe are generally more likely to rely on economic populism than their peers in the northern part.

In line with the first hypothesis, there is evidence that parties on the ideological extremes are particularly prone to express populist ideology in their campaign communication. More specifically, we find that both the radical right and the radical left play the 'populist card' more frequently than mainstream parties. With respect to issue domains, the empirical analysis demonstrates that the radical right excels in terms of cultural populism, thereby supporting the second hypothesis. The empirical

analysis further reveals that both radical groups tend to strongly engage in economic populism, thus contradicting the third hypotheses. In addition, the analysis shows that parties from the south are not more prone to rely on populism on economic issues than those from the north, thus leading to a rejection of the fourth hypothesis. However, the results reveal that Greek parties outclass their peers in the remaining countries when it comes to economic populism.

This article continues as follows. The next section focuses on the populisms by the radical right and the radical left, before addressing the north–south divide in the context of the European debt crisis. The article proceeds by presenting the key features of the case selection, the data collection and the construction of the indicators. In the subsequent section, we present the empirical results. The article concludes by critically reviewing the main results of the contribution and drawing some implications.

### **The populism(s) of radical parties**

The following section relies on a minimal and ideational conceptualisation of populism. Defined as a thin ideology (Mudde 2004), populism has the potential to come in various guises. Mény and Surel (2002: 6) compare populism to an empty shell that can be filled and made meaningful by whatever is poured into it. Indeed, extensive studies reveal that populist mobilisations have not only occurred across different places and times but that they have also taken very different forms (Canovan 1981; Hermet 2001). Among others, such mobilisations included agrarian revolutionary romanticism in tsarist Russia, US agrarian radicalism in the nineteenth century and urban mass movements in twentieth century Latin America.

While the populist phenomenon is far-reaching enough to include both right- and left-wing variants, most scholars of contemporary Western Europe associate it with the *radical right* (e.g. Betz 1993; Mudde 2007, 2010). The abundant literature suggests that most of these parties rely on populism. It is well established that the radical right has often met with electoral success in many Western European countries by repeatedly tapping into people's resentments against the establishment regarding the cultural dimension of the two-dimensional policy space (Hooghe *et al.* 2002; Kriesi *et al.* 2008).<sup>2</sup> In addition to their populism, these actors have been able to capitalise on widespread popular xenophobia. The ideology of the radical right does not necessarily involve ethnic racism but rather refers to 'differentialist nativism' or 'cultural differentialism' (Betz and Johnson 2004), i.e. a sharp rejection of multicultural society more generally.

At the same time, the state of the art suggests that it is not possible to simply equate populism with the radical right in Western Europe (van

Kessel 2015: 172). On the contrary, left-wing populism no longer seems to be a marginal phenomenon in Western Europe. Despite the fact that there is still little reference to this phenomenon, in recent years parties from the *radical left* have increasingly been identified with populist ideologies. Most significantly, March (2007: 67) argues that the collapse of communism has opened the space for a new type of left-wing populism. Many communist parties have abandoned their doctrinaire and conservative forms of organised socialism, while Social Democrats have moved to the centre, thereby increasing the perception that the mainstream left is an integral part of the establishment. More recently, the Great Recession may have fostered an affinity between socialism and populism (March 2011: 121), especially among parties from the radical left whose ideas gained currency in the context of the economic crisis (March and Keith 2016).

Comparative studies have focused on the ideological dimension of populism so far. Several comparative analyses of party manifestos (Pauwels 2014; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn *et al.* 2014) suggest that parties such as the Dutch Socialist Party (SP), the French Communist Party, and The Left in Germany run on populist platforms. In the case of the United Kingdom, March (2017) shows that on both sides of the left-right divide, the degree of populism by radical parties is higher than the degree in mainstream parties. Rooduijn and Akkerman (2017) arrive at the same conclusion based on the analysis of the election manifestos of 32 parties in five countries (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) from 1989 to 2008. Similarly, based on the holistic grading of party manifestos and candidate speeches in Western Europe and the Americas, Castanho Silva (2017) finds that populism in Europe is associated with extremism in general, and not necessarily with either left- or right-wing politics.

Populism seems to be characteristic of parties on the extremes of the ideological spectrum – the radical right and the radical left. Hence, the first hypothesis reads as follows:

*H1:* Parties from the radical right and the radical left adopt a higher degree of populism than mainstream parties.

While all kinds of populism are characterised by people-centrism, anti-elitism and demands for popular sovereignty, there is a great deal of variation in its more substantive features. Generally speaking, the academic literature draws a clear distinction between right- and left-wing populisms. According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013), the former tends to be exclusionary in nature, while the latter follows an inclusionary logic. The article distinguishes between three dimensions: material (i.e. the distribution of resources among social groups), political (i.e. the appeal to forms of political mobilisation) and symbolic (i.e. the notion of ‘the people’).

In line with Mény and Surel (2002), the article argues that the populist variation across the ideological divide is most visible in the symbolic dimension. Populists from the right define people using ethnic terms. As Rydgren (2013: 2) observes, such parties share an emphasis on ethno-nationalism that is rooted in myths about the distant past. They thus direct their programmes to strengthen the nation by making it more ethnically homogeneous. It is now well established that the radical right has been the driving force of a cultural conflict dimension that opposes universalistic and traditionalist-communitarian values in Western Europe (Bornschieer 2010; Kriesi *et al.* 2008). This party family primarily opposes cosmopolitan conceptions of society, since it undermines national sovereignty and local identities.

In contrast, populists from the left conceive of the people in terms of socio-economic categories. Given the prevalence of egalitarian ideals, left-wing populism primarily expresses itself on economic issues (March 2007) by emphasising a moral opposition between the virtuous working classes, on the one hand, and the oppressive representatives of capital on the other hand. The latter are held responsible for economic and political inequalities (March and Mudde 2005). Based on these considerations, the populism expressed by the radical left is expected to more likely focus on economic issues, while the radical right is more likely to concentrate on cultural issues. These considerations lead to the second and third hypotheses.

*H2:* Parties from the radical right display a higher level of populism than the remaining parties when cultural issues are at stake.

*H3:* Parties from the radical left adopt a higher level of populism than the remaining parties when it comes to economic issues.

## **The north–south divide**

According to Canovan (1999), the rise of populism is an indication of political malaise in modern societies. Following this line of reasoning, populism arises from the gap between the promise and the actual performance of democracies. In other words, populists challenge how democracy works in the name of its imagined ideal. The fundamental tension between the redemptive and the pragmatic face of politics provides a fertile ground for populist demands. In particular, the populist potential increases when this discrepancy widens. As Canovan (1999: 12) maintains,

when too great a gap opens up between haloed democracy and the grubby business of politics, populists tend to move on to the vacant territory, promising in place of the dirty world of party manoeuvring the shining ideal of democracy renewed.

In line with this statement, several scholars of populism identify *deep crises* as major catalysts for the emergence and reinvigoration of populism. This is probably most visible in the work of Ernesto Laclau, where populism is intrinsically linked to a crisis of representation (Howarth 2015). Taggart (2000: 2), for his part, conceives of populism as a reaction to a sense of extreme crisis, stating that politics as usual cannot deal with such unusual conditions. In a similar vein, Panizza (2005: 11) regards crises as crucial conditions for populism, since such events imply a breakdown of social order and a loss of confidence in the political system's ability to restore it.

Following this logic, economic crises provide a major opportunity for successful populist mobilisations. In a contribution on the Great Recession, Kriesi and Pappas (2015: 23) posit that populism has benefited from the financial and economic crisis, since popular dissatisfaction with elites increased in this particular context. In electoral terms, however, Kriesi and Pappas (2015) observe considerable regional variations. Most notably, they point to a strong increase in populists' vote share in Southern Europe. Indeed, fuelled by the serious economic crisis, some populist parties such as SYRIZA (Greece) or the Five Star Movement (Italy) have recently experienced tremendous electoral successes, sometimes leading to the destabilisation of national party systems.

This suggests that the potential for populism is generally more pronounced in countries that have suffered most from the economic crisis and its disastrous consequences. Although the Great Recession hit all European countries in late 2008, it did so to very different extents (Lane 2012). While most countries in the north recovered rapidly, economic landing proved to be generally hardest in the south. By 2016, some economies in Southern Europe were still far from pre-crisis levels of GDP. Particularly worrisome for these economies was the fact that the share of the unemployed workforce reached new record highs, especially among younger people.

According to this line of reasoning, the Great Recession widened the gap between citizens' expectations and what established parties can actually deliver. Hence, parties that address the antagonistic relationship between 'guilty' elites and 'innocent' people are likely to make headway. Voters may be receptive to the discourse of populist parties who seek to challenge the mainstream political consensus that revolves around a discourse according to which 'there is no alternative' (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). In a cross-sectional setting, parties from the south are thus hypothesised to more frequently pursue a populist discourse in the context of the European debt crisis than their peers from the northern part of Western Europe. Hence, the fourth hypothesis:

*H4*: Parties from the south adopt a higher level of populism than the parties from the north when it comes to economic issues.

## Data and measures

This study focuses on national election campaigns. From a researcher's perspective, such periods provide the advantage of a heightened intensity in political communication. The extent of populist messages can also be expected to increase in the context of election campaigns compared to 'ordinary politics' (Bernhard *et al.* 2015). In what follows, the article will examine 11 national elections – one per selected country – that took place in Western Europe between 2012 and 2015. The limited time frame presents the advantage of examining similar contextual conditions (such as presumably salient public debates on the Great Recession or the refugee crisis). This study analyses 10 parliamentary elections (Austria 2013, Germany 2013, Greece January 2015, Italy 2013, the Netherlands 2012, Portugal 2015, Spain 2015, Sweden 2014, Switzerland 2015 and the United Kingdom 2015), as well as one presidential election (France 2012).

The rationale driving country selection stems from the objective to include at least one representative example of the main regions in Western Europe. We therefore select one Anglo-Saxon (UK) case, one Scandinavian (Sweden) case, and five cases from continental Europe (Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland) for the sample. Given the key interest in the crisis-ridden southern region, we include its four biggest countries (Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal). With respect to parties, the selection is based on one single criterion. We include all parties that obtained vote shares higher than 4% in the national elections under scrutiny. These 63 parties are assigned to three different ideological groups: (1) radical left, (2) mainstream and (3) radical right. The second category is the most encompassing one by far, as it includes the following party families: the Greens, the Socialists and Social Democrats, the Liberals, as well as Christian Democrats and Conservatives.

Among the selected parties, the Italian Five Star Movement proved to be the most challenging case. This is in line with several scholarly contributions that highlight the rather unconventional profile of the party co-founded by Beppe Grillo (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Conti and Memoli 2015). According to Biorcio (2015), the orientation of the M5S, and its operation as a direct-democratic organisation, pointed to its affiliation the left in its early years. This has only changed recently. Given that the article analyses the 2013 Italian general elections, the Five Star Movement is eventually considered to be a functional equivalent of a radical left party. However, we test for alternative classifications in the

**Table 1.** Selected parties according to countries and ideological groups.

Election	Radical left	Mainstream parties	Radical right
Austria 2013	–	ÖVP, SPÖ, Greens, TS, NEOS	FPÖ
France 2012	FDG	PS, UMP, MoDem	FN
Germany 2013	Linke	CDU, SPD, Greens, FDP	AfD
Greece 2015 #1	SYRIZA, KKE	ND, To Potami, PASOK	XA, ANEL
Italy 2013	M5S*	PD, PdL, SC	LN
The Netherlands 2012	SP	VVD, PvdA, CDA, D66	PVV
Portugal 2015	BE, PCP	PPD/PSD, PS	–
Spain 2015	Podemos	PP, PSOE, C's	–
Sweden 2014	V	S, M, MP, C, FP, KD	SD
Switzerland 2015	–	FDP, SP, CVP, GPS, GLP BDP	SVP
United Kingdom 2015	–	Tories, Labour, Lib Dems, SNP	UKIP

\*As is explained in the data and measures section, the Five Star Movement (M5S) is classified as a radical left party.

Notes: Within ideological groups, the selected parties are ordered according to declining vote shares. The People of Freedom (PdL) from Italy had to be excluded from the empirical analysis due to a lack of press releases. The full names of the remaining parties are listed in Table A1 of the online appendix.

empirical analysis.<sup>3</sup> Table 1 provides an overview of the parties included in the analysis, classified by country and ideological group.

This paper relies on press releases issued by political parties during national election campaigns in the course of the last eight weeks prior to Election Day. We opt to use this type of communication due to motives of comparability. Parties across Western Europe widely use press releases and they exhibit quite similar formats and lengths. The press releases originate from the party websites. It is worth mentioning that we faced difficulties in finding appropriate campaigning material for three organisations – the Party for Freedom, from the Netherlands, the Five Star Movement and the People of Freedom (both from Italy). In face of a lack of classic press releases, we proceeded as follows. In the case of the Party for Freedom, the short news articles that were available on the party's website were selected. Regarding the Five Star Movement, the posts published on Beppe Grillo's personal blog were content-analysed. The only party for which no appropriate documents could be found is the People of Freedom. Silvio Berlusconi's party obviously did not make sufficient use of press releases and the like in the context of the 2013 Italian general elections.<sup>4</sup> Hence, the present empirical analysis covers 62 different political parties.

The following section outlines our indicators of populism. As part of its conception as a thin ideology, political actors can express populism in specific discursive patterns. Several authors usefully propose indices to operationalise populist beliefs based on an analysis of the discursive pattern of political texts, such as party manifestoes, speeches or press releases (see Aslanidis 2015; Bruhn 2012; Hawkins 2009; Jagers and Walgrave 2007; March 2017; Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn

*et al.* 2014). In this empirical analysis, we share a similar approach by using a quantitative content analysis of the parties' press releases. Based on Wirth *et al.* (2016), the coding of populism relies on its three core ideational concepts – people-centrism, anti-elitism and popular sovereignty. The unit of analysis refers to statements made by individuals (e.g. politicians) and organisations (typically political parties) about specific political issues. Following the guidelines of the codebook, a new statement was coded as soon as a hitherto unaddressed issue was available in a given press release. Depending on the thematic structuring of the selected texts, issue-specific statements can thus include a single sentence, a paragraph, or even an entire document.

In such issue-specific statements, political actors can potentially address all three populist sub-dimensions. According to the codebook, they use people-centrist rhetoric if they (1) stress the virtues of the people, (2) stress the achievements of the people, (3) demonstrate closeness to the people and (4) assert a monolithic people. Anti-elitist appeals include strategies that they (1) denounce elites, (2) blame elites or (3) exclude elites from the people. Finally, two indicators are used to capture popular sovereignty: (1) demanding sovereignty of the people and (2) denying sovereignty to the elites.<sup>5</sup> For each sub-dimension, we created an index ranging from zero to one. Subsequently, these three measures were summed up, given that a Mokken analysis revealed that those components form a hierarchical scale. The populism indicator thus theoretically ranges from zero to three. In this context, it seems important to highlight that populism has not to be regarded as an all-or-nothing phenomenon but as a matter of degree (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). According to this gradual logic, political actors can adopt more or less discourses on people-centrism, anti-elitism and appeals to popular sovereignty.

Altogether, 11,356 statements about issues or actors have been coded from the selected press releases (see Table A1 in the online appendix). We calculated the average populist communication level per statement for each party. The mean score across the 62 parties included is 0.050. At first glance, this low level suggests that political actors do not often make use of populist rhetoric in press releases. While it is true that there is no indication of populism in a majority of coded statements, it needs to be mentioned that the coding scheme precludes high scores of populist communication. Indeed, it is hard to conceive of political actors who articulate nine different specific criteria of populist appeals at the level of single statements throughout a substantial amount of campaign documents. Importantly, even if the level of populist communication measured is low overall, it varies substantially across parties (s.d. = 0.047). When looking at the three main components of populism, anti-elitist appeals prove to

be the most often used ( $M = 0.030$ ), followed by people-centrist rhetoric ( $M = 0.014$ ). It appears that political actors largely refrained from demanding popular sovereignty for the people ( $M = 0.06$ ).

With respect to the level of populism according to issue domains, we use the 12 broad categories employed by Kriesi *et al.* (2008).<sup>6</sup> We assigned actor statements about the welfare state, economic liberalism, public finances, education and infrastructure to the economic domain and coded statements that address policies related to cultural liberalism, immigration, the army and security matters as cultural issues. Based on a reviewer's comment, a differentiated strategy was implemented regarding the European integration process. Using the level of sub-issues as classification criterion, we decided to consider general statements, as well as those related to national sovereignty, enlargement, international cooperation, democratic institutions, security and migration, as belonging to the cultural domain. In contrast, we include statements about free trade, market regulations, social questions, the euro and the economic crisis as part of the economic domain. Additionally, actor statements about ecology or institutional reforms were not included to the issue analysis, as neither of these issues can be clearly assigned to the economic or the cultural domain.

In the context of 11 election campaigns under scrutiny, political parties generally adopt populist rhetoric on economic issues ( $M = 0.062$ ) more frequently than on cultural ones ( $M = 0.043$ ). Again, the variation is quite substantial. The standard deviation for economic populism is 0.085 and 0.051 for cultural populism.

## **Empirical analysis**

In the following, we begin our empirical investigation by descriptively analysing the levels of populism demonstrated by the selected parties. We also provide some qualitative illustrations of populist figures of speech by focusing on the most populist parties in our sample. In a second step, the results of the multivariate analysis are presented.

### ***Descriptive analysis***

Table 2 lists the overall levels of populist communication according to party groups. Consistent with the first hypothesis, populist communication is generally more prevalent at the ideological extremes. Thus the radical right and the radical left rely on populist appeals in election campaigns more often than mainstream parties. The mean score for the radical right ( $M = 0.094$ ) proves to be slightly higher than for the radical

**Table 2.** Levels of populism according to ideological groups.

	All statements	Economic issues	Cultural issues	N
Radical right	0.094	0.113	0.093	10
Radical left	0.083	0.131	0.058	10
Mainstream parties	0.031	0.034	0.027	42
Mainstream left	0.034	0.039	0.040	16
Mainstream right	0.029	0.030	0.019	26
	0.050	0.062	0.043	62

left ( $M = 0.083$ ). In contrast, mainstream parties score much lower on the populism indicator (0.031). Parties from the left (0.034) are slightly more populist than those from the right (0.029). This is primarily due to the fact that the Greens prove to be somewhat more populist than average (0.044). This comparatively high level may reflect the legacy of these parties, as they were rather populist in the 1970s and 1980s (March 2007: 66). With respect to the mainstream right, parties such as the Popular Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) from the Netherlands and Civic Choice (SC) from Italy also made rather extensive use of populist campaign communication (0.071 for both). When looking at the country level, it appears that radical parties exhibit consistently higher levels of populist communication in 10 out of 11 cases. The only exception concerns the 2013 Italian general elections (see Table A1 in the online appendix).

As far as concerns the *radical right*, all selected members of this party family are above average in their use of populist communication. The Swiss People's Party (0.239) proves to be the party that most extensively resorts to populist appeals. In the 2015 federal elections, the party decided to play the 'populist card' against the backdrop of the so-called 'asylum crisis', when reports about thousands of migrants attempting to enter Western European countries dominated the headlines (Bernhard 2016). In this context, the SVP attracted great attention by announcing that it would challenge a reform of the Swiss asylum law by means of a nationwide referendum.<sup>7</sup> The party made extensive use of people-centrism, anti-elitism and demands for popular sovereignty on the asylum topic. For example, in its press release issued on 25 September 2015, the party accused the federal authorities of 'deliberately throwing sand into the people's eyes'. The party picked out two provisions of the bill in its communication – the fact that asylum-seekers would be granted free legal advice, as well as the possibility that the federal government would conduct expropriations as a last resort in order to build new asylum centres. The SVP stated that it opposed these 'unsuitable and dangerous policies at the expense of the citizens'. On 6 October 2015, the party's governing board confirmed its decision to launch a referendum. In the press release of that day, the party concluded: 'To the SVP it is clear that the people should have the final say on this bill.'

Regarding the *radical left*, the Greek Communists from KKE (0.230) and SYRIZA (0.167) exhibit the highest degrees of populist campaign communication. In the framework of the Greek legislative elections in January 2015, which included a salient public debate on an agreement for a third bailout package provided by the Troika (Rori 2016), SYRIZA largely relied on populist appeals when it decided to attack the neoliberal austerity measures of the incumbent government, a coalition between New Democracy and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK). In a press release published on 23 November 2014, ahead of the vote for the new budget in Parliament, SYRIZA stated that

the government reduces social expenditures, increases taxes, and cancels any development prospect. At the same time, and in the same destructive logic, it announces privatizations against public property and the interests of the Greek people. ... What is certain is that this budget will not be executed because it will be cancelled by the vote of the Greek people.

In a similar vein, an important party figure made the following statement on 29 November 2014, in the aftermath of a national strike regarding imminent cuts on salaries and pensions:

The workers, the unemployed, and the pensioners, with yesterday's incredible participation to the strike protest rallies opened up a new victorious circle of labour and popular struggles that will lead – with their vote as well – to the overturn of the government before it manages to destroy whatever is left standing of the pensions. A left-wing government that will arise with the vote and the trust of the people will support public social security and pensions, with the first step in that direction being the reconstitution of the 13th pension instalment (Christmas present) for those who receive salaries of 700 Euros and less.

For their part, the Greek Communists forcefully made use of populist figures of speech when expressing their hostility towards the European Union. Addressing the EU's strategy 'Europe 2020', a deputy of the KKE claimed on 25 November 2014 that it

was planned and is being realised by the EU and the neoliberal governments to serve one and only one target: To safeguard and enhance the greed of the monopolies on the remnants of the life and rights of the working class people. This policy doesn't have any 'social dimensions', it serves the need of capital for very cheap labour power; it leads to the widening of extreme poverty and social exclusion for the working class and the poor popular sectors.

More generally, the Greek Communists used to portray themselves as the only serious opposition that could safeguard the interests of the working class. On 22 January 2015, General Secretary Dimitris Koutsoumpas posited, in a populist manner, that 'all other parties co-travel in the wagon running on the EU and NATO, IMF and ECB rails, are willing to

co-govern or to push whatever government to become more conservative. All the parties except for the KKE are determined to lead the people to be exploited by the rich, to produce profit from the sweat of the working people'. Anticipating a victory for SYRIZA, he further maintained that this party 'is allied with sectors of the big capital. It is being tested by the crowds of the markets, the imperialist think-tanks of the USA and elsewhere'.

The results also demonstrate the levels of populism according to issue domains. With respect to *cultural populism*, the radical right (0.093) exhibits higher average scores than the radical left (0.058) and mainstream parties (0.027). This basic pattern supports the second hypotheses. The highest means for the radical right come from the Swiss People's Party (0.233), ANEL (0.167), UKIP (0.153) and the Party for Freedom (0.139). In the case of the remaining parties, SYRIZA most frequently by far relied on cultural populism (0.203), most notably when addressing European integration issues.

A different picture emerges from the analysis of ideological groups in terms of *economic populism*. With an average score of 0.131, parties from the radical left exhibit a somewhat higher degree of populist campaign rhetoric than those from the radical right (0.113). Once again, mainstream parties turn out to be noticeably less populist (0.034). When taking a closer look at individual parties, it appears that the Greek Communists massively relied on economic populism (0.524). However, the KKE is far from being an exception in the Greek elections of January 2015. Next in line are Golden Dawn (0.333), ANEL (0.250) and SYRIZA (0.216).

As to the geographical region, this study distinguishes between the 19 parties from Southern Europe (Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal) and the 43 from Northern Europe (Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom). The former ( $M = 0.052$ ) are only slightly more populist than the latter ( $M = 0.048$ ). However, there is an indication of a difference on economic issues, given that the southern parties ( $M = 0.095$ ) are roughly twice as populist as those from the north ( $M = 0.047$ ). These figures support the fourth hypothesis. Finally, parties from the north only somewhat more frequently rely on cultural populism ( $M = 0.048$ ) than those from the south ( $M = 0.042$ ).

When examining the 11 elections under scrutiny, it appears that the Greek parties are the most populist in general ( $M = 0.088$ ). Among the remaining southern countries, only the parties from Italy ( $M = 0.060$ ) turn out to be somewhat above average, while those from Spain ( $M = 0.027$ ), and especially those from Portugal ( $M = 0.008$ ), are much less populist than the average European party. In other words, the four contexts from the south are far from forming a homogenous bloc. In the

elections of the northern countries, the levels of overall populist communication prove to be subject to less variation, given that the corresponding figures range from 0.030 (for the United Kingdom) to 0.071 (for the Netherlands). In terms of economic populism, the most striking result relates to the extraordinarily high level of economic populism that occurs in the case of the January 2015 Greek elections ( $M=0.189$ ), followed by the 2013 Italian general elections (0.089). With respect to cultural populism, the country-level variation proves to be much smaller. The maximum refers to the Greek national elections ( $M=0.079$ ), followed by the elections held in the Netherlands (0.068) and in the United Kingdom (0.064).

In the multivariate analysis, the influence of pre-election status is controlled for by taking into account *government participation* and *party age*. When it comes to the use of populist communication in electoral contests, scholars believe that the parties in office are generally less inclined to rely on populist rhetoric than challengers (Bonikowski and Gidron 2015; Ernst *et al.* 2017; Mény and Surel 2002). In an attempt to replace governing parties, the latter can be expected to make more frequent use of the populist toolbox. Simple bivariate analyses show that, on average, the 23 governing parties in our sample are less prone to use populist rhetoric ( $M=0.036$ ) than the 39 opposition and challenger parties ( $M=0.058$ ). The difference is similar in the case of cultural issues ( $M: 0.032$  vs.  $0.055$ ), but it is greater for economic issues ( $M: 0.028$  vs.  $0.082$ ). In addition, newly emerging parties can be expected to rely more frequently on populist communication than more established ones, thus taking advantage of their image of a 'fresh force' in the national political landscape. We account for party age by subtracting the founding year from the year in which the selected elections took place. Correlations between party age and populist levels prove to be rather low and even slightly positive in the economic domain. Pearson's  $R^2$  is  $-0.11$  for all statements,  $0.03$  for economic issues and  $-0.08$  for cultural ones.

### **Multivariate analysis**

The results of the multivariate analysis are as follows. Table 3 presents the results of six ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions that explain the degree of populism exhibited by the 62 selected parties. Let us begin by addressing the first three models. Model I refers to all statements, while Model II focuses on economic issues and Model III on cultural issues. In addition to party groups (radical left, radical right and mainstream parties) and a dichotomous variable for geography (1=south, 0=north), each estimation considers government participation and the age of the

**Table 3.** OLS regression models explaining levels of populism.

	Model I All statements	Model II Cultural issues	Model III Economic issues	Model IV All statements	Model V Cultural issues	Model VI Economic issues
Radical right	0.066*** (4.31)	0.064*** (3.66)	0.081* (2.84)	0.060*** (4.08)	0.059*** (3.41)	0.063* (2.57)
Radical left	0.057*** (3.60)	0.031 (1.69)	0.079* (2.67)	0.057*** (3.73)	0.030 (1.70)	0.077** (3.05)
South	-0.008 (-0.64)	-0.011 (-0.87)	0.034 (1.53)			
Greece				0.022 (1.36)	0.013 (0.65)	0.124*** (4.59)
Remaining south				-0.025 (-1.90)	-0.027 (-1.69)	-0.020 (-0.88)
Government participation	0.004 (0.29)	-0.008 (-0.55)	-0.019 (-0.85)	0.002 (0.16)	-0.009 (-0.66)	-0.025 (-1.27)
Party age	0.0002 (0.13)	0.0000 (0.06)	0.0003 (1.52)	0.0000 (0.13)	0.0001 (0.05)	0.0004 (1.76)
Constant	0.030** (2.63)	0.033* (2.54)	0.015 (0.72)	0.032** (2.92)	0.035** (2.70)	0.021 (1.14)
<i>N</i>	62	62	62	62	62	62
<i>Adj. R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.285	0.255	0.230	0.350	0.220	0.155

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ ; T-values in brackets.

The mainstream parties are the reference category for the ideological groups.

parties. The first model confirms that both the radical left and the radical right excel in terms of overall populist communication. In support of the first hypothesis, these two types of parties significantly rely on populism and do so more extensively than mainstream parties, which serve as reference category.

Model II supports the second hypothesis. The results show that only parties from the radical right make use of populist statements on cultural issues more frequently than mainstream parties. However, based on the coefficients reported in Model III, the third hypothesis must be rejected. The results indicate that both groups at the ideological extremes tend to resort to populist campaign rhetoric regarding economic issues more often than mainstream parties. The expectation was that the radical left would be more populist on this issue dimension.

As Model III demonstrates, there is no evidence for a north-south divide on economic matters. Contrary to the impression derived from the descriptive analysis, it appears that the parties from the south do not resort to populism more frequently in general than those from the north. This finding contradicts the fourth hypothesis. To delve deeper into the populist influence of southern parties, in the three additional models of Table 3, we replace the dichotomous variable with a similar indicator for Greek parties, on the one hand, and for the remaining southern parties from Italy, Spain and Portugal, on the other. Model VI shows that the Greek parties exhibit higher levels of economic populism than their peers.

This result can be linked to the extraordinary severity of the crisis that occurred in Greece in the context of the January 2015 elections.

In contrast, Models IV and V suggest that the Greek parties, the remaining southern parties, and those from the north, do not significantly distinguish between themselves in the use of populism in general or with regard to cultural issues. Additionally, there are no statistically significant effects with respect to the control variables. The six regression models indicate that government parties and older parties are no less inclined to rely on populism than opposition and younger parties.

We also tested some alternative specifications to the standard models. Thus, they obtained the same results in terms of significance by classifying the Five Star Movement as a residual party, a radical right party, and even a mainstream party. This also holds true when replacing M5S, for which we had to rely on blog posts instead of press releases, with either Left Ecology Freedom (SEL) or Civil Revolution (RC), two radical left parties which failed to obtain 4% of the vote in the 2013 Italian general elections. Moreover, we further examined the radical parties and did not find any statistically significant effect for the radical left parties from the southern region of Western Europe or for the radical right parties that have moved to the left on the economy (i.e. the Freedom Party of Austria, the National Front, the Party for Freedom from the Netherlands and the Sweden Democrats). We also included a series of interaction terms between the radical right and Southern European parties into our standard models. With the exception of a positive effect of southern radical right parties on economic issues, the coefficients turned out to be insignificant. This indicates that radical parties from the south are not generally exceptionally populist.

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that populism is on the rise in contemporary Europe. Numerous political parties that are commonly labelled as populist have succeeded in durably establishing themselves as powerful players in their respective countries. This article studies the levels of populism exhibited by parties in the context of 11 recent election campaigns. The empirical analysis is based on a content analysis of press releases. Consistent with our theoretical expectation, parties from the radical right and the radical left rely on populist appeals more frequently than their mainstream counterparts. In other words, the strongest expressions of populism are at the extremes of the ideological spectrum. Conversely, this study confirms that mainstream parties are less prone to rely on populism (Rooduijn *et al.* 2014), rejecting the thesis of a general *populist Zeitgeist*. This pattern of

bipolarity supports earlier comparative studies that focus on the more ideological dimension of populism by looking at party manifestoes, and it parallels current research findings obtained in the realm of new social media (Ernst *et al.* 2017).

However, we would like to warn against equating radicalness with populism. Indeed, ideological extreme parties cannot simply be regarded as populist for two main reasons. First, the phenomenon of populism should be considered a matter of degree. Hence, instead of using categorical indicators, we relied on a gradual measure in the framework of this empirical analysis. This indicator reveals that parties that are commonly classified as populist sometimes vary greatly in their reliance on populist appeals. Second, it is important to account for deviating cases. Our study demonstrates that some radical parties display below average levels of populism. This is most visible for the Communists from Portugal. At the same time, few mainstream parties (such as Popular Party for Freedom and Democracy from the Netherlands, Civic Choice from Italy, and some Green parties) make extensive use of populist campaign rhetoric.

Additionally, this investigation reveals that the phenomenon of populism is not confined to the radical right in contemporary Western Europe. This is of primary importance, given that the academic literature has long neglected left-wing populism. Scholars of populism are thus well advised to devote more attention to this phenomenon. This seems to be even more relevant when considering electoral performance. Indeed, in the Eurozone, populist parties from the left are currently stronger in electoral terms than those from the right. March and Keith (2016) argue that the Great Recession has decisively contributed to boosting left-wing populism in the last few years. According to this reasoning, the success of left-wing populists is due to the fact that these parties usually mobilise voters using economic and class-related terms.

This empirical analysis further provides analysis at the level of issue domains. It shows that the radical right parties are more populist when cultural issues are at stake, thereby confirming the second hypothesis. However, the empirical investigation does not ultimately support the expectation that parties from the radical left resort to populism more frequently than the remaining parties. Given that the multivariate analysis finds that both radical groups are more prone to resort to populism than mainstream parties, the third hypothesis had to be rejected. The rather high reliance on populism by the radical right may be attributed to the fact that most of the selected elections took place in the shadow of the Great Recession. Due to the saliency of the crisis and its consequences, the radical right may have felt compelled to play the populist card in the economic domain more often than under ordinary circumstances.

Additionally, we plead for a more fine-grained examination of these issues in future research. More specifically, scholars may assess whether, and to what extent, the specific contents of the populist appeals vary between radical groups on either side of the class divide. Unfortunately, the number of coded statements did not allow us to further disaggregate the magnitude of populism to the level of single issues. Another limitation of this analysis is its cross-sectional research design, since it only selected one election per country. Given that we do not have data on pre-crisis elections, only a snapshot of post-crisis elections, they are unable to posit any causal relationship about the effect of the crisis. A proper identification strategy would require at least one data point before the eruption of the crisis and one afterwards. This also holds true for the fourth hypothesis about the presumed north–south divide, which had to be rejected. In the absence of a systematic change analysis, the question of whether populism increased due to the crisis could not be addressed. It may be the case that the parties in the countries that were hardest hit by the economic and financial crisis (e.g. Greece and Italy) had already adopted stronger populist rhetoric at the outset of the crisis than parties from other countries. However, the emergence of new populist actors such as Podemos and the Five Star Movement, as well as the fact that mainstream parties largely refrained from using populist communication in the crisis-ridden January 2015 Greek legislative elections, suggest otherwise.

## Notes


1. This focus on key elements implies that we refrain from considering disputed characteristics of populism, such as charismatic leadership, mobilisation logics (bottom-up vs. top-down) and stylistic features (e.g. simplification, emotionalisation and personalisation).
2. When it comes to major political conflicts in contemporary Western Europe, political scientists typically draw a distinction between economic and cultural policy dimensions. While the former refers to the opposition between state interventions and market solutions, the latter contrasts libertarian and cosmopolitan values with authoritarian and nationalist values.
3. The main findings of this study are not affected by the classification of the Five Star Movement.
4. This might be due to the fact that the PDL, to a large extent, enjoyed direct media access thanks to the companies owned by Mediaset, which is partially controlled by Silvio Berlusconi's family.
5. The coding of the selected press releases was undertaken by 34 native speakers or highly qualified academics. Inter-coder reliability tests of this coding scheme produced satisfactory results (Cohen's Kappa > 0.5).
6. With Cohen's Kappa exceeding 0.6, inter-coder reliability turned out to be satisfactory at the level of these main categories.

7. This decision took most observers by surprise, given that the rather technical streamlining reform both chambers of Parliament had just adopted aimed at speeding up asylum procedures.

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## Shooting the fox? UKIP's populism in the post-Brexit era

Simon Usherwood

### ABSTRACT

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) has moved from being a single-issue party *par excellence* to a broader party of protest, taking advantage of wider feelings of discontent and disconnection. However, the 2016 referendum on UK membership of the EU fundamentally challenged its development and operation, by removing a core part of the party's rationale and identity, and radically shifting the overall political landscape. This paper considers the re-positioning through the referendum period, both rhetorically and organisationally. Drawing on party press releases and media coverage, the paper argues that UKIP has become caught in a set of multiple transformations, pushing it in the longer term towards a more conventionally populist position in a way that carries important resonances for other Eurosceptic parties across the continent.

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One of the defining features of European populism is the wide variety of manifestations found across national systems. This variety moreover cuts across ideological lines, but also programmatic priorities and development over time. While it is right to search for underlying commonalities in this diversity (e.g. Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Mair 2013; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013), it also remains important to recognise that particularities remain and have an impact (Caiani and Graziano 2016; Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). This paper considers precisely this impact, by considering the case of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in the wake of the June 2016 UK referendum on membership of the European Union.

Furthermore, one of the recurring features of populism is its adaptability (see Mény and Surel 2002; Taggart 2000), casting and re-casting its core elements – of ‘the people’ against pernicious ‘elites’ (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2007) – to suit very different situations. Importantly, this is not only an adaption to different national situations, but also to different

situations over time within national contexts: populist parties are incomplete and temporary manifestations of underlying structural developments in politics and society. The opportunity structures that present themselves in any national system will change over time, usually gradually but occasionally radically, in part through the actions of the political actors involved (Kitschelt 1986). So it is with UKIP and the radical upheaval of British politics that has come with the decision on Brexit. The party was built on a foundation of a single issue – as seen with other European populist parties (Ivarsflaten 2008) – of opposition to European integration, and this has been the policy it is most associated with in the public's mind, notwithstanding the growth in importance of a more conventionally exclusionary policy on immigration. With the referendum validating the original policy and securing its core demand, the question that immediately rises for the party is one of whether it has any continuing purpose. UKIP has been successful in mobilising and representing a broad coalition of supporters in the years running up to the referendum for reasons that extended well beyond the European issue (Ford and Goodwin 2014), but it now has to adapt to the apparent removal of that core of its work. As this special issue invites reflection on the changes wrought in Europe in recent years on populism, the central research question is whether Brexit has made UKIP into a more conventionally exclusionary European populist party. This natural experiment thus offers an instructive counterpoint to the disruptive processes found in other European countries (e.g. Lisi *et al.* 2019).

In order to answer this question, the article proceeds as follows. Firstly, it considers the particularities of UKIP as a populist party and the extent to which the factors of its origin, programme and ideology might shape its response to the changed realities of the Brexit era. The core argument that will be made is that while the party might have identified the issue of relevance, it finds itself in a changed situation, both because of its reduced internal capacity and because of a less sympathetic external environment. That external environment is not only shaped by the 2016 referendum, but also by the changing constellation of British party politics, and the changing policy of the Conservative party in particular (Bale 2018). Through analysis of party press releases, newspaper coverage and public opinion data over the period between February 2015 and October 2017, the paper will discuss how these different data sources shine light on the dilemmas faced by UKIP and the choices taken by it. While those choices might seem to be bringing UKIP more in line with the forms of populism found in other European states (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013), it is also evident that the size and the difficulty of the transition will be very substantial, and with no guarantee of success.

## UKIP as an outlier

As much as UKIP is often rolled in with other European populist parties making advances in recent years (e.g. Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Halikiopoulou and Vasilopoulou 2014; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011), the party has a very distinctive origin, path of development and ideological disposition. While it is undoubtedly a populist party (Hayton 2010; Usherwood 2016), it has grown into that definition from its roots as a single-issue party.

At its foundation in the early 1990s, the party was built as a purely single-issue organisation: to precipitate the UK's withdrawal from the then new European Union. Its founder, Alan Sked, a professor at the London School of Economics, proposed that UKIP would contest seats in the European Parliament and then refuse to take them up, so as to cause a constitutional crisis. The roundabout policy not only belied its academic roots, but also the constellation of individuals that the party had drawn together: not only disillusioned Conservatives, mobilised by Margaret Thatcher's Bruges speech of 1988, but also those from other parties (and none) who saw European integration running far beyond the market-led approach of the 1980s (Spiering 2004). The fragility of this coalition was very evident throughout the 1990s, with repeated internal splits, a constant need to rebuff entryist efforts from the far right and a major challenge in 1997 from the Referendum Party (Daniel 2005). The collapse of the latter left an enlarged constituency for UKIP, which it was able to capitalise on with the change in electoral system for the 1999 European elections. The foothold that its three MEPs – now following a policy of taking their seats – were able to create, together with the funding associated with their election, was to be critical in sustaining the party through its juvenile phase.

As much as European issues were important in British politics at this time – most obviously with the long debate about British membership of the euro – UKIP was only able to secure representation at the European level: both national and local elections produced no successes at this stage. Indeed, it is striking that it was only at the point that the party began to broaden its message from the single issue of 'Europe' – and thus become more conventionally exclusionary – that there was a growth in both its public profile and electoral success. The 2004 European elections proved a major breakthrough, with a combination of high-profile candidates, a strong campaign theme based on anti-establishment ideas, and the disarray of opponents resulting in 12 MEPs (Butler and Westlake 2005). Each subsequent cycle of European elections saw further growth in both vote share and representation (Usherwood 2016).

This electoral success was paralleled by the development of an ever wider set of policies, among which controls on immigration was the most important. This tessellated neatly with the continuing core EU message, as UKIP made much use of its withdrawalist position on the latter to highlight how other parties were unwilling and unable to impose limits on intra-EU migration (as freedom of movement has typically been framed in the UK): thus the original core became interwoven with ever more additions. The gradual emergence of local branches of the party in the 2000s also permitted the development of a Liberal Democrat-style localism and a reinforcement of the party's profile as a destination for protest votes (Tournier-Sol 2015), with local representatives able to speak more credibly about those issues too trivial for the national stage. That credibility helped to lay the groundwork for the sustained efforts to secure national representation, with the defection of two Conservative MPs in late 2014. Notwithstanding that it later became apparent that their defection was part of a larger gambit by Eurosceptic elements in the Conservatives to 'detoxify' UKIP prior to any EU referendum (Shipman 2016 has the best account of this), the image conveyed to both public and politicians was that UKIP was on the brink of becoming part of the mainstream, as the Tories continued their inner turmoil over 'Europe'.

Beyond this organisational and programmatic development, it is also important to stress the more general evolution of the party to a more pragmatic – and indeed populist – position. This is evident in a number of areas, most importantly in its conceptualisation and articulation of its policy towards the EU, its core project. The movement from non-engagement on principle, to pragmatic but very limited engagement, and then to the reframing of the EU within a bigger project of anti-establishmentarianism reflects the changing base of UKIP; something that predates the step-change in the party's profile (as seen in Gardner 2006 and Usherwood 2008). Whereas once the party conceived of itself as having the sole purpose of triggering a crisis over the UK's membership in the EU, now it sees that as simply one step towards a UKIP government and a programme of policy. Such a shift is only possible because of the fundamental lack of a party ideology, as usually understood: the party does not like the European Union – just as it does not like uncontrolled immigration – but that dislike is not grounded in a single critique, nor does it point to an ideologically driven alternative policy: populism here is very much a matter of style and strategy, rather than ideology (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013).

The ideological incoherence is an important part of understanding the party, for while the same can be said of other European populist parties, UKIP arrived at its situation from a particularly ideologically wide

starting point. While the policy focus was extremely limited – literally a single policy on a single issue – this allowed the party to get support from individuals from across the political spectrum: Sked was previously a liberal activist and the leadership group has always included those from different backgrounds, even as former Conservatives have remained the most common source of members (Gardner 2006; YouGov 2016). That breadth was also supported by the strong efforts to resist far-right entryism – often at the cost of internal ruptures and removal of staff – allowing the party to argue with some more credibility about being within the boundaries of polite political debate (the more overt far right having consistently struggled to achieve such acceptability in the UK (Goodwin 2007)). Through to the present, UKIP remains a collection of ideologies under the language of populism, rather than a cohesive ideological project. Here it is possible to contrast the libertarianism of Farage with the Tory politics of many other senior figures (Bale 2018), not to mention the old Labour politics of many recent followers of the party. As Wallace (2014) helpfully describes it, the party contains distinct ‘tribes’, each pulling the party in somewhat different directions, held together more by obfuscation and the politics of opposition than by any unifying positively framed agenda. The party has thus always worked on the basis of solving problems on a ‘common sense’ basis, rather than achieving core values.

If the origins and the ideological vacuum of the party mark it out from counterparts elsewhere, then this has diminished over time. Most obviously, UKIP has moved on from its starting point and now offers a full portfolio of policy positions and preferences and has articulated an inclusive rhetorical approach, grounded in classic populist tropes of common sense and external threat. For all that the party has fought hard – and repeatedly (Tournier-Sol 2015) – to resist entryism from far-right elements, the degree of overlap in its core policies on European integration and on immigration with radical right parties is very significant. While Mudde (2017: 7) is right to point out that it is not a populist radical right party, UKIP does still display many points of commonality, not least in its degree of personalisation on Nigel Farage.

Farage’s involvement with UKIP stretches back to its foundation, but until 2006, when he became party leader, he had initially taken a back-seat role. With his move into the leadership, as already noted, he instigated a shift in policy and presentation, while simultaneously building up an inner circle of supporters and advisers (Abedi and Lundberg 2008; Usherwood 2016): potential successors or challengers were repeatedly marginalised or constrained, allowing Farage to remain pre-eminent. The brief interlude during the 2010 General Election campaign, when Lord Pearson struggled with both the media and the party, only served to

underline Farage's value. As a highly charismatic individual (Crines and Heppell 2017), he was able to build a very significant media (and popular) following, as well as overcoming the ideological fissures that exist in the membership. In so doing, he has followed a path well-trodden by the Le Pens, Geert Wilders, Jörg Haider and many others in collapsing voters' conceptions of leader and party (see Taggart 1995; Weyland 2001). Naturally, such personalisation comes with costs, as Bynander and 't Hart (2006) point out: they undermine the longer-term health of the party and run the risk of charismatic effects becoming less effective at some future point, for reasons beyond the control of the individual.

What does all of this suggest for UKIP's post-referendum path and the degree to which it can be understood in terms of exclusionary populism? The impact can be most usefully divided into internal and external dimensions. Among the former – under the direct control of the party – the referendum might be expected to have had two distinct effects on its programmatic outputs. Prior to the referendum, the shift in public attention towards UKIP's core policy interest might be expected to result in more focus by the party on that issue: the party held a comparative advantage as the only national party with an unambiguous and central policy commitment to withdrawal from the EU. However, after the vote, we would expect that attention would shift away from the EU issue, both because it would no longer hold its comparative advantage (as other parties adopted the referendum outcome as policy) and as the party sought to establish its continuing relevance to public debate beyond what would now become a time-limited issue. Overall, the referendum is therefore expected to result in a party that focuses even more on those aspects that speak to conventional exclusionary populism, as it seeks to move beyond its original purpose.

By contrast, the anticipated pattern of external factors will present a different picture. Media coverage of the party would be expected to follow the party's lead, with an increasing focus on the EU issue in the run-up to the referendum, but thereafter we would not anticipate a similar re-focusing to other issues. This is based on the Hopmann *et al.* (2012) model, which suggests that relevant parties are more successful in influencing media coverage, coupled to a perceived weakening of party relevance (in the broader sense) post-referendum. This will also be reflected in a change in public opinion, with a sustained drop in support for UKIP post-referendum.

Finally, we expect that the 'Farage effect' will persist post-referendum. This includes both internal and external elements. The party has its strongest media and public asset in Farage, and so has a clear interest in maintaining its links to him and his name. Likewise, in the absence of any

other party figure of remotely comparable stature, the media will continue to make the connection between Farage and UKIP.

## Methodology and data

To test these expectations, we make use of two novel data sets. To explore internal aspects of the party, we have compiled a set of all press releases produced by the party between late February 2015 and the election of Henry Bolton as party leader in October 2017, and stored on the party's website. These press releases represent the most uniform source of output by UKIP in this period, with a process of central coordination and approval in their production and dissemination: the decision to produce a release does not sit with individual policy spokesmen. Moreover, by this same token, we can assume a minimum level of central interest in a release to warrant its authorisation and distribution (as in Norris 2003). Comprising 1219 releases, the data is coded for content on key words. The time period covers the run-up to the 2015 general election, the entire EU referendum period, and the immediate subsequent reorganisation of the party.

The second source of data is that of articles from the *Daily Express* for the same period. As Startin (2015; see also Deacon and Wring 2016) notes, the *Express* has become very closely aligned with UKIP since 2010, when it launched a campaign to promote UK withdrawal from the EU. Since then, there has been movement of personnel – most notably the political editor, Patrick O'Flynn, becoming a UKIP MEP in 2014 – and financial backing by the paper's owner, Richard Desmond, to the party, to the point that it can be considered the 'house journal' of the party during the period under consideration. The closeness of that relationship offers a good opportunity to test the expectations on external profile, since this is the most sympathetic outlet available to UKIP and thus the one best placed to test Hopmann *et al.*'s (2012) arguments. Articles were taken from the Nexis database, on a search for 'UKIP', with cleaning for duplicates and non-UK editions, before being coded in the same fashion as the press releases.

## Analysis

The period between 2015 and 2017 was a critical one for UKIP. At the start of the survey period, the party was working on the assumption that it was on the verge of breaking through into significant representation in the House of Commons, as support for both Conservatives and Labour parties fell and as UKIP appeared to be attracting defectors from both at

**Table 1.** Frequency of subject mentions, UKIP press releases and *Express* articles mentioning UKIP.

	27/2/15– 07/05/2015		08/05/2015– 23/06/2016		24/06/2016– 08/06/2017		09/06/2017– 25/09/2017	
	UKIP	<i>Express</i>	UKIP	<i>Express</i>	UKIP	<i>Express</i>	UKIP	<i>Express</i>
<i>N</i>	107	226	632	575	384	494	96	71
<i>N/week</i>	10.7	22.6	10.7	9.7	7.7	9.9	6.2	4.6
<b>Subject</b>								
EU without immigration	21.50%	13.72%	39.40%	27.65%	23.18%	37.85%	41.67%	33.80%
EU and immigration	17.76%	17.70%	20.57%	38.43%	10.16%	18.83%	16.67%	28.17%
Immigration without EU	10.28%	15.04%	5.54%	10.26%	7.03%	8.30%	5.21%	5.63%
Neither EU or immigration	50.47%	53.54%	34.49%	23.65%	59.64%	35.02%	36.46%	32.39%
Party leader	40.19%	59.73%	19.30%	47.65%	30.21%	44.13%	30.21%	8.45%
Nigel Farage	40.19%	59.73%	19.30%	47.65%	7.03%	46.15%	3.13%	36.62%
Labour	23.36%	43.81%	12.34%	27.30%	14.84%	37.45%	18.75%	33.80%
Conservatives	21.50%	28.76%	9.38%	13.91%	9.38%	20.24%	10.42%	33.80%

Sources: www.ukip.org; Nexis database.

an increasing rate. The working assumption was that there was political space to sell a message about a new formulation of politics at a time when the two main parties in Westminster looked set for deadlock and coalition talks (Bale 2018; Gruber and Bale 2014; Mellon and Evans 2015; Webb and Bale 2014). However, the unexpected victory of the Conservatives in May 2015 opened up a completely different set of opportunities. Not only was a referendum on EU membership now in place, but Labour seemed to be set on a more radical course under Jeremy Corbyn, potentially opening the door to more aggressive campaigning in old Labour heartlands by UKIP. That potential remained in the wake of the referendum itself, when UKIP was looking to establish its continued relevance. The final twist came with the snap general election in June 2017, which saw the wholesale adoption by the Tories of UKIP's central programme (see Heath and Goodwin 2017; Tilley and Evans 2017), cemented Corbyn as a credible and electorally attractive leader, and left UKIP with an incomplete and uncertain position. Party instability continued beyond the survey period into 2018 with the brief and troubled leadership of Bolton, so care has to be taken not to over-interpret practice during this time, but taken together, there are still four distinct phases to the analysis of the data, each marked by an unexpected turn of events: Table 1 and Figures 1–4 summarise the key findings from the press releases and newspaper articles.

In the first phase, prior to the May 2015 general election, UKIP appeared to be following a strategy of balancing its core interests in the EU and immigration with output focusing on other topics. Over half of the press releases in this period made no mention at all of either the EU or immigration, instead covering subjects as varied as transport, defence, health and the economy. Those subjects typify UKIP's stylist populism,

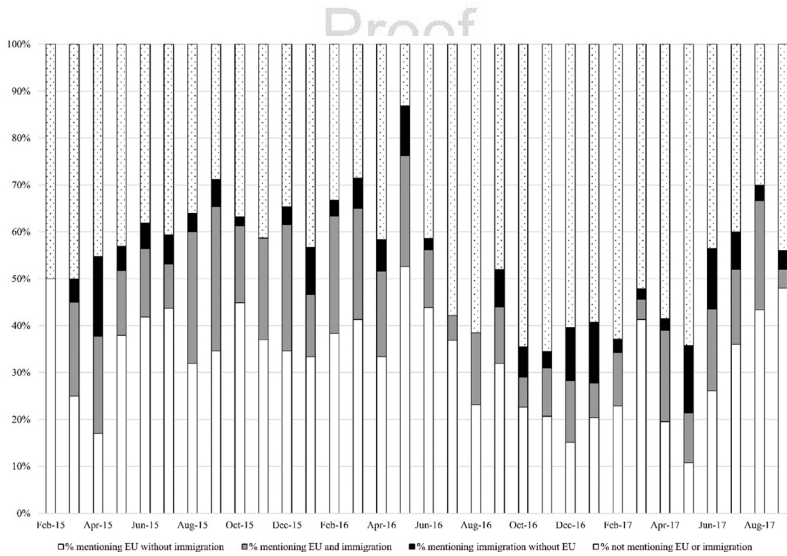


Figure 1. UKIP press releases, by content.

framing the party in prosaic terms of ending carpark charges at hospitals or building low-cost housing. When immigration was mentioned, in almost two in three cases so too was the EU, reflecting a long-run strategy of connecting the two subjects (Ford and Goodwin 2014). This was also the period during the survey timeframe that saw the most frequent mention of the leader's name, with Farage appearing in over 40% of releases, leveraging his high name recognition and brand of political authenticity (Bossetta 2017) to reach voters. Similarly, this was also the period that had the most frequent references to Labour and the Conservatives, always in negative terms, contrasting the common-sense, populist approach of UKIP to the failed 'mainstream'. Coverage by the *Express* largely reflects this overall approach, with a very similar pattern of coverage.

However, following the 2015 general election, there is a marked shift in approach, with an increasing focus on EU-related topics in the run-up to June 2016. Almost 60% of press releases mention the EU in this period (and over 75% in May 2016), while the connection with immigration is strongly reinforced, with over 80% releases mentioning the latter also referencing the former. This pattern of topics is also matched in *Express* articles. There are also far fewer references to the Conservatives or Labour in the period, reflecting the nature of the referendum debate, cutting across party lines. While both press releases and articles make less reference to Farage than before May 2015, the shift is much more marked in the former: The *Express* still manages to mention Farage in nearly every other article over the period.

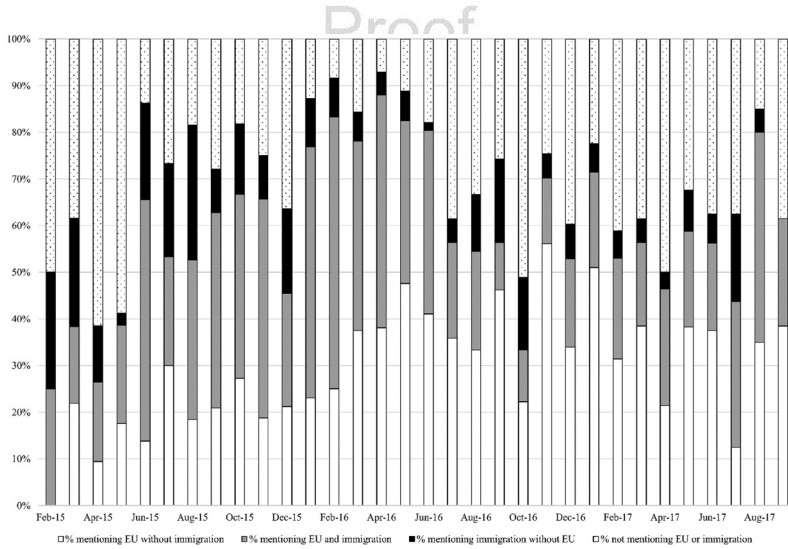


Figure 2. *Express* articles mentioning UKIP, by content.

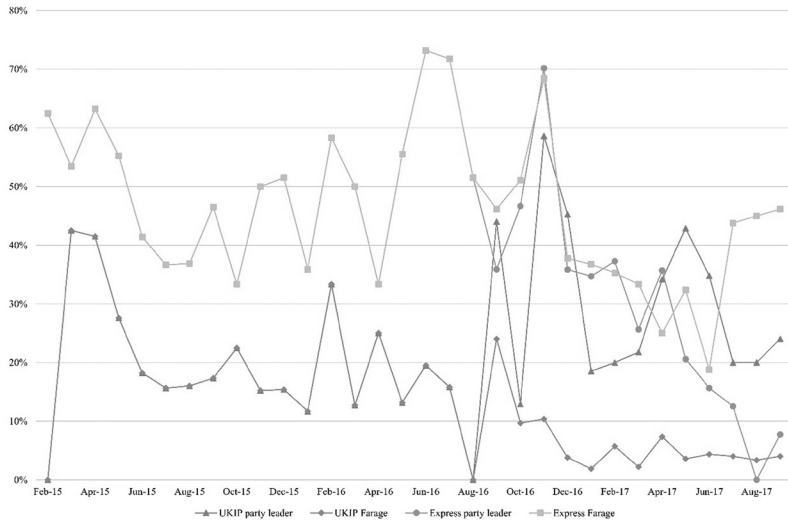
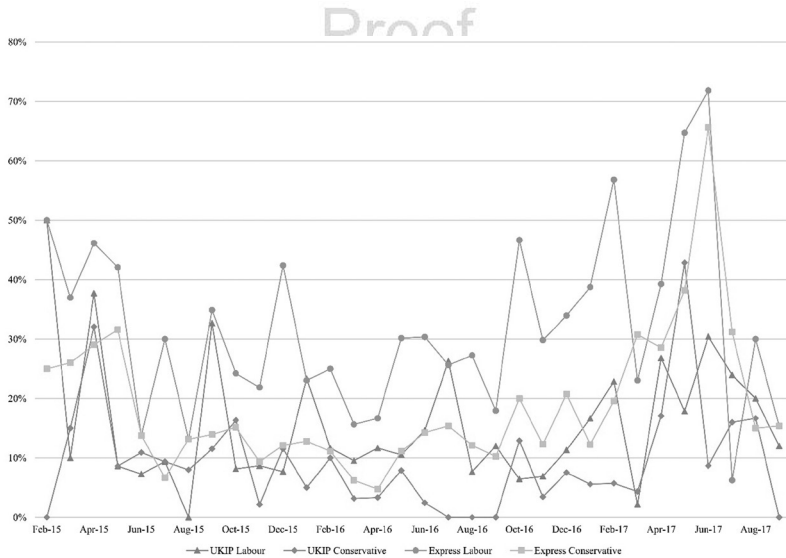


Figure 3. UKIP press releases and *Express* articles, by mention of party leader or Nigel Farage.

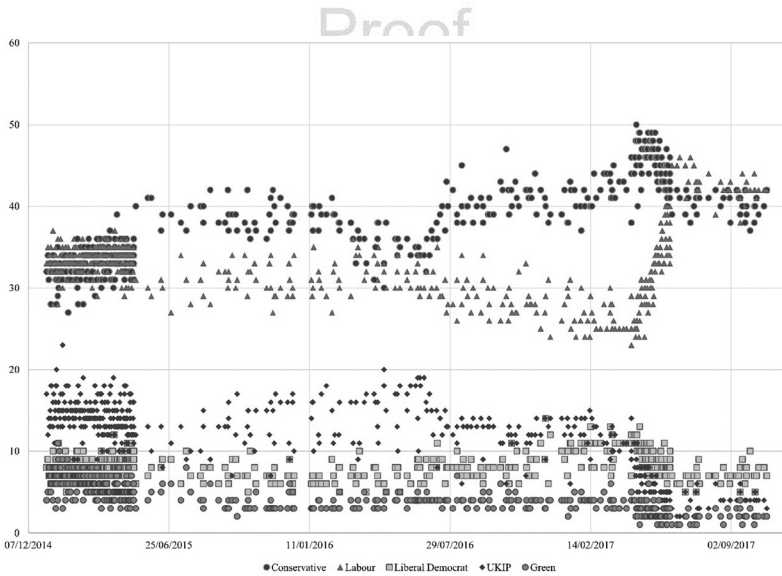
If the run-up to the referendum saw a swing back to the original core interest of UKIP, then the period after saw the opposite. Reference to the EU in press releases drops steeply, while immigration references also become fewer in number: in the period to June 2017, almost 60% of releases mentioned neither of these topics. Instead, the focus shifted back



**Figure 4.** UKIP press releases and *Express* articles, by mention of Labour or Conservatives.

to the wider range seen prior to the 2015 general election: the party produced a mixture of responses to issues of public interest and a number of policy documents, intended to claim more of the political ground. A key moment came in February 2017, when the new party leader, Paul Nuttall, announced his intention to prepare ‘detailed and costed policies’ to frame UKIP as ‘the patriotic party that advances common-sense solutions to many of the problems that are holding [the British people] back in their lives’ (UKIP 2017). Nuttall himself clearly used the press releases to mark himself out as a new figurehead for the party, appearing in over a third of those issued during his leadership, with only very occasional mentions of Farage (and these mainly relate to his continuing position as a MEP). But on this last point there is a divergence with the *Express*, which, while keen to name-check Nuttall at levels seen under Farage, it also continued to mention Farage himself even more frequently: a recurring theme of the entire period following the referendum was the publication of editorials and readers’ letters calling for his return as party leader, as the only individual capable of guiding the party and country through the Brexit process. This ties in with the continued focus on EU-related subjects by the *Express* at this time, with mentions in over half of all articles, even as the party tried to broaden its agenda.

This divergence became even more marked immediately after the 2017 general election, when the *Express* largely stopped name-checking the interim leader, Steve Crowther, even as it continued with frequent



**Figure 5.** UK opinion polling, by vote intention (%).

Source: ukpollingreport.co.uk.

references to Farage (see Figure 3). Indeed, it is also striking that the volume of articles shrinks at this time, to under half the level previously observed. References to the EU and to immigration remain more common in the newspaper than the press releases, even as the party reverted to much more frequent discussion of both. In large part this shift back to the EU was an amplification of the post-referendum phase, inasmuch as the party has made increasingly frequent pronouncements on the need to pursue withdrawal from the EU in a timely and decisive manner, railing against those who might seek to frustrate that objective. This was also marked by an increasing number of references to the Conservatives and Labour in the press releases.

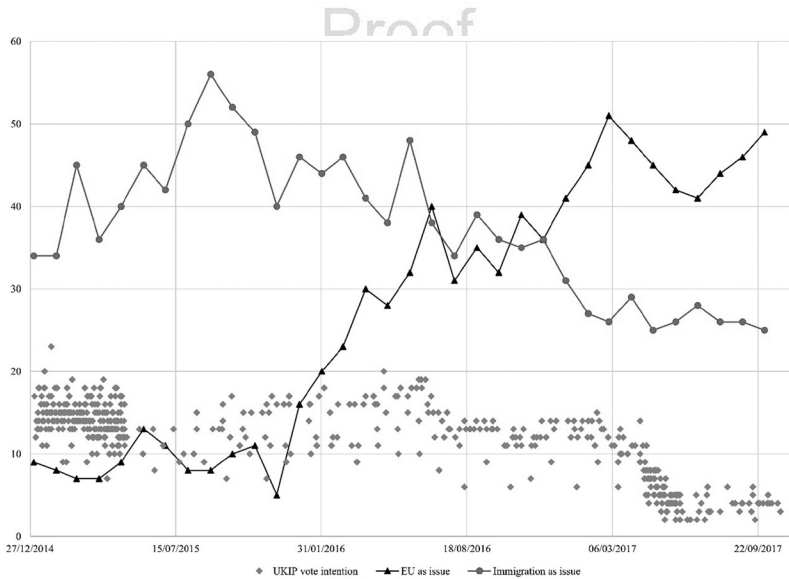
Against the backdrop of these shifts in party profiling, it is also useful to consider the changing public support for the party (see Figure 5). As before, this appears to follow a set of changes that broadly coincides with the periods already outlined. The run-up to the 2015 general election saw consistent polling in the high teens, followed by a fall back towards 10% immediately after. However, support returned to its previous highs as the referendum drew closer, before falling back to the low teens through the rest of 2016 and early 2017. The short campaign in 2017 for the general election was marked by a large drop in support (mirroring the rise in Labour support), settling post-vote at around 5%. However, this mirroring was not the result of direct defections from UKIP to Labour, but rather of UKIP's voter base splitting: preliminary data from the British Electoral Survey (2017; see also Dennison 2018) suggests one-third went to the

Conservatives – less than the latter might have expected – plus a substantial volume of non-voting. Labour picked up many more votes from former Tories and floating voters than from former UKIPers.

Previous analyses have highlighted the extent to which UKIP has drawn voters from across the political spectrum, including many previously non-voters or lapsed voters (e.g. Cowley and Kavanagh 2016; Cutts *et al.* 2017): similarly, the 2017 vote has seen this flow in reverse (Heath and Goodwin 2017), with UKIP voters heading as much to Labour as to the Conservatives. Taken in aggregate, it appears to be in periods when support for those two parties taken together is low that UKIP has prospered electorally, especially in the period since the mid-2000s, in line with Ford and Goodwin's (2014) argument that the party had carved out a niche as a vehicle to represent the 'left behinds'; those who had not benefited from social and economic change in recent decades. However, the data for the period under consideration does raise a question about how much this still holds true. In particular, the shift at the 2017 general election appears to have undercut the claim to electoral relevance that the party was making post-referendum. Having held on to much of its polling share in the year after the referendum, under new leadership and with a more diversified portfolio of policies and priorities, the loss of over half of that support from June 2017 points to a potential collapsing of the particular situation that emerged from 2010, where UKIP could play a particular populist role as an outsider group.

This is further underlined by the evidence presented in Figure 6, which plots the percentage of the British public who consider either the EU or immigration as an important issue (drawing on the long-running Ipsos-Mori 2017 dataset). The former has consistently run below 10% for the entire period since the early 2000s, and was part of UKIP's decision to diversify its policy (Gardner 2006): relatively few people still felt that European integration was a matter of much concern, fewer still a reason to change voting allegiances. The rise of concern about immigration, especially in the wake of the EU's 2004 enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe (see Boomgaarden *et al.* 2011; De Vreese and Boomgaarden 2005), provided a new opportunity for UKIP to extend its policy platform in an organic extension of its position on the EU. While that concern appears to have fallen back since the 2016 referendum, it has been offset by the strong rise in interest in the EU as an issue, as the process of withdrawal moves towards its conclusion. However, neither issue has a significant correlation with vote share over this period.

This leads us back to the expectations set out above, since they point to the elements of that situation and the question of whether it still applies. Certainly, the 2016 referendum does appear to have increased the



**Figure 6.** Intention to vote UKIP versus importance of select issues (%).  
Sources: ukpollingreport.co.uk, Ipsos Mori.

incentives for the party to renew its focus on the EU. Press releases prior to May 2015 showed a high degree of diversification away from this topic, in line with the party's efforts to recast itself as a more conventionally (in European terms) exclusionary populist party, but this shifts demonstrably in the run-up to June 2016, with ever-increasing direction of positions towards the European issue. Moreover, this then falls away after the vote, as UKIP tried to return to its pre-May 2015 situation under new leadership. However, the period since June 2017, following the general election and the resignation of Paul Nuttall, does call into question how robust a relationship there is. On the one hand, public interest in the EU is rapidly increasing and output has become more EU-focused again, but on the other hand this has not translated back into public support, which has fallen in this period, especially post-2017, which suggests that the previous transmission belt of UKIP supply feeding into public demand no longer works as it used to, not least because of the co-option by the Conservatives of the party's key agenda points.

The failure of transmission is also seen in media coverage. While the *Express* coverage did track UKIP output through to the referendum, there is a much smaller shift back to non-EU-related coverage post-referendum, alongside a sharp fall in the volume on coverage post-2017 general election. This might be best understood when considering the continued interest by the *Express* in Nigel Farage, who remained much more present in their coverage than was the case for the party itself as much as the

party has sought to build a new image of itself away from the profile of their former leader, he still provides a highly mediatisable figure and one whose links with journalists make him a convenient pathway. This might also explain the rise of *Express* content that talks of internal UKIP disputes, which was absent during Farage's leadership, just as it explains the appearance of Farage in the sports section, attending tennis matches.

## Discussion and conclusions

It is important not to overstate the particularity of UKIP. As much as its genesis and development have followed a very particular path, it shares much in common in its more mature form with other populist parties, even as it retains an unusual preoccupation with European integration. This 'single issue populism', as it might be termed, is of wider interest, because it exposes in a more visible way how a particular policy line can impact a party's approach across the board. Moreover, it offers an insight into how much a party can uncouple itself from its past, both in its self-image and in how others portray it.

UKIP's particular situation has often worked in its favour. The narrow focus on European integration allowed it both to avoid marginalisation as 'another far-right party', while also giving a degree of policy space not available to its competitors in the party system. As UKIP developed into a more broad-based organisation in the 2000s, it was able to take that unique mix as the basis for establishing a much wider coalition, grounded in conventionally exclusionary populist rhetoric and led by a charismatic individual: the party became a berth for those who felt that the system was not working for them or their interests, tapping into the secular rise in distrust found across democracies (Ford and Goodwin 2014). That balancing act – offering very ideologically diverse policies, dressed in the language of change and 'independence' (Gardner 2006) – was facilitated by a Conservative party that simultaneously left policy space open and normalised more radical policy on European integration (Bale 2018). It brought the party to third place in the 2015 general election, with 12.6% of the vote, the best performance by a fourth party in the post-1945 period.

However, that success has been more brittle than it might have appeared in 2015. The promise – ultimately carried through – to hold a referendum on British membership of the EU has ultimately collapsed this particular constellation of success. This is due to three interlinked elements. The first has been the changing nature of UKIP itself. Having already sought pre-2015 to diversify its base, the party had tried to transcend its origins: few people felt European integration was a priority of public policy, while immigration was an area of growing concern (and

one where UKIP could offer more radical solutions than other parties). Second, the pre-eminence of Nigel Farage gave the party an internal coherence that allowed it to make this change while still presenting a united public face that could be underpinned by the third element, the likely long-term failure of the other parties to offer any credible opportunity to challenge the UK's membership of the EU: they might talk tough on Europe, but only UKIP was prepared to commit unambiguously to leaving.

David Cameron's unexpected re-election in 2015 called that bluff and exposed a strategic blind spot in UKIP's model: either it would lose a referendum, and thus take the matter out of public debate for many years, or it would win, and then have its purpose called into question. UKIP was certainly alive to this dilemma, but the opportunity to secure its core objective was impossible to ignore and it tried to rebalance itself during 2015–2016 to make the most of its particular position in the public debate to maximise the 'Leave' vote. Tellingly, that did not mean a wholesale dropping of its other policies, but rather an active involvement in the unofficial, but still very substantial 'Leave.EU' campaign group (Banks 2016; Shipman 2016): just as other parties sought to preserve some independence during the campaign by contributing to cross-party groups, so too did UKIP, while still running a portfolio of other, non-EU activities alongside.

While that work did contribute to the eventual success of 'Leave' (Farrell and Goldsmith 2017), it both robbed the party of its central policy issue and of its leader. Farage's departure was always going to be problematic for a party structure that had come to rely on him personally to such a degree, as was seen in the 2015 'un-resignation' when he was dragged back to the role of leader almost as soon as he handed in his notice. The degree of media comment – and discontent within the party – around this made it hard to repeat that process in June 2016, but it seems that Farage had, in any case, decided that then would be the best moment to leave, at the point of the vindication of his political career to date. While this might have been good for Farage, it was less obviously so for the party, which now had to navigate a very different situation with a new leader and a necessarily different policy focus.

These internal changes to the party also came at a time when the media environment was changing. As the data from the *Express* – the party's semi-official media partner – highlight, the narrative that the party wanted to communicate was not necessarily the one that the media wanted to convey. The personalisation of coverage in Farage, and the priority given to the party's anti-EU message left much less space in which to make the manoeuvre that the party was attempting. This raises a

question of the motivation for the *Express*'s support: was it driven by a general attachment to the party's policy programme, to its anti-EU stance, or to the person of Farage himself? As Startin (2015) rightly points out, the newspaper has taken a very strong line on the EU and on immigration, often having no one but UKIP to provide supportive quotes. At the very least, the *Express* and the party used each other in support of their respective agendas, but those now appear to be diverging, especially with Desmond's February 2018 decision to sell the *Express* to Trinity Mirror.

This leads to the final element of the changing constellation for UKIP. The outcome of the referendum has meant that several of the mainstays of British politics have been upended. Not only is the UK now committed to extricating itself from an organisation that has been a central vehicle for public policy for several decades (see Evans and Menon 2017), but the relationship between direct democracy and parliamentary sovereignty is also challenged (Armstrong 2017). More particularly, the referendum has forced most political parties – most notably the Conservatives (Bale 2018) – to adopt a position on EU membership that largely matches UKIP's: to be out, but with a positive and constructive – if distant – relationship or, as Farage repeatedly stressed during the referendum, 'we are leaving the EU, not Europe'. This closing down of the policy space represents a critical threat to UKIP, since it was central to its policy not only on European integration, but also on immigration. Any attempt to carve out a new, distinctive policy in either area is compromised both by the lack of obvious differentiators and by the spread of views within other parties: calls for a full and complete break with the EU are as common in the Conservative party as they are in UKIP, with the former having the additional weight of coming from the party of government.

The very strong reassertion of the two-party system in the 2017 general election might seem to go against the party de-alignment hypothesis (Heath and Goodwin 2017), but a more careful reading is required here. The profound uncertainty over the UK's future path post-EU provided a strong incentive for voters to return to the security of trusted political parties. At the same time, neither the Conservatives nor Labour articulated a clear plan of how they would pursue that future (see Evans and Menon 2017; McKibben 2017). Given that this remains the case, even as the UK has moved into the formal Article 50 negotiations, this suggests there is a space in the political system for a challenge from populists of style and of ideology. As Jennings and Stoker (2017) note, there is evidence to suggest a continuing realignment of the British polity to a cleavage around cosmopolitanism, where a case could be made to those 'left behind' about the value of a bigger populist project of nationalism and introversion. Put differently, the nearly 4 million votes secured by UKIP

in 2015 did not disappear two years later because discontents had been satisfied, but because the opportunity structure had shifted for voters: in an uncertain era, anyone might be able to deliver radical changes. For UKIP, that offers a window to rebuild their internal organisation, their media profile and their voter support. At the same time, it leaves the door open for other groups to fill that space and so is as much a threat as an opportunity: even if UKIP itself is not successful in making this transition, another populist grouping might well be.

The dynamics of the party system and the exigencies of Brexit would seem to be pushing UKIP towards an ever more conventional conceptualisation and articulation of its populism, notwithstanding the reversion in EU-centred press releases in the immediate post-2017 General Election period. Rallying support to a single-issue banner of leaving the EU is no longer a tenable position, given the political position of the UK since 23 June 2016. Moreover, that banner cannot be easily replaced by an equally broad one of building a coalition for any one model of post-membership: that implies a necessary shift from a negative to a more positive core rhetoric, which in turn points towards more language of protest, especially given the accumulated weight of other immigration and anti-establishment policies. In this, UKIP represents an important marker for other Eurosceptic parties that might find that they also will have structural consequences that flow back from their position on European integration. Indeed, the British example is instructive for illustrating how European Union-level politics can have fundamental consequences for national political activity. Even if other countries do not follow the same path of withdrawal taken by the UK, the progressive increase in the range and depth of European policy over time means that positions on European integration are likely to become ever more salient. The Long Crisis has provided fertile ground for populists to strengthen the profile of their Euroscepticism as a vehicle for their broader projects. However, as UKIP has amply demonstrated, the potential to become transformed by one's European policy is a clear possibility. Populists both shape and are shaped by their environments, potentially even more than other political parties.

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## How to stay populist? The Front National and the changing French party system

Yves Surel 

### ABSTRACT

The main aim of this contribution is to assess the relevance of the notion of 'exclusionary populism' for the characterisation of the Front National (FN) in France. Since its emergence in the 1970s, several categories or notions have been applied to this political party. Once considered as the resurgence of a traditional extreme right, it has since been classified as a case of a new European right-wing extremism, or as one of the neo-populist parties that obtained electoral successes in the 1990s. The recent evolution of the party has also been described as a sort of 'normalisation'. Is therefore 'exclusionary populism' still a category that can grasp the evolution of the party, as well as its present position in the French party system? To answer this question, this article examines political discourses and various electoral platforms of the Front National to gather some empirical evidence. The argument is twofold: The Front National, despite its '*dédiabolisation*' strategy, is still a classic populist party characterised by exclusionary populism and a sort of 'catch-all populism'; its evolution is, however, dependent on the recent evolution of the French party system.

Populism, as a phenomenon and concept, has become an almost embarrassing term, saturating political as well as academic debates. This is particularly true in the case of the French political system, which was undoubtedly one of the first to see 'populist' parties emerge (Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995; Mény and Surel 2000). Since its first electoral successes in the 1980s, the Front National<sup>1</sup> (FN – now *Rassemblement National*) has become a favoured case study and a sort of model for other leaders and political organisations in the 'populist political sphere'. Contributing to this special issue, where a new definitional approach to populism is proposed, based on different analytical variables, one of the main aims of this article is to assess to what extent the Front National fits with this

new analytical perspective. Is it always a sort of paragon of populism, a pure model of this set of ideas, leaders and organisations? Or does it rather correspond to a specific declination of populism, attached to a more specific and restricted set of issues, mobilisation instruments and repertoires of political action?

These questions are all the more legitimate since the party has changed greatly since its creation in 1972, and even more so since the takeover of the party by Marine Le Pen, the daughter of its creator Jean-Marie Le Pen. The FN has even recently become one of the most important actors in the French party system, to the point of almost winning an electoral competition. Therefore, can this party remain populist while presenting itself as a party of government? And, how can it remain populist when populism seems to constitute an increasingly shared repertoire for all political actors? Finally, how to adapt to a party system that has itself undergone profound changes, as was the case in France in 2017? The second objective of this article will therefore be to qualify these changes and to measure both the extent of the FN's transformations and its capacity to maintain a monopoly of the populist 'label'. Our main analytical purpose will be to test the hypothesis that the adaptations of the FN were guided both by a strategy of extension of its initial electoral base and by the desire to keep the movement's 'genetic imprint' by developing what I will call 'catch-all populism'.

However, before attempting to answer these two broad questions which will form the subject of the two sections of this paper, it is necessary to specify the original features of the FN, go back to the concept of populism and present the approach adopted, particularly by emphasising the idea of 'catch-all populism'.

### **A case for 'varieties of populism': from the Front National to the Rassemblement National**

The Front National remains to this day one of the most frequently studied cases of populist parties in Europe, even if this is also a party that retains some peculiarities compared to contemporary populist movements or leaders (Mudde and Katlwasser 2017). It is indeed primarily a relatively old party. Founded in 1972 by Jean-Marie Le Pen to unify dispersed and marginalised far-right movements, it gradually gained greater visibility, particularly after its first electoral successes in the early 1980s (Mayer 2002; Mayer and Perrineau 1996; Perrineau 1997). Like other parties experiencing similar developments, it became one example of this 'new radical right' which got much attention in comparative political studies in 1990s and the 2000s (Betz 1994; Kitschelt 1995; Mény and Surel 2000,

2002; Taggart 2000). In various respects, the FN was indeed quite similar to such formations as the Haider FPÖ (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs), the Vlaams Blok, or the Northern League (Lega Nord): a rejection of political elites and traditional parties; an ideological identity characterised by a new form of reactionary nationalism based on the so-called 'nativism' identified by Cas Mudde, the idea that the state and the political regime are first and foremost dedicated to a native group of inhabitants (Mudde 2007); a partisan organisation dominated by a charismatic leader using violent rhetoric and simplistic slogans. The FN was therefore, with no doubt, one of the parties best embodying this new populist wave emerging in a Europe in crisis, a wave which has now spread beyond the extreme right as Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn have recently shown (Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017).

However, and this is one of its other characteristics, unlike other parties, the FN has never managed to access positions of power despite consistent electoral success. Stabilised for a long time around 15% in various elections, the FN gradually gained an electoral base strong enough to become one of the main actors in the French party system. A first important step was attained in 2002 when Jean-Marie Le Pen reached the second round of the presidential election, eliminating the Socialist candidate and incumbent Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin (Perrineau 2003). The defeat in the second round did not prevent the FN growing gradually, except in 2007, to electoral scores around 20% of the votes. It even became the first party of France in the 2014 European Parliament elections, where it obtained 24.86% of the vote and 24 deputies. And, in 2017, Marine Le Pen, who succeeded her father in 2011, reached the second round of the presidential election with 21.3% of the votes before being beaten by Emmanuel Macron (33.9% vs. 66.1%). Yet this electoral base has never allowed the FN to exercise executive power elsewhere than in some local authorities, unlike the Northern League or the FPÖ. The main reason is obviously an electoral law based on the majoritarian two-round system, which effectively prohibits the party from being able to win a plurality or majority of seats. But this institutional factor is complemented by an ideological positioning and strategic choices that still make the FN a party only partially integrated into the dynamics of the French party system.

This apparent paradox must not hide the important developments that the party has experienced since its creation. In a party as focused on its leaders as the FN, one of the important challenges was the succession of Jean-Marie Le Pen, which started after the poor result obtained in the 2007 presidential elections against Nicolas Sarkozy (10.44%). The taking over of the party leadership by his own daughter, Marine Le Pen, did not undermine the electoral capital of the FN. It has even been accompanied,

as this article will show, by an attempt at partial ideological renewal and strategic repositioning undertaken in the form of what Marine Le Pen has herself called '*la dédédiabolisation*' (de-demonisation). For the new leader, the challenge was indeed to make the FN a party of government or, at the very least, to continue the electoral rise by broadening its political offer and its electoral base to the left (Ivaldi 2015). The first objective of this article, an empirical one, is then to assess the relative importance of this transformation and to evaluate both its extent and its potentialities.

### **From populism to 'catch-all populism'**

Populism is a term, notion or concept, which is still difficult to define, as can be seen in several recent works (Caiani and Graziano 2016, 2019; Mudde and Katlwasser 2017; Müller 2016). And the desperate words of one of the first specialists of these phenomena, Margaret Canovan, who eventually suggested abandoning this notion (Canovan 1981, 1999), still have an echo. Yet the optimistic metaphor of Isaiah Berlin remains as relevant as ever. In his view, the analysis of populism is in a way similar to a syndrome, 'the Cinderella complex':

by which I mean the following: that there exists a shoe – the word 'populism' – for which, somewhere, there exists a foot. There are all kinds of feet which it *nearly* fits, but we must not be trapped by these nearly fitting feet. The prince is always wandering about with the shoe; and somewhere, we feel sure, there awaits a limb called pure populism. This is the nucleus of populism, its essence. (Berlin quoted in Canovan 1981: 7)

The most common 'nearly fitting foot' is based on the idea that populism can be analysed, even in an attenuated and simplified form, as a political ideology. In keeping with earlier work (Mény and Surel 2000, 2002), this article still considers that populism, being also one of the normative dimensions of democracy (Leca 1996; Canovan 1999), is primarily an ideological scheme revolving around three major propositions: (1) 'the people' constitute the main reference and the exclusive mode of legitimisation of the political power; (2) elites and traditional institutions are seen as dangers, having betrayed the interests and values of the sovereign people for their own benefit; (3) it is necessary to return to a golden age, a state of society more coherent with the habits, beliefs and ideas which are authentically attached to the people.

The ambiguous link to democracy is obviously due to the first proposition that sees the people, whatever its more precise definition, as the ultimate reference of the political, economic and social order. In a general reflection on the normative foundations of democracy, Jean Leca defined populism as 'a social phenomenon linked to the access of the masses to

politics, understood as the struggle for the allocation of resources, the control of coercive power and for their legitimacy' (Leca 1994: 5; our translation).

This first general definition calls for two important specifications. The first is that democracy is obviously not based on this ideological framework alone. Leca states, like many analysts of democracy, that democracy as a political regime is also organised around a second set of principles brought together with the notion of constitutionalism. There is no 'authentic' democracy without respect for the rule of law, without procedural mechanisms, without protection of minorities – of any kind. One could even add, following the classical works of Robert Dahl, that democracy is also based on the respect of pluralism and alternation (Dahl 1956, 1971). If these 'other' political and institutional dimensions are not activated, populism would become similar to ideologies that are more directly authoritarian. As examples of populism in Latin America (Laclau 2005) show, notably Peronism, populism can indeed serve as a normative basis for regimes or political movements that are not truly democratic in this narrower meaning.

A second specification is needed because of the fundamental indeterminacy raised by the term 'people'. As many authors have shown, starting with Ionescu and Gellner (1969) or Canovan (1981), populism has various forms that are based on various meanings of 'the people'. It is thus possible to find populist phenomena where the people are defined by reference to a 'common man' (the *Uomo Qualunque* movement in 1950s Italy) and others where the people are sometimes equated with the nation, or are related to a mythological opposition between the 'little ones' and the 'big ones' (Birnbaum 2012), or defined by referring to indigenous minorities (this is the case of the *Movimiento al Socialismo*, MAS, in Bolivia for example). This profusion of definitions largely explains the failures of repeated attempts to define a synthetic typology (Canovan's work remains the most effective analysis in this perspective). One could also argue that these repeated failures are the consequence of the fact that the very notion of populism is a typical case of the conceptual dilemma highlighted by Giovanni Sartori. In an essential article, Sartori (1970) recalls that the elaboration of concepts is based on two contradictory dimensions: the explanatory intensity, or the set of properties attached to a notion, and the empirical extension, i.e. the cases covered by the term. Moreover, Sartori perfectly shows how these two dimensions are always in tension: the greater the explanatory intensity, the less the empirical extension. For example, when adding up properties in a definition of democracy, the number of potentially covered regimes decreases. This 'pathology' of conceptual elaboration ultimately nourishes what Sartori calls the 'concept-stretching' dilemma, which results in what he refers to as 'vague, amorphous generalisations' (Sartori 1970: 1034).

Research on populism is typically affected by this pathology. Taking a closer look at the different perspectives adopted by recent work to solve this dilemma, two types of solutions emerge. The first is to add a dimension to the notion, what could be called ‘populism with adjectives’. Scholars therefore speak of populism as a new radical right (Betz 1994), as a sort of national populism (Taguieff 2012), or as welfare chauvinism or welfare populism. Among these notions, one seems best suited to the analysis of the National Front: the idea of an ‘exclusionary populism’ proposed by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). Comparing contemporary populist movements in Europe and Latin America, these two authors emphasise that European populist parties and leaders are best characterised by a tendency to designate some social groups as responsible for the situation of the people. Their discourses and political manifestos call to exclude these groups from some social, economic or political benefits to reserve them to the ‘authentic’ people or to the ‘natives’, to use Mudde’s proposal (Mudde 2007).

In this study, the National Front will be analysed through the lens of this perspective. The first analytical objective of this article is therefore to assess the relevance of this notion given the party’s evolution and its relative position in a party system – the French one – profoundly modified by the most recent presidential and legislative elections in 2017.

An alternative solution for the analysis of populism consists of multiplying the variables, therefore a sort of ‘populism with (added) variables’. This idea has notably been proposed by Caiani and Graziano (2016, 2019) and consists in crossing the perspectives rather than dissociating them to identify varying degrees of populism. These ‘varieties of populism’ emerge in particular from the presence or absence and the degree of activation of four elements: this “radial” conceptualization is indeed based on the idea that populism

can have a minimal and all-encompassing definition such as: (1) an ideology which thematizes the virtues of the ‘people’ against the ‘establishment’ or the ‘ruling elite’; (2) a rhetoric which emphasizes the de-legitimation of the old political actors and their proposals, and legitimizes the new political actors; (3) a communication style which is non-institutional and informal, and offers easy solutions to complex problems; (4) an organization characterized by a concentration of party power in the hands of a leader and by a personalization of party/leader – party/members relationship. (Caiani and Graziano, 2016: 245)

The interest of this approach is thus not only to find a parade to the ‘typological illusion’, but also to make the analysis of populist movements more dynamic and to make the measurement of different degrees of populism possible (see also Ivaldi *et al.* 2015; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011).

Using a similar perspective, more precisely focused on the notion of repertoire, Rogers Brubaker writes that, with such analytical arguments, ‘populism is thus a matter of degree, not a sharply bounded phenomenon

that is either present or absent' (Brubaker 2017: 362). Concerning the National Front, this perspective more precisely allows us to see how recent developments have been able to alter (or not) the populist character of the movement and to establish which 'variety' of populism it is related to.

This argument can be supported by a further analytical proposal, the idea that the FN has adopted what I will call 'catch-all populism'. As several recent studies have shown, one additional characteristic of populism which makes it so difficult to analyse is that it largely escapes the classical structure of cleavages and the left-right dichotomy (Akkerman *et al.* 2016; Kriesi *et al.* 2012; Rooduijn 2014). The political offer is indeed often addressed to various electorates, whose main common element is to perceive themselves as victims of current socio-economic dynamics and elites having betrayed popular trust. This evolution has been observed in particular for Podemos, whose inclusive meaning of the notion of people is precisely based on a negation of the left-right axis (Ivaldi *et al.* 2015; Kioupkiolis 2016).

Our main hypothesis is therefore that the FN, like all parties anxious to win or retain the positions of power in the post-war years – the 'catch-all parties' identified by Kirchheimer (1966) – tried to develop a composite political appeal to attract diverse electorates. As Katz and Mair have pointed out, these parties are trying to capture an electorate made uncertain by the evolution of political competition, when 'voters were believed to have become free floating and uncommitted, available to, and also susceptible to, any and all of the competing parties' (Katz and Mair 1995: 8). This notion of 'catch-all populism' is thus related to the fact that, as Brubaker rightly points out, the emergence of populist leaders and parties in recent years can be seen as the product of diverse transformations in Western political systems, provoked in particular by the collapse of traditional polarisation lines, by the 'crisis' of traditional parties, and by a greater volatility of the electorate (Brubaker 2017). In this phase of uncertainties and partial realignments, parties tend to develop composite electoral offers that attract different types of voters, which may mean adopting 'catch-all populism' for the National Front.

This idea of 'catch-all populism' seems to us all the more stimulating as it allows us to establish to what extent the speeches made by populist actors can 'activate' various, usual dimensions of this political repertoire. Indeed, the 'varieties' of populism unfold in two main dimensions: the more or less coordinated mobilisation of different meanings of the people; and the highlighting of vertical and horizontal oppositions.

On the first point, Mény and Surel (2000) showed that the populist discourse and movements could refer to three main senses of the term 'people'. The first is of a political nature and aims to recall that the people

are the only legitimate sovereign in a given political regime. The second, more socio-economic, highlights the 'small' against the 'big' (Birnbaum 2012), a people of producers, whether they are peasants, workers and/or artisans. The third, finally, sees the people as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991), most often in the form of the nation-state.

As Rogers Brubaker has recently shown, these worlds of meaning form different lines of opposition that he calls 'vertical' and 'horizontal'. So,

in the vertical dimension, 'the people' are defined in opposition to economic, political, and cultural elites. 'The people' are represented as morally decent (though not necessarily pure), economically struggling, hard-working, family-oriented, plainspoken and endowed with common sense, while 'the elite' – the rich, the powerful, the well-connected, the (over-)educated, and the institutionally empowered – are seen as living in different worlds, playing by different rules, insulated from economic hardships, self-serving and often corrupt, out of touch with the concerns and problems of ordinary people, and condescending toward their values, habits, and ways of life. (Brubaker 2017: 363)

Interestingly, he points out that this dimension can also stigmatise individuals and social groups on the bottom, populations being seen as dangers and parasites for the people. To this is added a horizontal dimension, where "the people" are understood as a bounded collectivity, and the basic contrast is between inside and outside' (Brubaker 2017: 363). Workers in a country will thus be considered threatened by globalisation and competition from other economies, while the nation will be described as constrained by the European Union or international treaties. Establishing the existence of a 'catch-all populism' means then to show that populist leaders or organisations can attempt to combine the various characteristics set out here, the three meanings of the people and the horizontal and vertical dimensions, to produce a 'complete' political offer, capable of capturing previously polarised electorates.

This article then assumes that the National Front, faced with similar developments, and in a political context marked by its prevalence in polls and increased competition over the control of the populist repertoire, has thus attempted to develop an ideological and strategic positioning less uniformly oriented towards the radical right. This form of 'catch-all populism' would therefore announce an important transformation of this party.

## **Data and method**

The paper pursues two related objectives: to assess the ideological evolution of the FN since its original identity as an example of 'exclusionary populism' and the evolution of its degree of inclusion in the French party

system towards a 'catch-all populism'; to use the typological tools proposed by Caiani and Graziano (2016, 2019) to characterise its particular form in the varieties of populism, comparing it to other political formations that may compete with it. To advance on these two points, the paper is based on a qualitative case study of the FN's speeches and proposals over the last few years and on a main analytical proposal: the idea that the FN has adopted a form of 'catch-all populism'.

This study is resolutely a qualitative case study on the ideological and organisational evolution of the FN since 2011 and the takeover of Marine Le Pen – linked to some notions and concepts proposed by the recent comparative literature on populist movements. To quote John Gerring, it might thus be described as 'an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar's aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena' (Gerring 2004: 341). The empirics of the paper are therefore based on a qualitative examination of the speeches of the main leaders of the FN, the manifestos elaborated during the presidential elections of 2012 and 2017, as well as the main positions identified in the press. The contribution thus highlights the observation of a political context marked by two main features: the position of 'favourite' gained by Marine Le Pen in the polls several months before the 2017 presidential elections, which requires a new positioning likely to lead to power; increased competition from other parties and political leaders for the occupation of a populist niche.

To test these arguments, the article is structured in two further parts. The first discusses critically the internal evolution of a political organisation long characterised by its 'exclusionary populism', by applying the notion of 'catch-all populism' detailed in the previous section. The second part is more directly related to the effects of the recent transformations of the French party system in the context of the last presidential election (Evans and Ivaldi 2018; Perrineau 2017a), to better measure the evolution of the FN's position in the electoral competition.

### **The evolution of 'exclusionary populism': towards 'catch-all populism'?**

The first objective of this paper is to assess the relevance of the notion of 'exclusionary populism' when it comes to the characterisation of the National Front and to test the 'catch-all populism' hypothesis. Its original political orientation, 'exclusionary populism', identifiable in the party's discourses, manifesto and documents, undoubtedly allowed the movement to emerge as a powerful political alternative, but also kept it in a peripheral position within the party system. How therefore to be included in a

system that one is denouncing? This question, which is so typical of populist movements (Akkerman and Rooduijn 2015), is all the more essential since there have been many changes in the movement in recent years: a change of leader with the arrival of Marine Le Pen at the head of the party in January 2011 and an evolution of the party's positioning around a 'normalisation' or a '*dédiabolisation*' strategy likely to make it a true governmental party. This section will be divided in two main arguments: is the National Front still a 'pure' case of 'exclusionary populism'? Or has the '*dédiabolisation*' strategy adopted by Marine Le Pen been successful and changed the 'variety of populism' that might characterise the FN as an example of 'catch-all populism'?

### ***(Still) a pure case of 'exclusionary populism'?***

One of the definitions of populism most spontaneously applied to the National Front is probably that of 'exclusionary populism' proposed by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). Based on previous work by Mudde (2007) on the social groups most often targeted by populist movements, these authors argue that one of the singularities of populist parties in contemporary Europe could rest on this common and constant tendency to stigmatise certain social groups or individuals considered as dangers or threats to the people. Listing the 'usual suspects', they point in particular to the fact that 'the groups that are to be excluded range from criminal illegal aliens (opposed by all parties) to legal non-citizens (such as guest workers and refugees) to citizens of foreign descent (for example, Muslims) to ethnic minorities (such as Slovene speakers in Austria)' (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013: 166).

In this perspective, the National Front, being probably one of the first parties to highlight the issue of immigration, is logically seen as one of the best examples of this particular form of populism. Thus, Jean-Marie Le Pen, the party's founder, made this issue of immigrants one of the axes of his speeches and his electoral rise. An analysis of the speeches of the leader of the National Front showed that the word 'immigration' was one of the most used with 118 occurrences, more than unemployment (80) or insecurity (35) (Souhard *et al.* 1997). One of the leaders and ideologues of the party also argued in the 1990s that

the tide of immigration directly [...] undermines the great balances of our nation. Civil peace is threatened, full employment is compromised, the school system is disrupted, public and social expenditures are unbalanced and, worse than all, the very identity of our nation is jeopardised. Already, the 'black-blancbeur' fashion contaminates our youth and Islam spreads throughout the territory. (Mégret 1997)

As noted by Mudde and Kaltwasser,

these parties have proposed a broad variety of policies that would more or less introduce a different legal system for ‘aliens’ with regard to general social services, jobs and social housing. The most infamous example of these proposals is the 50-point programme of the FN (Front National 1991), which was copied and elaborated into a 70-point programme by the Belgian populist radical right party Flemish Bloc (now Flemish Interest, VB) a year later. (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013: 160)

Is this tendency to adopt ‘exclusionary populism’ still a constant in the discourse and programmes of the National Front? This is all the more crucial since the evolution of the party, during the leadership of the founder’s daughter (Marine Le Pen), has sometimes been seen as a ‘normalisation’ which might facilitate a greater ‘inclusion’ in the French party system.

In a recent study by Alduy and Wahnich (2015) based on an analysis of Marine Le Pen speeches, it is quite clear that the changes are minimal. Thus, with reference to the question of immigration, small adjustments do not prevent a great continuity. If immigration is a term a little less used (17th place instead of the 13th in the corpus of speeches analysed for the father), the two authors emphasise that ‘Marine Le Pen shows a remarkable fidelity to the paternal corpus, quantitatively and qualitatively’ (Alduy and Wahnich 2015: 74; our translation). Significantly, some sentences are reused in an identical way a few years apart. For example, when Jean-Marie Le Pen, speaking on the Europe 1 Radio Channel in July 2010, estimated that ‘massive immigration [...] has brought in our country more than 10 million foreigners in 30 years’, Marine Le Pen, in a speech given in Marseille in 2012 during the presidential campaign, considered in turn that ‘it is impossible to assimilate a massive immigration of 10 million in 30 years’ (quoted in Alduy and Wahnich 2015: 80; our translation). Same expression, same number, same deliberate simplification.

During the last 2017 presidential campaign, this specificity of the discourse carried by the leaders of the National Front was still prevalent. In a study conducted by the Elabe polling institute, the comparative analysis of the terms most used by the four main presidential candidates is for example quite characteristic (see Table 1).

What is striking in Marine Le Pen’s discourse is the set of terms that recalls her unitary and nationalist conception of the polity. The words ‘France’, ‘French’ and ‘People’ dominate this ranking, while ‘immigration’ appears in 8th position (just before ‘Islamism’). In a speech given in Paris on 17 April 2017, just before the first round of the presidential election, she advanced the idea of stopping immigration by an ‘immediate moratorium on all legal immigration to stop this delirium, this uncontrolled

**Table 1.** Main terms used by the four main candidates in 2017 presidential elections.

François Fillon	Marine Le Pen	Emmanuel Macron	Jean-Luc Mélenchon
France	France	Responsabilité	Savoir
Dette	Français	Terrain	Si
Atout	Peuple	Renouvellement	Bien
Totalitarisme	Etat	Chacune	Faire
Autorité	National	Justice	Ils
Musulman	Union	Nous	Humain
Devoir	Fillon	Justement	Chose
Nation	Immigration	Engagement	Falloir

Source: Elabe, 'Ce que les candidats nous disent', [https://elabe.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/elabe\\_ce-que-les-candidats-nous-disent.pdf](https://elabe.fr/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/elabe_ce-que-les-candidats-nous-disent.pdf).

situation, which leads us to the bottom'. And, in her presidential manifesto, this stigmatisation of immigration led to some quite 'conventional' proposals according to the history of the National Front. Amongst her *144 engagements* (Le Pen 2017), conceived as a real platform of government, there are indeed several expected axes. Proposal 21: 'To restore the automatic expulsion of criminals and foreign offenders'; proposal 71: 'Make savings by eliminating state medical aid reserved for illegal immigrants, by fighting against fraud (creation of a biometric Vitale card – a social security document – merged with the identity document)'; proposal 142: 'Firstly, to reserve the allocation of social housing to the French'. Even if the expression '*préférence nationale*' (national preference), which was part of the classic rhetorical repertoire of Jean-Marie Le Pen, is not so explicitly put forward, it does not prevent the inclusion in the presidential programme of proposals with identical implications and with similar consequences.

It is true that immigration has often constituted the political 'marker' of representatives of the new radical right in contemporary Europe, to the point that Cas Mudde put forward the hypothesis that these movements were almost 'single-issue parties' (Mudde 1999). In the case of the National Front, the interest in keeping this exclusionary discourse on immigration is all the greater as the party seems to have monopolised this topic while convincing the French of it. A recent comparative survey conducted on the perception of Muslim populations in several countries has shown, for example, that France is the country where the differential is the highest between the actual number of Muslims in the population and the number spontaneously given by the interviewees. According to this study,<sup>2</sup> the French consider that Muslims represent 31% of the population, whereas they are actually only 7.5%. The leaders of the FN are very aware of this favourable context. For example, Louis Aliot, one of the closest collaborators of Marine Le Pen, said during the campaign that 'Marine's words on immigration, on Islam, [...] is not demonisation. The majority of French people agree with us' (quoted in Alduy and Wahnich 2015: 74).

Changes are not that important in this respect. The National Front has largely remained, with Marine Le Pen, the radical right party representative of the 'exclusionary populism' identified in the European party systems by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser. Indeed, the evolutions remain cosmetic and sometimes vary in importance depending on the public and the contexts. Thus, in the specific context of the presidential campaign, Marine Le Pen has refocused on a 'classic' populist discourse by highlighting the usual targets of the movement. On 30 April 2017, between the two rounds, Marine Le Pen commented in a television interview on France 2 that

people are always right. No one is right against the people, neither Mr Juncker, nor Mrs Merkel, nor the artists, nor the MEDEF (the French federation of employers), nor the unions, nor the UOIF (Union of the Islamic Organisations of France, the principal organisation of representations of the Muslims in France), nor the churches.

And she insisted, putting forward a conception of power which might be viewed as resolutely 'populist': 'I will be in a permanent relationship with [the people]. If [the people] decide to give me power, the power will not be mine; it will stay with [the people].'

These positions are in fact quite consistent with the dimensions isolated by Caiani and Graziano (2016) in the factors which determine various degrees of populism. More precisely, they correspond perfectly to certain rhetorical axes, in particular the fact that populist leaders support 'the power of common people vs. legitimacy of the current political establishment', or the idea that 'the primary goal of these statements is to "delegitimise established structures of interest articulation and aggregation"' (Caiani and Graziano 2016: 266; in the online appendix). The conclusion of Marine Le Pen's 2017 presidential manifesto was quite typical in this perspective: 'This project, I will implement it in your name, in the name of the people, so that France lives.'

### **The '*dédiabolisation*' strategy and its limits**

Again, the classification of the FN as an example of 'exclusionary populism' does not seem to be really affected by the strategy of '*dédiabolisation*' claimed by Marine Le Pen over the past few years (Dézé 2015). However, it does not mean that this strategic shift has been without consequences (Kitschelt 1995, 2004; McGann and Kitschelt 2005). The recent evolution of the National Front has indeed been dominated by a partial reorientation of the discourse and programme aimed at capturing new electoral support, in order to be in a position to finally access power. It began with a disappearance of the anti-Semitic vocabulary commonly used by Jean-Marie

Le Pen, which seemed to be a much more negative 'marker' than the discourse on immigration. It also involved a gradual giving up of the neo-liberal programme that was part of the 'winning formula' of the 1980s (Kitschelt 1995; McGann and Kitschelt 2005) in favour of the return to a more statist orientation, which was much more in line with the French tradition of a strong state (Ivaldi 2015).

One of the initiators of this movement was Florian Philippot. Coming from a sort of left-wing *sovereignism*, Philippot is above all a high civil servant who brought a new legitimacy to the Front National. Sometimes described as the 'énarque'<sup>3</sup> of the FN, he redefined, as director of the strategy of the party, its positioning towards more statist orientations. He also described his own political career as determined by a sort of affiliation with Charles de Gaulle, founder of the Fifth Republic, evoking the fact that the general was an example for him. These positions then determined a shift in the ideological line of the party with a decrease of a neo-liberal axis in favour of a recurrent appeal to the state as the protector of the people. In the introduction to her *144 engagements* (Le Pen 2017) as a presidential candidate, Marine Le Pen wrote, for example: 'I also want to return their money to the French, because for too many years, our social and fiscal policy impoverished the middle and popular classes, it enriched the multinationals and squandered the public money via totally uncontrolled immigration.' And the programme effectively included measures centred on a strong state. Proposal 34, for example, reactivated the idea of the state as a leading actor in the economy: 'To put in place a plan for re-industrialisation in the framework of a cooperation involving industry and the strategic state to favour the real economy in the face of speculative finance.' Her 2017 manifesto also included proposals close to a renewed form of planning. Thus, proposal 40: 'To create a State Secretariat dedicated to economic changes attached to the Ministry of Finance in order to anticipate changes in forms of work related to new technologies.'

This ideological shift was intended to broaden the electoral base. The main objective was to capture a popular electorate which was considered as having been abandoned by the left, while convincing farmers and a 'peripheral' France, such as that sometimes identified in the recent work of some geographers (Guilluy 2014). Thus, during the presidential campaign, Marine Le Pen stated that '[the policies she would adopt] will recreate public service and jobs in numbers, by revitalising these forgotten territories' (L'Obs 2017). And she evoked more widely this 'forgotten' population by saying: 'You are the silent France, well I will make your voice heard! You are the France of the forgotten, I will put you in full light! France who gets up early, who does not burn a car, who pays his fines, this France cannot stand in the shadow anymore!' As a result, a

survey conducted by Institut Français d'Opinion Publique (IFOP) after the first round of the presidential election showed that Marine Le Pen came first in the rural communes (26% vs. 21.4% overall score) ahead Emmanuel Macron (22% vs 24%), while collecting 39% of the workers' vote against 25% to Jean-Luc Mélenchon.

This evolution is not specific to the National Front. Several recent studies have shown in particular that this reorientation is a broader characteristic of many parties of the radical right, which simultaneously decided to change the 'winning formula' identified by Kitschelt in the 1980s. Sarah de Lange, in a comparative study on France, Flanders and the Netherlands, shows precisely that 'in the course of the 1990s, established NRR parties modified their ideological appeal and moved to a more centrist (albeit still right-wing) economic position. This change was inspired by the simultaneous decline in voters with capitalist-authoritarian preferences and increase in working class voters with socialist-authoritarian attitudes. To expand its vote share, the NRR had to meet the preferences of the latter group without neglecting those of the first group. Hence, it gradually moved to a more centrist position on the socialist-capitalist dimension, while maintaining its fierce authoritarianism' (de Lange 2007: 416). And the strategy of '*dédiabolisation*' for the FN fits quite nicely with this desire for a partial 'normalisation'.

These adaptations might also sometimes explain some variations in Marine Le Pen discourses. Returning to the use of the immigration issue, Alduy and Wahnich advance for example the argument that:

she [Le Pen] does not use the same discourse for the militants ... and for the mainstream media. It is indeed important to emphasise a dual or duplicated discourse: while the speeches intended for 'the base' reproduce the polemic common places of the father, Marine Le Pen strives to move the discussion to a strictly economic field during interviews in the national media. (Alduy and Wahnich 2015: 83; our translation)

Compared to the analytical framework proposed by Caiani and Graziano (2016 and 2019), this evolution might also be viewed, at least marginally, as characterising a diminishing degree of populism. Unlike her father, Marine Le Pen does not so much play on this idea of a 'taboo breaker and fighter against political correctness' attached to the organisational dimension. This is even quite the contrary, since such an attitude might endanger the desired 'normalisation' of the party.

Nevertheless, as stated previously, I hypothesise that these evolutions ultimately have the effect of developing a form of 'catch-all populism' similar to the process which generated the 'catch-all parties' identified by Otto Kirchheimer (1966). As in the initial schema, as Krouwel (2003) recalled, the evolution of the FN reflects a more global adjustment of the party

system. In the 1990s and 2000s, this evolution was marked by a crisis of the radical left and by a succession of electoral shifts between the Socialist Party and its allies on the one hand, and the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP, a classic right-wing party that has changed names several times) on the other hand. In accordance with Kitschelt's analyses of the evolution of the structure of cleavages (Kitschelt 1995), these realignments opened up a space for a radical right-wing force such as the FN, which then occupied the political 'niche' thus created. And these same realignments determined party transformations that recall the changes listed by Kirchheimer. Indeed, according to Kirchheimer, to become 'catch-all' requires:

- a) drastic reduction of the party's ideological baggage ...
- b) Further strengthening of top leadership groups ...
- c) Downgrading of the role of the individual party member, a role considered a historical relic which may obscure the newly built-up catch-all party image.
- d) De-emphasis of the *classe-gardée*, specific social-class or denominational clientele, in favour of recruiting voters among the population at large.
- e) Securing access to a variety of interest groups for financial and electoral reasons. (Kirchheimer 1966: 190)

The adaptations initiated by Marine Le Pen correspond quite precisely to these dynamics: partial modification of the ideological axis of the party; strengthening of the governing bodies to the detriment of party members often too attached to the previous image of the party; willingness to broaden the social base of the electorate by turning to the workers and farmers; maximising the support of organisations and institutions that ensure the sustainability of the party (Crépon *et al.* 2015). It also means that broadening the electoral base requires a broadening of the doctrinal core; for example, calling for a renewal of the state is to add to the issue of migrants the protection of the 'small' against the 'big'. It also shows that globalisation endangers traditional jobs by the 'top', the globalised finance system escaping all control, and by the 'bottom', the immigrant workforce or the 'posted workers' made possible by the principle of people's mobility within the European Union. It is thus less a question of 'normalising' the party than allowing it to cover the entire populist spectrum with this 'catch-all strategy'.

Two additional arguments support this analysis of the FN: firstly, a critique of the '*dédiabolisation*' thesis; secondly, the identification of internal tensions which originated with this doctrinal evolution. On the first point, several recent works have highlighted the fact that the so-called '*dédiabolisation*' has not fundamentally changed the ideological characteristics and normative preferences of FN adherents. Mayer (2015) shows for example that supporters of the FN have indices of ethnocentrism (an index calculated from polls measuring intolerance or racism) much higher than members of other parties: 87% in the FN have a strong index of ethnocentrism, against 48% among right-wing supporters, 33% for

supporters of centre political parties and 18% for left-wing supporters. She concludes that the declared supporters of Marine Le Pen's party are distinguished by a record level of rejection of the 'Other', a rejection linked to the fact that four out of five defined themselves as 'racist'. While Marine Le Pen has made anti-Semitism a taboo, more than one in two sympathisers have high marks on a scale of anti-Jewish prejudice. While she is careful to target 'Islamic fundamentalism' and not Islam, her supporters do not make any differentiation (Mayer 2015).

This permanence of ethnocentric attitudes, typical of the more radical period of the party, also explains why the '*dédiabolisation*' desired by Marine Le Pen has originated internal tensions in the FN. The sometimes more nuanced proposals, notably associated with the arrival of Florian Philippot, have provoked tensions among former collaborators of Jean-Marie Le Pen and new party leaders embodying a more traditional line, like Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, the grand-daughter of the party's founder. In an article published by *Libération* during the presidential campaign, the analysis made by a party leader was characteristic of the tensions created by these transformations: '[Philippot and his close friends] do not even know how much they are hated by the base ... Philippot seems to want to expurgate everything reminiscent of the old FN.'<sup>4</sup>

Embodying a more radical and traditionalist segment of the party, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen also reacted several times to Philippot's positions, claiming for example in December 2016:

When we define the position of the FN or we decide to a strategic change, we do it in the instances of the party, we do not do it alone [...] I recall that Florian [Philippot] took positions over which he was with a minority within the Front, including the government campaign to fight against AIDS that seemed to me very embarrassing, for children but also for homosexuals. The majority, the FN, does not share this choice at all (Le Journal du Dimanche 2016).

The choice for 'catch-all populism' was thus at the same time a source of new potentialities, particularly from the electoral point of view, but also a source of conflicts, which have been further sharpened by more general developments of the French party system.

### **'You'll never walk alone': the National Front and the evolution of the French party system**

The above-mentioned evolution of the National Front seems to have been successful with the 2014 European elections (with nearly 25% of the vote, the FN was the strongest party before the UMP, 20%, and the PS, 14%) and the presidential elections in 2017, where Marine Le Pen acceded to the second round. Nevertheless, the evolution cannot be analysed without

situating it in the context of the recent transformations of the French party system. The presidential and legislative elections of 2017 have indeed determined very important changes in French political life, to the point that a recently published book evokes a ‘disruptive vote’ (Perrineau 2017a; see also Evans and Ivaldi 2018). The election of Emmanuel Macron to the presidency of the Republic, a candidate without a real political past, was followed by legislative elections which saw a new political party, *La République en marche*, created to support Emmanuel Macron, captured the majority of seats (314 MPs out of 577 in the National Assembly), while the party in power from 2012 to 2017, the Socialist Party, declined from 280 to 31 MPs.

For the National Front, these elections and the new political context had contrasting consequences. At first, the presidential election seemed to be a success. Pascal Perrineau recalls for example that ‘Marine Le Pen received 7,678,491 votes (21.3% of the votes, 16.14% of registered voters). Never has a candidate of the National Front in the presidential election reached such a result’ (Perrineau 2017b: 251; our translation). However, the second round was disappointing since Marine Le Pen was largely defeated (33.9% of votes against 66.1% to Emmanuel Macron) and presented a disastrous image during the debate with the future president between the two rounds.

How can this contrasting finding be explained? In relation to the analytical dimensions attached to ‘varieties of populism’, this situation can be observed from two related perspectives: first by formulating the assumption that one of the main consequences of the current political context is to have put into question the FN’s kind of a monopoly on populism or, more precisely, of a ‘tribunitian function’ from which the FN had previously benefited; secondly, by showing that the party’s internal tensions, which result from its recent trajectory, constitute a threat to the possible further evolution of its strategy and positioning.

### ***The end of a monopoly on a ‘tribunitian function’?***

Previous work with Yves Mény (Mény and Surel 2000, 2002), advanced the idea that one of the functional characteristics of populism in party systems was attached to what Georges Lavau had called a ‘tribunitian function’. Studying the place of the Communist Party within the French party system, Lavau remarked that this party played a role consistent with certain latent functions identified by the functionalist analysis which consisted in

organising and defending plebeian social categories (i.e. people excluded or feeling excluded from the processes of participation in the political system, as well as from the benefit of the economic system and the cultural system) and give them a sense of strength and confidence. ... The proposed

political programme and the political action carried out mean for these plebeians that their anger is officially represented by proxies who resemble them and speak their language, but do it in an articulated political form. (Lavau 1969: 18; our translation. See also Lavau 1981)

The hypothesis then formulated was to see the FN, within the French party system, as the organisation that succeeded in pre-empting this function after the decline of the Communist Party. This also might explain why most of the attributes identified by Caiani and Graziano (2019) on varieties of populism are found in the FN characterisation.

However, the current period, a consequence of the restructuring initiated with the last elections suggests a de-monopolisation of this tribunitian function. A significant number of dimensions, which characterised so neatly the FN, indeed apply today quite well to some leaders or some political movements. This is undoubtedly the case of Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his movement, *France Insoumise*, which displays a large number of populist features.

Take for example the ‘ideology’ category. Caiani and Graziano identify some typical elements: the idea that society is organised around ‘two homogeneous and antagonistic groups/bodies (“the pure people” vs. “the corrupt elite”)', or some arguments based on ‘restoring popular sovereignty’, or ‘economic protectionism’. Mélenchon’s discourses indeed contain a recurrent use of such ideological appeals. For example, during the 2012 presidential campaign, Mélenchon said that

the people who had dissolved in abstention, in the refusal to obey the injunctions of ‘I-know-all’ small men, the bad ones who give them advice and who, when it is their honour and their duty to take their word, when the French say no, then go and say that we would have said yes. Those who betrayed us, our first duty to begin our journey is to get rid of them!<sup>5</sup>

These arguments were shaped and systematised in 2017 with the idea of ‘*dégagisme*’, the call to ‘delete’ the elites in place. Thus, even accepting the label of populist, Mélenchon stated in 2010:

I do not want to defend myself from the accusation of populism. This is the disgust of the elites – do they deserve better? Let them all go! I appeal to the energy of the majority against the [...] privileged. Populist, me? I accept it!<sup>6</sup>

And, in 2017, on his blog, Mélenchon analysed the evolutions of the French party system by the prism of this ‘*dégagisme*’:

Considered from above, the situation sees a particularly strong moment in the maturation of the phenomenon ‘let them all go away’ ... We must therefore deduce that this constitutes a heavy trend of the political moment. It is this ‘*dégagiste*’ impulse that opens the seasons of great upheaval in societies.<sup>7</sup>

But this populist ideological identity, explicitly assumed, is complemented by other aspects also noted by Caiani and Graziano. Consider, for

example, isolated rhetorical elements, namely the ‘instrumentalisation of diffuse public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment’, ‘the sublimation of the “redemptive” side of politics (opposed to the “pragmatic” side)’, or ‘the power of common people vs. legitimacy of the current political establishment’, which also figure in Mélenchon’s discourses. Thus, during the 2017 presidential campaign, Mélenchon stated in Marseille on 9 April: ‘Here you are, the [...] people, the one who aspire to live by his work, his inventions, his poems, his love for the others’ (Le Parisien 2017). And this emphatic speech is also based on a transformation of the political organisation that values the charismatic leadership of Jean-Luc Mélenchon who, again, fully plays the role identified by Caiani and Graziano: the ‘taboo breaker and fighter against political correctness’.

All these elements explain why the competition between Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen has often been hypothesised in recent scholarly work. Analysing the features of their respective electorates, Bruno Cautrès observes in particular that

in many segments of social groups who live or feel themselves living in a situation of precariousness or in the lower social positions (people without a diploma, with low salary levels, with subjective feelings of not getting by with the income of the household, people who practise a profession in decline or who fear that someone from their household might be unemployed), the Mélenchon and Le Pen votes are at a close range and at a high level (above their national average scores). (Cautrès 2017: 188; our translation)

More precisely, this competition is clearly seen in two segments of the electorate that are sometimes overrepresented in the vote for populist parties, namely young people and workers.<sup>8</sup> Considering 18–24-year-olds, Jean-Luc Mélenchon and Marine Le Pen were at similar levels in 2012, the first gaining 16% in this group vs. 15% for the second. In 2017, Mélenchon obtained 29% against 21% for Le Pen among 18–24-year-olds. As far as the workers are concerned, the balance of support has not changed much, but the competition is even fiercer: while he won 18% of the workers against 33% to Marine Le Pen in 2012, Mélenchon captured 25% of the workers against 39% in 2017, the two populist candidates thus winning about two-thirds of this social group. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, however, obtained 32% among the unemployed against 20% for Marine Le Pen.

This conflict is now also a strategy mobilised by the actors themselves. Jean-Luc Mélenchon had already appeared in the legislative elections in 2012 against Marine Le Pen, who had won over Mélenchon in the first round. This competition has been revived by recent polls more favourable to the *France Insoumise* (which now has 17 MPs in the National Assembly against 8 for the FN), to the point that the president of the FN recently evoked his opponent by saying: ‘Mélenchon here, Mélenchon

there, I cannot bear it anymore! It seems like he is the one who reached the second round!”<sup>9</sup> The evolution of the party system thus highlights the emergence of an ‘inclusionary’ form of populism which endangers the FN’s position in this political niche, especially since the party has undertaken a partial normalisation. In this regard, the recent evolution of the French party system is quite typical of more general trends observed throughout Europe (Akkerman *et al.* 2016).

### **An ‘old’ populist in the land of ‘modern’ politics?**

The emergence of a competitor, weakening the capacity of the FN to occupy this functional ‘tribunitian niche’, is not the only changing feature of the French party system that has affected the position of the FN and determined attempts to change its variety of populism. One of the National Front’s objectives was precisely to anticipate a breakdown of the party system and to benefit from this general realignment and, thus, get access to power. As argued above, the 2017 presidential campaign undoubtedly constituted from this point of view a result and a limit. Leading the polls for several months, Marine Le Pen finally obtained 21.4%, second after Macron in the first round before being largely defeated in the second round.

It is indeed quite clear that the FN has not been the main beneficiary of these changes and the further adjustments since the last election also seem to endanger its electoral capital. The actor who appears today at the heart of this general realignment remains Emmanuel Macron, the new president, to whom the idea of another variety of populism has sometimes been attached. Macron’s entry into politics was effectively based on a critique of global ‘corporatism’ and traditional parties. In his programmatic book, *Revolution*, Macron cumulates the negative diagnoses about the political system in France, as Sylvie Strudel recalls:

the denunciation of a Republic taken ‘in the traps of the political game’ and ‘in past cleavages’, the diagnosis of the exhaustion of the partisan system and a necessary overcoming of the parties, the judgment on the sinking of the left–right divide, the call for unity and the gathering of all the ‘progressives’. (Strudel 2017: 208; our translation)

Macron himself did not hesitate, on various occasions, to play with this ‘populist’ label. For example, before the first round of the 2017 presidential election he said:

If being populist is to speak to the people in an understandable way without going through partisan apparatus, I might accept to be seen as a populist. From this point of view, even General de Gaulle was a populist. But it must not be confused with demagoguery, which consists in flattering the people in its lowest aspects. So, call me populist if you want. But don’t call me a demagogue because I don’t flatter the people.<sup>10</sup>

The type of populism that can be attributed to Macron, however, is quite different from the ones that can be applied to the FN or to *France Insoumise*. Indeed, considering the four main dimensions isolated by Caiani and Graziano (2016), only the last two can be applied to the case of Macron. The new president clearly embodies ‘a charismatic (new kind of) leadership’ and, throughout the campaign, he successfully played the role of a ‘taboo breaker’ who fought the traditional political elites and their discourses. It is also quite clear that his political strategy was sustained by an unconventional style of campaigning. His movement has been conceived from the very beginning as a political ‘start-up’ and his campaign benefited from a large number of actors and techniques attached to the digital economy. Sylvie Strudel described his campaign as a ‘2.0 campaign’ characterised by

the services of start-ups such as LMP (which optimises election campaigning thanks to big data) and PROXEM (specialised in the semantic analysis of textual data) are mobilised from the ‘la Grande Marche’ to meet the French, a participatory co-construction operation of the manifesto launched from May to July 2016 by *En marche!* In terms of cyber-activism, Emmanuel Macron uses an almost systematic coverage of his travels and his main meetings on Facebook, without neglecting other social networks like Twitter or Snapchat. (Strudel 2017: 209–10; our translation)

However, all other dimensions of the ‘varieties of populism’ approach, especially the ideological and rhetorical aspects, do not apply to Emmanuel Macron. For example, his denunciation of the classical parties does not lead to a particular glorification of the people or of some of its components, but rather insists on a polarity between the ‘ancients’ and the ‘moderns’, of which he would be the perfect incarnation.

In a recent paper, based on an analysis of the terms used by presidential candidates and the correspondence between these words, Damon Mayaffre highlights interesting semantic similarities. More precisely, he observes that Macron is distinctly characterised by a discourse that emphasises words attached to the idea of renewal such as ‘*refonder*’ (to refound), ‘*transformation*’ or ‘*renouvellement*’ (renewal). Jean-Luc Mélenchon, for his part, uses a discursive repertoire dominated by terms such as ‘*humain*’, ‘*les gens*’ (people) or words related to environmental issues. Finally, Marine Le Pen uses terms that bring her much closer to the classic right-wing candidate, François Fillon, such as ‘*France*’, ‘*déclin*’ or ‘*étranger*’ (foreigner) (Mayaffre 2017: 151).

Even if this first specific research question requires further work and more distance from the recent elections, it still reinforces the already expressed idea that the evolution of the FN, with this partial dynamic of ‘re-centring’ and ‘catch-all populism’, exacerbated internal tensions and partisan competition. On the first point, the recent evolution of the FN

shows significant breaks. After being dismissed from various responsibilities, Florian Philippot resigned on 21 September 2017, explicitly highlighting the conflicts fuelled by the strategy of ‘*dédiabolisation*’ and denouncing ‘a terrible step backwards’: ‘I, I especially came for the *dédiabolisation*, I came because the excesses of the past, it was finished.’<sup>11</sup> The creation of an alternative political party, *Les Patriotes*, has not had a massive effect for the time being on the FN, but this conflict, characteristic of the party’s trajectory, reflects its current strategic and ideological dilemmas.

In parallel, the victory of Laurent Wauquiez in the recent election for the presidency of the party of the classic right, *Les Républicains*, attests to a possible radicalisation of classical conservatism. Analysing one of his campaign speeches, *Le Monde* notes, for example, a call to ‘the central values of France’, ‘this so moving old country’ that he prefers ‘to the sad global village’ which is just the dehumanised showcase of ‘a world without roots’. Against the ‘betrayal of the elite’, Laurent Wauquiez intends to defend the ‘identity’ of France, threatened by immigration, multiculturalism, communitarianism, Salafism ... and “*assistanat*” (state handouts).<sup>12</sup> By taking up elements of the populist lexicon, Wauquiez thus tries to compete with the more classical radical right on the political segment that was its previous niche and seems to confirm the proximity, at least semantically, identified by Damon Mayaffre during the presidential campaign between Marine Le Pen and François Fillon.

## Conclusion

With the help of the analytical tools attached to the populist phenomenon, this article has proposed two complementary perspectives. The first was based on the idea of testing the relevance of one of the most commonly applied notions to the FN and similar parties of the radical right that appeared in Europe in the 1990s, namely the concept of ‘exclusionary populism’. The ideological and strategic evolutions initiated by the FN over the last years have not altered this central feature. As Marine Le Pen’s speeches, the party manifesto and the ideological preferences of the FN supporters still show, the FN remains characterised by a rather classic articulation of the valorisation of the people and the rejection of the elites, political institutions and certain social groups. The analytical dimensions and variables proposed by Caiani and Graziano (2016) also show that the party has lost nothing of its populist ‘density’. All the main elements that have been identified in this framework still apply perfectly to the FN, even if we can consider that the strategic evolution has tried to move towards a form of ‘catch-all populism’. In recent years, Marine Le Pen’s discourse has thus agglomerated the different meanings of the ‘people’

and the vertical and horizontal dimensions attached to the populist repertoire. Even though ‘exclusionary populism’, the movement’s identity marker since its inception, remains essential, the discourse and strategy of the *Rassemblement National* is now much more open to social issues and, therefore, to a younger and more feminine electorate, which is also nowadays more often coming from the working class. This is even truer since the political life has dramatically changed in France over the last years.

The second analytical perspective was thus based on the idea that these recent evolutions should be linked to the big changes that the French party system witnessed in 2017. The election of Emmanuel Macron, the sudden emergence of the movement that accompanied his accession to power, and the growing success on the left of the *France Insoumise* vis-à-vis the Socialist Party have had important consequences for what today is called *Rassemblement National*. The first and main consequence is a form of demopolitisation of its populist discourse and the tribunitian function that characterised the party in the past. The second consequence is related to the ambiguous ‘normalisation’ of the party, as its accession to the second round of the presidential election was accompanied by an increase in internal tensions and a rapprochement with the traditional right. Although it is still probably too early to truly isolate and qualify these changes, a preliminary assessment suggests that the FN/*Rassemblement National* has not yet finished its trip through the ‘scales of populism’.

## Notes

1. I will mainly refer to this party as the Front National in the paper, even if it has recently changed its name, becoming the *Rassemblement National* since 1 June 2018.
2. ‘The Perils of Perception’, recurrent survey published by Ipsos: <http://perils.ipsos.com/>. These data are often contrasted with the actual composition of religious beliefs in the world analysed by the Pew Research Center (<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/2010/percent/all/>).
3. The word ‘énarque’ is used to designate the former students of the Ecole nationale d’administration, where the higher civil servants are selected and trained.
4. Dominique Albertini, ‘Florian Philippot, l’apparatchik détesté du “Front profound”’, *Libération*, 26 May 2017.
5. J.-L. Mélenchon, ‘Discours de la Bastille’, 18 March 2012.
6. Interview with *L’Express*: ‘Mélenchon: “Populiste, moi? J’assume!”’, 16 September 2010.
7. <https://melenchon.fr/2017/01/30/valls-valse-encore-une-victoire-du-degagisme/>
8. I refer here to surveys conducted by the same institute, IFOP, with similar protocols on both elections.
9. Marc de Boni, ‘Marine Le Pen: “Mélenchon, je n’en peux plus!”’, *Le Figaro*, 6 September.

10. 'Emmanuel Macron accepte d'être qualifié de candidat populiste', *Le Monde*, 19 March 2017.
11. Louis Hausalter, 'Florian Philippot démissionne du FN après la sanction de Marine Le Pen', *Marianne*, 21 September 2017.
12. 'La stratégie étriquée de Laurent Wauquiez', *Le Monde*, 27 October 2017.

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## Beyond left and right: the eclectic populism of the Five Star Movement

Lorenzo Mosca  and Filippo Tronconi 

### ABSTRACT

Born in 2009, the Five Star Movement (FSM) has been one of the most electorally successful European populist parties since 2013. While its classification as a populist party is unanimously accepted, some have considered it close to left-libertarian positions, others as an anti-immigrant far right party, and still others have simply deemed it as unclassifiable. This article sets out to shed light on this question, using the official documents issued by the party since 2009, posts retrieved from Grillo's blog during three electoral campaigns, and the opinions of the party's supporters as expressed in three surveys in 2013, 2014 and 2016. Although displaying a clear anti-establishment identity, in economic terms it presents left-of-centre positions inconsistently mixed with more conservative proposals, while on the issues of citizenship and immigration, it has an elusive positioning, mixing national securitisation and international humanitarianism. The conclusions highlight the eclectic nature of FSM's populism.

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**Eclectic:** 1. In ancient use, the distinguishing epithet of a class of philosophers who neither attached themselves to any recognized school, nor constructed independent systems, but 'selected such doctrines as pleased them in every school' (Liddell and Scott). (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

**Eclectic:** 1. Composed of elements drawn from various sources. 2. Selecting what appears to be best in various doctrines, methods, or styles. (Merriam-Webster)

The 2013 national elections represented a turning point in Italian politics. The economic, political and moral crisis clearly had an unshackling effect on Italian voters, generating a tripolar party system. Based on an incoherent and many-sided ideology as well as a personalistic leadership and 'post-bureaucratic' organisation, a peculiar communication style claiming proximity to the people and expressing anti-establishment sentiments, the Five Star Movement (FSM) was the main beneficiary of the above-mentioned changes (Conti and Memoli 2015; Corbetta 2017; Tronconi 2018).

The FSM has frequently been depicted as a populist party (Bickerton and Accetti 2018; Bobba and McDonnell 2015; Corbetta 2013; Tarchi 2014). However, it presents original and somewhat contradictory features, distinguishing it from other Western European populist parties. On the one hand, it seems to come close to an ideal-typical image of a populist party as far as its political rhetoric and style of communication are concerned. Its anti-establishment position, the refusal to enter into any coalition-forming negotiations (until the aftermath of the 2018 elections), the rejection of professional politics, an extreme, often offensive use of language, all point to a strong populist character.

Beyond its anti-establishment stance, however, the positioning of the FSM in the ideological space is ambiguous (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Manucci and Amsler 2018; Russo *et al.* 2017). Starting from a green, libertarian platform, it has gradually evolved, incorporating issues such as anti-taxation and Euroscepticism that could also attract right-wing voters, while remaining rather elusive on the crucial issue of immigration. At the European level, this turn to the right was in a sense formalised in 2014 by its agreement with the UK Independence Party (UKIP) to form a joint political group in the European Parliament. At the same time, it has maintained typical leftist positions on the issue of guaranteed minimum income, as well as continuing to hold its environmentalist stance.

In this article we aim to shed light on the ideological positioning of the FSM, a party that eludes the most common classification of populist parties into left-libertarian or anti-austerity on the one side and radical right-wing on the other (e.g. Hobolt and Tilley 2016). We think this is a useful contribution per se, given the relevance of the FSM in the context of European populist parties and the divergent interpretations of its nature. Beyond that, the FSM is one of the main examples of non-radical populist parties, which do not display the typical ideological profile of radical left or radical right. The mutating populism of Italy (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016) in its latest manifestation seems to come closer to 'centrist populism', a phenomenon that is known and often described in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) with reference to the second decade following the democratic transition (Engler *et al.* 2019; Hanley and Sikk 2016; Pop-Eleches 2010; Stanley 2017; Učėn 2007; see also the useful overviews in Van Kessel 2015; Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Conversely, this sub-set of populist parties is not common, and still under-researched, in Western Europe.

The evidence presented in this article is based on the analysis of official documents of the party, posts retrieved from Grillo's blog, and voters' surveys, spanning from 2013 to 2017, and confirms the ambiguous and contradictory ideological positioning of the FSM.

In the next section we look at different possible classifications of populist parties; then we present the data we have referred to and explain the method used to gather it. In the fourth section we observe the diachronic evolution of the FSM on three issues (anti-establishment, economy and immigration) from the perspective of the party and the voters. Finally, the concluding section recaps the main findings in an attempt to define the positioning of this party in the left–right continuum and to refine our understanding of its location, and its peculiarities, in the realm of European populism.

### **On the classification of populist parties**

Populism can be better understood as a *thin-centred ideology* (Mudde 2004: 544). As such, it does not display the degree of coherence and intellectual sophistication of other ideologies, such as the communist or liberal ones. The thin-centred populist ideology ‘*considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and ... argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people*’ (Mudde 2004: 543, emphasis in the original). This makes populist parties able to combine this *Weltanschauung* with different ideologies.

Until the beginning of the twenty-first century this specification was much more relevant in theory than in practice, as most European populist parties, or at least the most electorally successful ones, belonged to the radical right party family (Mudde 2007). Since the outbreak of the economic crisis, however, several populist anti-austerity parties have gained increasing visibility. This has led some authors to propose a distinction based on different policy proposals and visions of politics and society. On the one hand, anti-austerity parties of the left (e.g. Podemos, Syriza, France Insoumise), have been vocal in rejecting the economic measures endorsed by the European Union and other global financial institutions and in pledging to expand the role of the state in the economy;<sup>1</sup> on the other, right-wing populist parties (e.g. UKIP, Front National) have mainly affirmed a nativist ideology, ‘which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state’ (Mudde 2007: 22). This vision has often been complemented by advocating national sovereignty, ‘claiming that powers should be repatriated from the EU to national institutions and that they can stem the threat of globalisation (especially foreign immigrant labour)’ (Hobolt and Tilley 2016: 975).

The analytical distinction proposed by Mény and Surel (2000), between the people as the bearer of sovereignty, as a class and as a nation is a convenient starting point to clarify the ideological differentiation between populist parties, and guide the empirical analysis.

In the first meaning (the *sovereign* people), 'the people' is intended not only as the legitimate source of sovereignty, but also as the only subject entitled to exercise it. According to this Rousseauian view, all intermediate bodies claiming to represent the people, and particularly parties, are considered as usurpers of the legitimate government. Parties, which were born as a linkage between civil society and the state, are now clearly located *into* the state (Katz and Mair 1995), and unanimously perceived as part of the elite, as opposed to the people. Moreover, parties by definition aim to represent a segment of society, thus neglecting the unitary view of the general will of the people. This is the core of the opposition between the people and the (political) elite on the one side, and between the people as a monolithic body and a pluralist view of society on the other. From this perspective, the enemy of the people is the establishment (and particularly the *political* establishment, and the political party as its main incarnation), both at the national and supranational level. In second place, a socioeconomic perspective is proposed by Mény and Surel (2000), by which 'the people' is meant as a *class*. The people-class is not limited to the Marxist proletariat, but includes instead all the small economic actors: workers and peasants, artisans, shopkeepers and small entrepreneurs. Their enemy is represented by multinational companies, bankers and more generally all the emerging sectors of the globalised financial economy. In third place, we can consider 'the people' in terms of a *national community*, bearing certain cultural or racial traits and reinforced by some foundational myth and by a shared history. Here the enemy of the people is the ethnic stranger that puts (again) the supposedly unitary character of the people in danger. In contemporary European societies, migrants are the most obvious targets of this kind of populist discourse.

More recently, a distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary populism has been proposed (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). Inclusion and exclusion are defined along material, cultural and symbolic dimensions. In short, the first one refers to the distribution of state resources to specific groups within society, the second one to the degree of openness of political participation, the third one to the boundaries of the nation itself and who is considered part of it. According to these authors, contemporary European populism often displays exclusionary features, while its Latin American incarnations are predominantly inclusionary. The former stresses in particular the sociocultural dimension,

with a nativist approach to citizenship rights; the latter emphasises the socioeconomic dimension, widening the recipients of public resources.

The classifications here briefly recapped have a common ground in the core defining characters of populism as an ideology based on: an anti-establishment discourse, criticism of representative democracy and its actors, emphasis on the incarnation of the general will of the people. They also have a common ground in defining the sub-groups of populist parties and their ideological references. The anti-austerity, the people-as-a-class and the inclusionary versions of populism all broadly refer to the distribution of material resources within society. On the contrary, the nativist, the people-as-a-nation and the exclusionary versions of populism share a general post-materialist focus, based on identity rather than (or beyond) material interests.

While these elements allow discriminating between the main Western European populist parties, they appear less able to provide a convincing frame for many populist actors in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> In order to bridge this gap, scholars focusing on this area have recently proposed a further classification. The labels of 'centrist populist parties' or 'anti-establishment reform parties' (AERPs) have been adopted to describe political actors combining a criticism of corrupt and inept elites and non-extreme policy positions. As noted by Stanley, 'the centrism of these parties might derive from ideological inconsistency rather than intentional moderation, with aggregate policy stances comprising a mixture of apparently contradictory proposals (such as left-wing and right-wing economic policies)' (Stanley 2017: 144). Centrist populist parties distinguish themselves for non-ethnic, non-anticapitalist and non-ideological appeals (Pop-Eleches 2010). According to Hanley and Sikk (2016: 523) AERPs combine anti-establishment appeals with moderate social and economic policies and display three core features: (1) a politics of mainstream reformism, (2) usually framed in terms of anti-establishment appeal to voters, and (3) genuine organisational newness. AERPs 'are committed to mainstream models of liberal democracy and the market economy and display neither the populist radical right's inclination to "illiberal democracy", ethnocentrism and social conservatism nor the anti-capitalism of the radical left'.

In the following sections of this article we locate the FSM within these varieties of populisms. Based on the preceding discussion, we focus on three aspects defining the FSM's ideological positioning and competition strategy. The first one is the anti-establishment nature of the party, making up an important feature of its populist core discourse, and the common ground defining all Western and Eastern European populist parties. The second refers to its positioning in the economic sphere, and determines whether it is close to pro-state or pro-market arguments. This is a

key indicator especially for anti-austerity parties, advocating a shift from policies aimed to reduce the public debt to policies envisaged to support economic growth via increased public expenditure. Podemos is a clear example of these stances (Bickerton and Accetti 2018; Ramiro and Gomez 2017; Rodríguez-Teruel *et al.* 2016). The third aspect concerns the standing of the FSM on the crucial issue of immigration, seen here as a cognitive shortcut to the degree of inclusiveness of the political community of reference. This is particularly relevant for contemporary radical right parties, that insist on the national boundaries of their polity. Indeed, nativism and anti-immigrant policies are core defining features of radical right populism (Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2007).

## Methodology

In order to build a comprehensive image of the party, we focus on both its official positioning and the opinions of its electorate between 2013 and 2017. To do so, we triangulated: (1) survey data collected at the individual level; (2) party manifestos issued since the foundation of the party; (3) posts published on Grillo's blog during electoral and referendum campaigns.

For data on voters, we rely on three surveys, carried out during two election campaigns (the Italian general election of February 2013 and the election of the European Parliament of May 2014) and, in December 2016, in the period when a referendum on proposed amendments to the Constitution was held. The Italian National Election Study (ITANES) conducted the first and the third surveys, while the Italian section of the European Election Study (EES) administered the second one. The three surveys were carried out with face-to-face interviews. For all surveys we compare the opinions expressed by the voters of the FSM with those of the mainstream left and mainstream right (Partito Democratico, PD, and Forza Italia, FI)<sup>3</sup> parties, the radical right populist Lega Nord (LN),<sup>4</sup> and the general Italian electorate. Respondents declaring an intention to vote for the FSM numbered 237 in 2013 (out of 1508 total respondents), 125 in 2014 (out of 1091) and 695 in 2016 (out of 3050). In the latter case, when opinions were collected before a referendum, we consider those interviewees declaring their intention to vote for the FSM in the hypothetical event of an imminent general election. In all our analyses we focus on questions with identical wording across the three surveys.

The analysis of party manifestos is based on the two official national electoral programmes that were developed in 2009 and 2017, plus a short manifesto drawn up for the 2014 European elections. Although general elections took place in 2013, the national electoral programme of the FSM was launched by the party at the time of its official foundation, in

October 2009, and remained basically unchanged until 2013. Since then no national elections took place until 2018. In 2014 the party published a one-page seven-point manifesto for the European election. The party manifesto for the 2018 national election has been drawn up during 2017 via online ballots organised on 23 different topics. For each topic both large documents and more synthetic leaflets are available. The long documents are sometimes extremely detailed.<sup>5</sup> The leaflets consist of two pages: the first one includes a slogan on the specific topic while the second one comprises a summary of the programme on the issue and, afterwards, the programmatic points voted for online by the members.

Alongside our analysis of party manifestos, we also examined posts published on Grillo's blog, as the latter is considered the official organ of the Movement. Initiated well before the foundation of the party (2005), it is the only place where all decisions concerning the FSM (i.e. expulsions of dissidents, creation of representative bodies, etc.) have been disseminated despite having been taken without any formal procedure or physical assembly and lacking any other written form. Since its foundation the blog has frequently hosted written interventions from people close to the cultural milieu of the Movement. However, over time it has changed from a personal blog (Grillo's blog, [www.beppegrillo.it](http://www.beppegrillo.it)) to the official organ of the Movement (blog of the stars, [www.ilblogdellestelle.it](http://www.ilblogdellestelle.it)), where interventions from elected representatives have gained more and more relevance and visibility (Doc. 1).

Despite the fact that the name of the blog was only changed in 2016, its function as a collector of contributions coming from different levels of the Movement started much earlier. As such, in our analysis contributions not authored by Grillo have also been considered as relevant in defining the FSM's official position in the public sphere. We collected all posts published in the 30 days before the 2013 and 2014 elections and the 2016 constitutional referendum ( $N=83, 170$  and  $171$ , respectively). Concerning the time frame of gathering posts, although not representative of all content published in the blog over the years, we restricted our focus – as many other studies did (e.g. Schärudel and König 2017) – to the period of the electoral campaign, which is the one where more shifts and extensions from the point of view of the party programme may occur as parties can be forced to take positions on issues downplayed in their manifestos. It is also the period when parties make hard decisions on the priorities of their communication strategy, emphasising the issues on which they presume to be able to mobilise their electorates.

Our unit of analysis was the single post. The posts were analysed using a codebook focused on our three main issues: anti-establishment claims, economic claims and claims on immigration. As the three issues are not

mutually exclusive they could be detected simultaneously in the same post. Moreover, such dimensions are not exhaustive of the content of the posts. In fact, some of the posts did not fit into our coding scheme and could not be classified along the three dimensions.

First, we quantified all references to the three issues in the posts in order to identify the changing salience of a specific topic during campaigns. For the anti-establishment issue we coded any claim opposing the elites in different sectors of society (the political, the media, the financial and banking systems) as well as stances against corruption, criticism of representative democracy and alternative democratic conceptions, and reference to moralisation of politics and its costs. Regarding the economic issue, we coded any reference to policy proposals concerning austerity, taxes, military budget, telecommunications, public services, welfare state, education, poverty, labour and the common currency. Concerning immigration, we looked for references to foreigners, non-EU citizens, immigrants, migrants, refugees, clandestine, Roma people and nomads. Second, we analysed the framing of the different issues in a more qualitative way in order to infer the position of the party on these topics. With reference to the economic issue we discriminated between pro-market and pro-state statements, while on immigration we noted differences between national securitisation (restrictive stance) and international humanitarianism (permissive stance).

### Party discourse and voters' attitudes between 2013 and 2017

Our analysis of Grillo's blog during the campaigns of 2013 (general election), 2014 (European election) and 2016 (constitutional referendum) clearly shows that anti-establishment stances outnumber any other type of stance. However, there has been a small but constant decline of the anti-establishment discursive component over the years (from two-thirds of the posts in 2013 to half of them in 2016) (see Table 1). While being much less prominent, there have been frequent references to economic issues (around one-fifth of the posts, with little variation over the three years). The issue of immigration, however, was never explicitly touched upon during the three electoral campaigns we analysed. For this reason,

**Table 1.** Topics of posts published on Grillo's blog, over the total of posts in campaign periods (percentage values).

Topics	2013	2014	2016	Total
Anti-establishment	68.7	79.4	53.2	66.7
Economy	16.9	22.4	19.3	20.0
Immigration	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
(N)	(83)	(170)	(171)	(424)

Source: Own elaboration based on [www.ilblogdellestelle.it](http://www.ilblogdellestelle.it).

**Table 2.** Self-positioning of voters on the left–right axis.

		2013	2014	2016
FSM	Mean	3.9	4.6	5.2
	Standard deviation	2.4	2.0	2.5
	Refuses left–right positioning (%)	16.5	8.0	27.1
	(N)	(237)	(125)	(695)
LN	Mean	6.7	7.4	8.2
	Standard deviation	1.6	1.5	1.4
	Refuses left–right positioning (%)	0.0	9.7	8.6
	(N)	(22)	(31)	(302)
PDL/FI	Mean	7.7	7.3	7.9
	Standard deviation	1.6	2.0	1.4
	Refuses left–right positioning (%)	3.1	3.9	1.1
	(N)	(159)	(78)	(180)
PD	Mean	2.4	3.2	4.4
	Standard deviation	1.7	2.0	1.9
	Refuses left–right positioning (%)	3.9	0.0	2.3
	(N)	(332)	(279)	(619)

Note: 0 = extreme left; 10 = extreme right.

when dealing with this issue we also took into consideration other arenas, such as the parliamentary one.

From the point of view of the voters, the FSM displays a very peculiar identity, which explains why observers do not agree on its ideological profile. Table 2 summarises the self-positioning of FSM's voters on the left–right axis, compared to those of the two mainstream parties, PD and FI, and the LN, which is often described as a radical right populist party. In all of the three years covered by our analysis, the average FSM voter is located between those of the two mainstream parties. At the same time, the dispersion of voters around the mean is higher for the FSM than it is for its competitors in 2013 and 2016. Also, the percentage of those who refuse to position themselves is greater than its opponents in 2013 and 2016, when it reaches a remarkable 27%. In 2014 it is overcome by the value of the LN, although the low number of respondents for this party should lead us to be particularly cautious when interpreting this evidence. All this points to an ideologically elusive electorate, mixing elements from the left and the right, or even impossible to classify according to such categories. That is why a more accurate profile of the FSM needs to be drawn, focusing on specific issues.

## The anti-establishment issue

### *The party's position*

In mobilising anti-establishment resentment, Grillo's blog has three main targets: politicians, journalists, and financial and economic players. This comes as no surprise as the founding events of the movement – the 'V-

days' of 2007 and 2008 – were directed exactly against the first two (Mosca 2015). A Manichaeic discourse opposes the FSM to the political 'caste' that is considered responsible for the catastrophic situation of Italy. According to the blog the collusion among traditional parties is proven by bipartisan agreements demonstrating programmatic alignment between centre-right and centre-left coalitions that even supported a technical government 'imposed' by Brussels eurocrats (Mosca 2013). The mainstream conservative and progressive parties are deplored as fraternal twins: it is no coincidence that they refer to the centre-left PD as 'PD minus L', where PDL (Popolo della Libertà, People of Freedom) is the name of the main centre-right party. The opening section of the 2013 electoral manifesto, on 'State and citizens', claimed that 'Parliament does not represent citizens any longer, as they cannot vote for candidates, but only party symbols ... Parties have replaced popular will and avoid its control and judgment' (Doc. 2).

The second target of Grillo's blog is journalists and traditional media. Like politicians, they are considered a 'caste' but also named as a 'calotte' (*cupola mediatica*: 'cupola' being the name of the governing body of the criminal organisation *Cosa Nostra*) generating a fake reality to accommodate politicians' will. Mainstream media are harshly criticised and journalists are personally attacked as they are seen as part of the discredited establishment. Over time the blog reacted to criticism voiced in the traditional media attacking both left-wing and right-wing columnists and even journalists who were considered closer to the Movement. Both politicians and journalists are perceived as belonging to the same corrupt system, which flourishes thanks to public funding. In a post published during the 2013 electoral campaign Grillo established a connection between politicians and journalists stating:

[Parties] have occupied the State. They have sold it off. They have taken out its flesh from the inside. Now, thanks to the newspapers and the TV channels that they control, they present themselves as the saviours of the fatherland, they, the very people who have fleeced it and used it for their own interests. (Doc. 3)

The financial and banking system is the third target of the movement. Reference is often made to the irresponsible nature of international investors, public money used to save banks instead of people in need, and austerity policies imposed by the EU through its domestic executors. In the words of Grillo:

International finance is fighting its war for predominance, for the draining out of democracies and of the States. It's a super-organism that takes no notice of anyone, which can make use of the media, the politician-waiters and the governments themselves. The Third World War is not fought on the battlefield or with bombs, but in the editor's office of the newspapers,

on TV channels, in the top floors of the banks, in the rating agencies, in the multinationals. (Doc. 4)

The 2018 manifesto advocates ‘a banking system less prone to the requests of the financial system’, the need to ‘fight speculation’, and a strict compulsory system of public audit reporting for multinational companies (Doc. 5).

Although to a lesser extent, beyond the political–media–financial circus, there are many other concrete incarnations of the FSM’s anti-establishment discourse, ‘part of a wider project of elite denigration’ (Ivaldi *et al.* 2017: 6): the EU and Eurocrats, domestic institutions (government, parliament, president of the republic), trade unions, bureaucrats, industrial giants, intellectuals, lobbies, technocrats and the powers that be.

The FSM’s discourse repeatedly emphasises the opposition between corruption and organised crime on the one hand and legality, morality, and transparency embodied by the Movement and its representatives on the other. These values are seen in light of the common citizen who tends to be considered naturally honest by the Movement. Proof of this romanticised vision is offered by quotations from popular figures such as Imposimato (Italian magistrate and Honorary President of the Italian Supreme Court) and Lannutti (president of a national consumers’ association), who refer to the FSM’s candidates as ‘capable and honest young people’ ‘fighting for the common good’ (Doc. 6) and to the Movement as ‘young, clean, transparent’ opposed to ‘genetically modified parties ... [that] defend the bankers, the great powers’ (Doc. 7). Both endorsed the FSM in the last mass rally before the 2013 elections that was held in Piazza San Giovanni in Rome, a square traditionally associated with mass demonstrations of the labour movement.

Another important topic is related to the reduction of the costs of politics and the ending of unjustified privileges of elected representatives. In this respect, the main proposals advocated by the Movement are: the reduction of salaries and the total elimination of life annuities for all elected representatives, as well as the abolition of electoral reimbursements for political parties.

Last but not least, repeated mentions of direct democracy, participation and popular will are also present in the manifestos of 2013 and 2018 and frequently referred to on the blog. During the campaign on the 2016 referendum and in the 2018 manifesto constitutional reform was portrayed as a violation of democracy. As stated in the blog: ‘Renzi is selling a reform that has as its real goal the centralisation and control of power over itself, erasing the voice of citizens and weakening their participation in democratic and political life’ (Doc. 8).

### The position of voters

In order to ascertain the view of the FSM voters on the anti-establishment issue, we refer to a set of questions from two surveys (2013 and 2016).<sup>6</sup> These questions allow us to investigate a crucial aspect of populist attitudes, namely the anti-party sentiment of the electorate. This is only one of the dimensions of the concept of populism as an ideology (Mudde 2004) or as an attitude (Akkerman *et al.* 2014): however, as stated above, anti-party sentiment is certainly a crucial component of the more general concept of populism.

Respondents were asked to declare their agreement with three statements on a Likert scale with four alternatives.<sup>7</sup> For each statement, we compare the percentage of FSM supporters with the overall opinion of Italian voters and with the opinion of voters of the two mainstream leftist and rightist parties (PD and PDL in 2013, PD and FI in 2016), and the far right LN. The three items cover different aspects of the role of parties within the political system: (1) their role for the functioning of democracy; (2) parties as promoters and channels of political participation; (3) parties as representatives of a plurality of interests within society (Figure 1). On



**Figure 1.** Opinions on the role of political parties in democracy for major parties (2013 and 2016, standardised values); value zero represents the position of the average Italian voter.

Question wording: For each of the following statements, could you tell me the extent to which you agree? *Parties and democracy*: There cannot be democracy without political parties. *Parties and participation*: Thanks to political parties people can participate in politics in Italy. *Parties and representation*: Political parties are necessary in order to defend the interests of different social classes and groups.

all three indicators, FSM voters show much higher anti-party sentiments than the average Italian voter, both in 2013 and in 2016. In 2013 more than half of the respondents do not consider parties a necessary feature of a democratic political system, 60% believe parties are not necessary to defend the interests of different social classes and groups, and more than two-thirds think that parties are not useful instruments for political participation. The perception of parties of FSM voters is between 0.3 and 0.45 standard deviations lower than the Italian average. In both surveys, FSM voters have by far the worst opinion of parties on all the three dimensions considered. This is true when compared to PD and PDL/FI voters, but even when compared to LN's voters. The profile of the latter becomes more similar to that of the FSM in 2016, because the LN sharpens its anti-establishment orientation, while the views of the FSM remain stable, at least relative to the average Italian voter.

## The economic issue

### *The party's position*

The economic programme of the Movement is far from being clearly articulated. The FSM refuses any ideological connotation and considers traditional cleavages out-dated. As observed on the blog, the party proposes 'a new way of doing politics, a way that is neither to the right nor the left, but straight ahead!' (Doc. 9).

Nonetheless, previous studies have shown that, compared with the manifestos of other Italian parties, its 2013 electoral programme provided the greatest saliency to welfare expansion and market regulation (Conti and Memoli 2015). Others noticed, however, that 'redistributive issues are virtually absent ... there is no direct reference to "equality", "rights" or welfare – either in inclusionary or in exclusionary terms' (Font *et al.* 2015).

Considering electoral programmes, '20 points to bring Italy out of the dark' were issued during the 2013 campaign as a summary of the electoral manifesto. They actually added to an apparently left-wing platform also programmatic stances intended to appeal to traditional right-leaning constituencies (Tronconi 2015). They included measures intended to re-launch small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the abolition of municipal property tax and opposition to the repossession of people's first home, as well as the abolition of the Italian tax enforcement agency *Equitalia*. One peculiar and distinguishing proposal of the party introduced during the electoral campaign of 2013 regards a universal basic income (*reddito di cittadinanza* – citizenship revenue)<sup>8</sup> that is often linked to a slogan claiming that 'no one should be left behind' (Tronconi 2015). This is a

distinctive claim of the Movement that has been backed up through the organisation of a national demonstration called 'Five Star March' which was repeated twice in order to ensure that public attention remained focused on this proposal (della Porta *et al.* 2017).

As with the previous manifesto, the fiscal section of the 2018 electoral programme also stresses the need to reduce taxes on enterprises. The section of the manifesto concerning labour includes proposals such as reducing the working week to 40 hours, allowing a more flexible retirement age, workers' participation in management, and greater rights, especially for trade unions not affiliated to the main confederations. The section regarding banks includes the creation of a public investment bank to fund innovative and sustainable businesses. Regarding education, the positioning of the Movement is very clear, placing state schools – defined as 'free, democratic, open, inclusive and innovative' – at the core of its programme. No public money should be allocated to private schools; more resources should be devoted to state schools; and teachers' salaries should be increased. The foreign policy section reveals another important aspect of the economic stance of the Movement: opposition to austerity and neoliberalism as prompted by the 'Troika' and the European Stability Mechanism, bodies that have outsourced the democracy of peoples, imposing the infamous 'strict conditionality' without any popular mandate (Doc. 11).

Another relevant topic frequently raised in the two manifestos and during the campaigns that we have analysed, concerns opposition to cuts to social expenditure (school, health and welfare more generally). This resistance is not restricted to defending existing standards but also calls for the restoration of pre-crisis funding as well as demanding further expansion of the welfare state. In connection with this point, military expenditures and particularly the programme of purchasing F35 fighters has frequently been targeted, proposing instead to divert these resources to social policies. In the 2013 manifesto it is proposed to fund public health research drawing money from 'military research' (Doc. 2, p. 14), while the 2018 manifesto advocates a 'stop to the F35 [purchasing programme] and military equipment expenditure', to prioritise instead 'investments in cybersecurity' (Doc. 12).

Finally, the central role of the state is the recurring feature of the section on economic development: the economic, regulatory and monetary role of the state is to be restored. Public intervention is conceived as the pillar of a new development model that could even include protectionist measures (i.e. import quotas and customs duties) as well as debt-financed public investments. The 2013 electoral manifesto called for the nationalisation of the physical infrastructure of the telephone and data network, a position that was somewhat softened, but not abandoned, in the 2018 manifesto.

The ambiguous positioning of the FSM on the economy is masterfully summarised in the following sentence: 'Neither neoliberalism nor autarchy but a fair compromise protecting and reviving Italian quality in the world' (Doc. 13).

This picture is confirmed by our analysis of Grillo's blog. The most prominent issue related to the economic dimension concerns the dignity of labour and opposition to the so-called 'Jobs Act', a new piece of legislation on the labour market passed by the parliament in December 2014 and accused of spreading precarious work and reducing rights for new employees. There is also opposition to taxes on labour and SMEs. Very telling of the elective affinity with the latter is the fact that part of the salary of elected representatives is given back and used to provide microcredits to SMEs, considered by the Movement as the healthy component of Italian capitalism (Caruso 2015), as opposed to multinationals and large financial companies. The FSM fights against the financial receipts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), against trade agreements such as The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and The Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), against EU-driven measures such as the Stability and Growth Pact, the bail-in legislation and the Fiscal Compact. According to the blog:

the policies pursued by this caste over the past few years have failed, inspired by old formulas that are no longer followed in the United States, China, anywhere in the world, and are inspired by a tight liberalism of IMF derivation, are inspired by the dogma that debt, basically, public debt, is fundamentally paid not through virtuous growth, but through social carnage, austerity and spending cuts. (Lucio Di Gaetano, financial adviser and former employee of Bankitalia) (Doc. 14)

Finally, discussion has taken place on the euro as the Movement advocated a consultative referendum to leave the common currency (Doc. 15). This proposal was the first of the 'seven points for Europe' that were adopted for the 2014 European election campaign (Doc. 16), but it has since been abandoned for tactical reasons, and it was not included in the 2018 electoral programme. The partial reconsideration of the position on the European currency was part of a broader strategy to soften the FSM's anti-EU position. Indeed, in January 2017 the party tried to join the European parliamentary (EP) group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), one of the most enthusiastic supporters of European integration since 'a mainstream affiliation in the EP was a political signal about the "respectability" of the M5S as a party of government' (Bressanelli and De Candia 2018: 18). The request was approved with an online vote by FSM members but eventually rejected by the Liberals themselves (*La Repubblica*, 9 January 2017).

How can we summarise this composite picture? Many references to leftist economic policies (on the labour market, on social expenditure, on nationalisation of infrastructures) are balanced by some proposals that are meant to appeal a traditional conservative electorate (tax cuts on small enterprises and on house property). Most notably, these mixed economic views are overarched by typical populist stances regarding the big financial players (banks and multinational corporations), international actors like the IMF and the European Central Bank and a Eurosceptic position that has only recently been reconsidered.

### ***The position of voters***

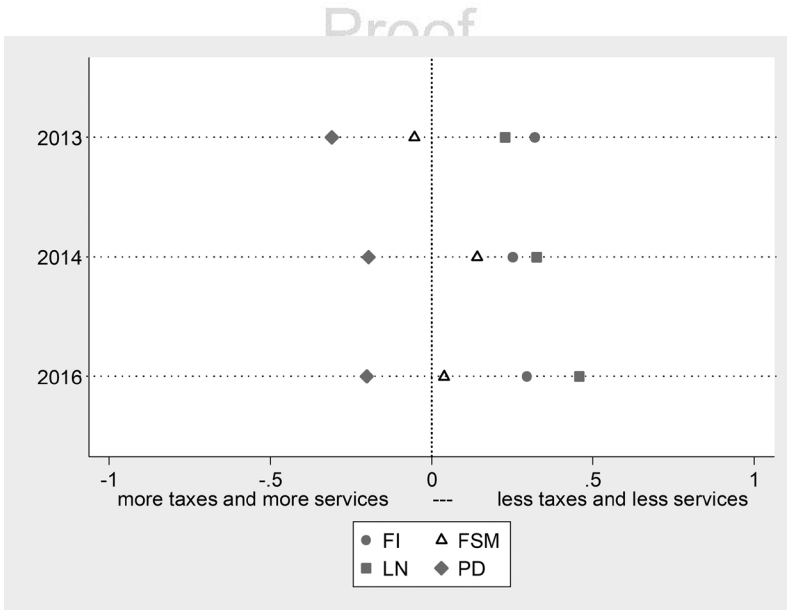
The position of voters on the economic issue has been observed through a traditional question on the preference of respondents between increased services (at the expense of more taxes) and reduced taxation (at the expense of less services). We think this question, which referred explicitly to the economic dimension of the left–right spectrum and was anchored to a concrete and well identifiable issue, is more valid than the question about self-positioning as rightist or leftist. This is because, as we have seen in the opening part of this section, FSM voters openly refuse to be located on the left–right axis (Table 2), because they consider it obsolete.

In contrast with the positions expressed by the party in its official documents, in all the three surveys, FSM respondents are located close to the average Italian voter (Figure 2). A moderate shift towards the right can be observed between 2013 and the following two waves, reflecting a well-known redefinition of the social and demographic profile of voters (Bordignon and Ceccarini 2013; Pedrazzani and Pinto 2017). The call for stronger state regulation and an increased degree of public intervention in the economy resonates only partially in the opinion of its voters. Strikingly, in comparison with the two major mainstream parties, the FSM is always located in a median position. Here the distinction between the FSM and the LN is also clear: the strong pro-market position of the latter is not matched by the centrist orientation of the former.

### **The issue of immigration**

#### ***The party's position***

Coming to the third issue of our analysis, no clear statements from the Movement on immigration can be found on the blog. Very tellingly, the words ‘immigration’, ‘migrant/s’, ‘foreigner’ or synonyms were never mentioned in the 424 posts published in the month preceding the three elections that we analysed (see Table 1). However, the issue of



**Figure 2.** Opinions on taxes vs. services for major parties and Italian voters (2013, 2014 and 2016, standardised values); value zero represents the position of the average Italian voter.

Question wording: Some people say that taxes should be reduced, even if it means cutting public services. Others say that public services should be expanded, even if that means higher taxes. What is your opinion?

immigration has been touched upon only every now and then over the years in the blog.<sup>9</sup>

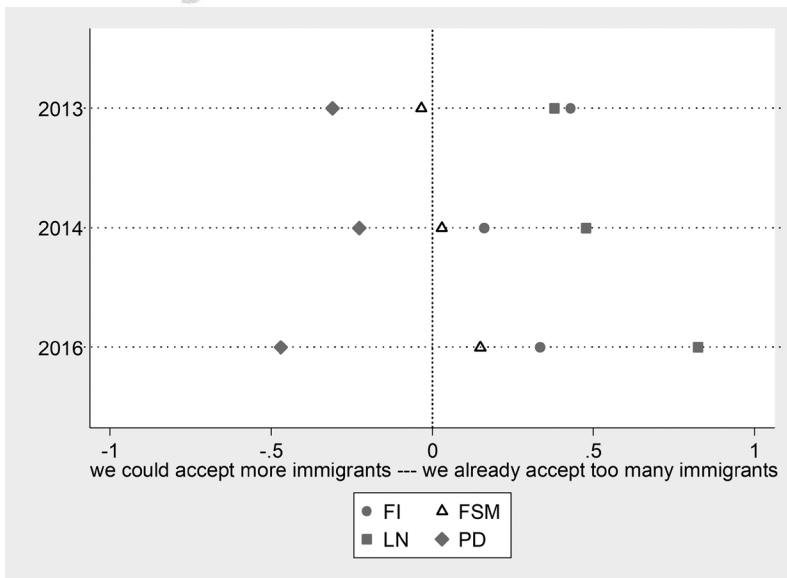
While the 2013 manifesto did not include any reference to the immigration issue, the 2018 manifesto contains a policy section devoted to it. The slogan attached to this section states 'Zero landings of immigrants. Italy is not the refugee camp of Europe'. This restrictive stance is however complemented by four policy proposals based on a humanitarian approach to the phenomenon concerning: (1) the establishment of safe and legal channels of access to Europe; (2) a revision of the Dublin III regulation aimed at a fair distribution of asylum seekers in EU member states according to objective parameters such as population, GDP and unemployment rate; (3) the strengthening of local commissions in charge of recognising the status of refugees to make their decisions faster; (4) an embargo on the sale of weapons to countries engaged in civil wars, the end to the exploitation of developing countries and a drive for true international cooperation.

The ambiguity of the party on this issue is confirmed by other studies that broaden the analysis beyond official documents. An analysis of the parliamentary debate on the refugee crisis between May 2015 and June 2016 comparing the FSM with other populist parties in Italy and the UK

shows that ‘while LN and UKIP represent the refugee peak as a national threat, which raises criminality and insecurity within host societies, FSM tends to position itself closer to the left continuum of the spectrum, underlining the humanitarian emergency’ (Gianfreda 2018: 103). Recently, in the parliamentary debate and the vote on a draft law recognising ‘Jus soli’ as the criterion for obtaining Italian citizenship, the FSM MPs abstained as, in the words of the candidate to the premiership, Luigi di Maio, ‘this is not a priority for the country’ (*La Repubblica*, 17 June 2017). Interestingly, in 2013 the FSM elaborated a draft law on citizenship that was even less restrictive than the one rejected four years later (Doc. 17). At the European level, the EP passed a reform of the Dublin Regulation on asylum seekers in November 2017. FSM’s MEPs voted against it, while even the LN abstained on it. The press release of the parliamentary group of the FSM on that day was tellingly entitled ‘Renegade Northern League: All economic migrants [will be allocated] to Italy’ (Doc. 18).

### ***The position of the voters***

Although barely present in the official documents and in the blog posts of the Movement, the issue of immigration has become prominent in the



**Figure 3.** Opinions on immigration for major parties and Italian voters (2013, 2014 and 2016, standardised values); value zero represents the position of the average Italian voter.

Question wording: Some people say that we accept too many immigrants. Others say that the current situation is under control. Still others think that we could easily accept more. What is your opinion?

political debate of the last years (Geddes and Scholten 2016). The views of voters on this topic can be traced again for three points in time (Figure 3). As we already observed for the economic orientation (Figure 2), the FSM presents a median position between PD and PDL/FI and an almost identical positioning to that of the Italian electorate, with a slight movement towards anti-immigration views through time. Differences with the LN are also very clear, and they increase in 2016 compared to 2013, as voters of Salvini's party become more radical on this topic.

### **Conclusion: an eclectic populism**

In the theoretical section of this article we set out a framework for the analysis of the ideological positioning of the FSM. In our empirical analysis, we captured these broad concepts referring to three topics: the anti-establishment claims and the positions on the economic and immigration issues. According to our analyses, the FSM displays a clear anti-establishment character. Anti-establishment views and a rejection of any kind of intermediation can be detected in the political discourse of the party with reference to different spheres of social life: political (parties), mediatic (professional journalism), economic and financial ones (banks, unions) (Caruso 2015). Other qualifying traits of FSM's identity are moralisation of politics, abolition of the privileges of the 'caste', as well as frequent references to direct and participatory democracy. On this set of issues, there is a convergence between the message originated by the *party in central office* and the attitudes of voters, at least considering the role of parties within the democratic system, since data is not available on the other aspects of the anti-establishment dimension. Also, FSM voters display a much stronger anti-party sentiment when compared with the supporters of the mainstream parties and even compared to the populist LN.

When we turn to the other two dimensions that we have analysed (the position on the economy and immigration), the picture is very different. Concerning the economy, the FSM presents certain traits of leftist parties (indeed radical leftist ones), focusing on welfare expansion and a strong role of the state in the economy, requiring European institutions to put a halt to austerity policies and proposing an ambitious universal basic income programme, but also adopts quintessential anti-tax discourse to appeal to conservative voters. This policy profile, however, is not reflected in the positioning of its voters. Since 2013, with limited movements in the following years, the average FSM voter has been closely aligned to the average Italian voter, positioned between the PD and PDL/FI and distant from the average voter of the LN.

Finally, we considered the issue of immigration as a shortcut to the wider sociocultural definition of the borders of the political community. In this case party documents are particularly elusive, to the point that this issue is absent from the 2013 manifesto and from the blog in the three campaign periods here considered. However, the 2018 manifesto devotes a section to the topic where traditionally opposing views of left and right are blurred, mixing international humanitarianism (typical of the former) with national securitisation (emblematic of the latter). From the perspective of the voters, views are again similar to those of the average Italian and located on a median position between the PD on one side and PDL/FI and LN on the other.

The relative positioning of voters of the three parties shows a clear pattern: FSM voters are far more extreme in their anti-party positions, while they are consistently located between the two mainstream parties on substantive policy issues. They are also clearly distinct from the voters of the LN: more extreme as far as anti-party sentiments are concerned, and more moderate on economic and immigration issues.<sup>10</sup>

From a chronological point of view, we do not observe dramatic developments in the positioning of the party and the voters on the three issues – this would indeed be surprising in such a short time range. Beyond a partial moderation in pro-state economic arguments in the 2018 manifesto, when compared to the 2009 one, the party shows a remarkable stability.

All this allows us to safely locate the FSM within the broad group of European populist parties. Differently from most Western European populist parties, though, the views of the FSM on economic and immigration issues are not well defined. Beppe Grillo himself has frequently refused any definition of his party as leftist or rightist, considering these categories as out-dated. Indeed, the FSM displays an ‘eclectic’ form of populism, combining contradictory or elusive visions on policy issues crosscutting traditional cleavages with a strong anti-party and anti-establishment rhetoric.<sup>11</sup> The FSM’s political identity includes, at the same time, a supportive orientation towards both left- and right-wing issues and related policies.

The eclectic nature of FSM’s populism seems able to attract voters with moderate views, as happens with the ‘centrist’ populism that has been observed in CEE countries in recent decades (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Stanley 2017). The FSM is an anti-austerity but not an anti-capitalist party. It proposes mixed or contradictory policies on immigration but is not xenophobic. Its voters consistently have non-extreme views on these issues, contrary to those of the LN, which displays instead a clear radical rightist, nativist profile.

If this interpretation is correct, the following step consists in understanding what conditions favour the success of centrist populist parties

instead of (or in addition to) radical ones, beyond explanations focused on single cases or on the legacies of post-communist transitions. A comprehensive answer to this research question clearly goes beyond the scope of this article. Here we limit ourselves to a few possible hints, as a note for a developing research agenda.

The Italian party system is eccentric in the Western European context in several respects. Indeed, it shares with CEE countries a number of characteristics that could be used as a starting point for generating hypotheses on the emergence and electoral viability of 'centrist' or eclectic populist parties. In the first place, Italian parties (and the party system) have a short history and a weak institutionalisation, determined by the dramatic renewal following the corruption scandals of the beginning of the 1990s. This could imply that not only some extreme fringes, but also the bulk of moderate voters, have been available to abandon mainstream options and turn to new anti-establishment actors (the LN, FI and FSM). Second, the salience of the issue of corruption sets a favourable context for anti-establishment parties, beyond the economic and immigration issues. As demonstrated through a comparative analysis of party manifestos (Curini 2018: 89–90), Italy, together with Greece, shows by far the highest salience of corruption in Western Europe, and values that are similar to most CEE countries. Widespread distrust in the functioning of democracy is another feature that characterises Italy more than other Western countries (van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017: 91). This could open the way to parties advocating a deep reform of political institutions, as well as forms of direct democracy, without necessarily contesting the principles of liberal democracy.

The FSM represent an unusual case of populism in the Western European scene. Quite surprisingly it displays instead some features that make it similar to several CEE 'centrist' populist parties. Low party system institutionalisation, salience of the corruption issue in the political debate and diffused dissatisfaction with democracy could represent promising paths to understand what explains the emergence and success of these parties.

## Notes

1. Left-wing populist parties, although less common in Europe than in Latin America, were present before the Great Recession, too. For instance, the German Linke or the Dutch Socialist Party (see March 2011).
2. And in Latin America. Argentine Peronism is in fact considered as the archetypal example of ideologically diffuse or eclectic populist party (Roberts 2017), a label also providing an accurate description of the initial appeal of Fujimori in Peru (Pop-Eleches 2010).
3. Or the PDL (Popolo della Libertà, People of Freedom), as Forza Italia was called between 2008 and 2014.

4. 'Nord' (Northern) was dropped from the party name in October 2017, as part of a strategy aiming to expand its electoral base to the southern regions.
5. Ninety-two pages for economic development, 89 for energy, 38 for agriculture, 28 for constitutional affairs, 25 for the environment, 23 for mobility, 20 for telecommunications and the others between 6 and 12 pages.
6. We also consider a third time point (2014 European elections) on the other two dimensions analysed in the following pages. However, since the questions related to the populist attitudes of the voters were not comparable across the three surveys, the 2014 data have been excluded in this section.
7. Since not all the scales were identical in the three surveys, the data presented in this and the following figures have been standardised, so that zero corresponds to the general mean and the standard deviation is equal to one.
8. During the XVIIth legislative term, the FSM Senate group presented a bill on this topic (Doc. 10). According to this proposal (<https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/308596.pdf>), all people below the poverty threshold (calculated as earning less than six-tenths of the annual median national revenue) should be given a monthly salary of €780. This measure, although referred to as a universal basic income, should actually more properly be referred to as an unemployment benefit.
9. Its saliency increased only in recent years particularly in the aftermath of the 'Mafia Capital' scandal (December 2014) and the controversies that emerged in 2017 on the role played by NGOs in the migrants' rescue operations in the Mediterranean Sea, on a parliamentary bill endorsing 'Jus soli', and on the reform of the Dublin Regulation in the EP. Interestingly enough, the FSM repeatedly criticised both centre-left (PD) and centre-right (FI, but also the LN) parties advocating the fairness of 'common sense' solutions on the topic, located in between the political correctness ('*buonismo*') of the former and the opposite stance ('*cattivismo*') of the latter.
10. Analysing a wider set of issues, Colloca and Corbetta (2015) find the same 'centrist' positioning, leading to the conclusion that the FSM is better understood as a post-ideological party.
11. After the 2018 elections, the FSM started negotiations in view of a coalition government with both the LN and the PD, once again confirming the ambivalent nature of its ideological positioning.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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## Economic crisis and the variety of populist response: evidence from Greece, Portugal and Spain

Marco Lisi , Iván Llamazares  and Myrto Tsakatika 

### ABSTRACT

Greece, Portugal and Spain are among the countries worst hit by the 2008 Great Recession, followed by significant electoral and political turmoil. However, one of the dimensions in which they differ is the presence and varieties of populism in parties' political proposals. Drawing on holistic coding of party manifestos, we assess the varying presence of populist rhetoric in mainstream and challenger parties before and after the 2008 economic downturn. Our empirical findings show that populism is much higher in Greece compared to Spain and Portugal. We do not find a significant impact of the crisis as the degree of populism remains rather stable in Greece and Portugal, while it increases in Spain, mainly due to the rise of new populist forces. The study confirms that populist rhetoric is a strategy adopted mainly by challenger and ideologically radical parties. In addition, inclusionary populism is the predominant flavour of populist parties in new Southern Europe, although exclusionary populism is present to a lesser extent in the Greek case. We contend that the interaction between the national context – namely the ideological legacy of parties and the main dimensions of competition – and the strategic options of party leadership is crucial for explaining cross-country variation in the intensity of populism and the specific issues that characterise populist discourse.

As a result of the 'Great Recession', mainstream parties have faced electoral setbacks and challenger parties have gained growing strength in national party systems. While traditional party families (i.e. social democrats, Christian democrats, liberals) are losing popular support, a number of populist parties have made inroads into European political systems, destabilising usual alignments and patterns of competition. Although

scholars disagree on the magnitude of the populist earthquake shattering democracies in affluent societies and whether the process came to a halt, they tend to acknowledge that, from a marginal phenomenon, populist parties have now become a persistent and quite successful political actor in Europe.

The economic and financial crisis has impacted significantly on party system change in Southern Europe (Bosco and Verney 2016). Greece, Portugal, and Spain, three South European new democracies, until recently characterised by stable party systems and centripetal dynamics of party competition based on two moderate forces, have experienced increasing fragmentation and an opening structure of party competition since the economic crisis (Morlino and Raniolo 2017). The emergence and success of new 'populist' actors have been one key element behind this major shift. Yet distinct trajectories can be seen, showing different patterns of party system change. Whereas in Spain two new parties, one of them leftist and populist, have shattered the post-Franco bipartisan system, in Portugal established actors have succeeded in averting the entrance of new political forces, populist or otherwise. On the other hand, Greece has experienced a new 'populist era' through the success of populist parties mainly on the left and less prominently, though still significantly, on the right.

This paper is primarily devoted to examining and explaining cross-partisan and cross-national variation in the extent and type of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain, in the aftermath of the economic crisis.<sup>1</sup> By means of a content analysis of election manifestos using holistic grading and a qualitative assessment of populist frames, it aims to contribute to an empirical analysis of the spread of populism in new Southern Europe across countries, party types and party systems. These three cases have been selected not only because they experienced a similar economic and political crisis since 2008,<sup>2</sup> but also because they underwent parallel trajectories in terms of democratic consolidation and party system institutionalisation (Diamandouros and Gunther 2001; Morlino 1998). How do these countries differ in terms of degree of party populism? Has the crisis increased the overall level of populism in the new democracies in Southern European countries? And what is the ideological bent of the populist frames adopted by distinct political parties? These are the main research questions that this study aims to address.

Our purpose, we stress at the outset, is not to determine the factors that explain the pervasiveness of populism, nor to test whether the crisis caused the emergence or electoral success of populist parties (see on this Hawkins *et al.* 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Addressing such goals would demand a drastic expansion of the cases included in the

analysis. Our goal here is much more modest, and it consists in the qualitative analysis of cross-national and diachronic variations in the levels and content in populist proposals in three countries that have shared important political and socioeconomic features over the last decades. Although it might be possible to approach our topic using quantitative methods (for example through public opinion surveys), we employ qualitative case studies because the question of context – namely ideological legacies and party strategies – is crucial for understanding the spreading of the populist phenomenon in the Southern European new democracies. Overall, we expect to find remarkable differences across countries, as well as across distinct party types (e.g. challenger vs mainstream, moderate vs. radical parties). Finally, we also expect to find a prevalence of the inclusionary type of populism, given the impact of the Great Recession in the region.

The article is structured as follows. We address in the next section key theoretical issues for the study of populism and lay out our main expectations concerning the emergence of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the next section we present our empirical research strategy and the type of data we analyse. The following section focuses on the political background of the three countries and the trajectory of party systems during the crisis. Then we discuss our main empirical findings. Finally, we conclude by presenting some comparative reflections and examining some possible implications of our analysis for future research.

### **The European crisis and the emergence of populism: literature review**

Cas Mudde's well-established minimal definition of populism is that of '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: 543). Populism is deemed a 'thin-centred' ideology because its core can be combined with other ideologies 'thick' or 'thin', such as communism, nationalism or ecologism (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008; Canovan 2004; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). A variation on the understanding of populism as a 'thin ideology' is populism as a style or discourse of politics, i.e. not expressing core beliefs but a mode of political expression employed strategically by its proponents (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Populism thus seen allows for the study of the phenomenon as a 'gradational property' rather than as an essential quality of particular parties (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013: 7–10; Rooduijn *et al.* 2014).

A significant distinction among populisms drawn in the comparative literature is that between an egalitarian, inclusionary type, which until recently has been more successful in the left-wing movements of Latin America, and a xenophobic, exclusionary type to be found mostly in the far-right parties that have developed in Europe since the 1980s (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). The distinction is analysed on the basis of three dimensions: material, political and symbolic (Filc 2010: 128–38). The material dimension concerns the distribution of resources among social groups with inclusionary populist parties in favour of mass welfare programmes to include the poor and exclusionary populisms defending forms of welfare chauvinism that aim to protect established welfare insiders from immigrant outsiders. The political dimension refers to forms of political mobilisation that go beyond representative democratic channels such as plebiscitary and local forms of radical democracy. Inclusionary populisms mean for these mechanisms to give a voice to disregarded groups while exclusionary populisms also advocate similar devices but demand the disenfranchisement of immigrant groups. Finally, the symbolic dimension involves setting the boundaries of ‘the people’, with inclusionary movements highlighting, for instance, the ‘dignity’ of indigenous populations, while symbolic exclusion often draws on forms of cultural discrimination (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

In order to understand why specific varieties of populism emerge, as well as its intensity across distinct countries and parties, we need to look at both the roots of this phenomenon and the main issues associated with the crisis of representative democracies. On the one hand, populism has mostly a contingent nature, given the fact that strategic choices and agency play an important role in activating the adoption of this type of discourse. On the other hand, some countries present more favourable conditions for the emergence of populism, making it a recurrent strategy for achieving the main party goals. We contend that the interaction of these elements is crucial for understanding both the levels and varieties of populism in the Southern European new democracies.

It has been widely argued that economic crises facilitate populism (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Moffit 2016; Stavrakakis 2014). Such events have ‘catalysing effects’ that intensify long-standing problems (Morlino and Raniolo 2017: 22). Such are the long-term trends of increasing economic inequality and social exclusion that have accompanied technological displacement, deep changes in the world of work and welfare and neoliberal economic policies (Inglehart and Norris 2016: 2). Economic crises reinforce the divide between globalisation’s ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (Kriesi 2014). In addition, the crisis has increased political discontent and mistrust towards representative institutions, a situation that seems strongly

connected to the success of populist parties (Moffit 2015; Rooduijn *et al.* 2016). This is particularly the case of Southern European countries, characterised by a significant worsening of different components of democratic legitimacy such as trust in the parliament, trust in political parties or satisfaction with democracy (Muro and Vidal 2017). In so doing they provide fertile ground for challenger parties to blame national elites and mainstream political parties for the economic and social woes of globalisation's 'losers' (Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Higher levels of populism also seem to be more common among parties on the left and right extremes of the ideological continuum than among mainstream parties (Polk *et al.* 2017; Rooduijn *et al.* 2014).

The key factors that are likely to favour the emergence or predominance of inclusionary rather than exclusionary populism in the aftermath of an economic crisis can be argued to lie in high levels of crisis intensity, in the retrenchment of welfare states in the face of economic crisis (Kriesi and Pappas 2015), and in the lack of partisan programmatic responsiveness (Bornschier 2010; Roberts 2013, 2015). On the other hand, exclusionary populism, which is mostly associated with transformations taking place in the cultural and symbolic dimensions, is more likely to emerge when the salience of immigration increases and mainstream right-wing parties do not politicise or give priority to xenophobic public preferences (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

The Southern European new democracies have provided a fertile environment for the emergence of inclusionary populism for two main reasons. On the one hand, the Great Recession has brought to the fore materialist concerns, increasing the salience of socio-economic cleavages (Kriesi 2014: 369–70). On the other hand, these countries have also experienced a strong responsiveness crisis, as socialist parties have adopted neoliberal policies that contradict their founding principles. A number of authors have argued that this programmatic dealignment facilitates the emergence of populist contenders of the inclusionary type that promise to restore equality and dignity (Roberts 2017). However, so far we lack comparative studies on the presence, evolution and substantive content of populist appeals in Southern European party systems.<sup>3</sup>

The general links between populism and economic crisis are insufficient to account for cross-national, cross-partisan and even cross-temporal variations in the levels and substantive contents of populist appeals in Greece, Portugal and Spain. A comparative explanation of such differences must take into consideration national contexts and legacies (Taggart 2017), party ideological frames (Moffit 2016; Taggart 2017; Polk *et al.* 2017) and party strategies (Pauwels 2011). In sum, we argue that ideational theory (Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2018; Hawkins *et al.* 2017)

may explain to a great extent the different nuances that the variegated phenomenon of populism may take, even within the region most affected by the economic crisis. In addition, if we want to make sense of the varieties of populism, it is important not only to look at the dominant type of this phenomenon, but also at the trajectory and historical levels of the populist phenomenon in a specific environment.

The previous discussion allows us to lay out our main empirical expectations. For the reasons we outlined above, and given the intensity of the effects of the Great Recession, we expect substantial increases in the populism levels in these three countries after 2008. Now, we also expect to find important differences in this regard between Greece and the two Iberian countries. The already established prevalence of populist rhetoric elements in the Greek party system (Pappas 2013, 2014a, 2014b; Vasilopoulou *et al.* 2014) should also lead to substantially higher populism levels in that country than in Portugal and Spain. As for cross-partisan variations, for strategic reasons we expect populism levels to be higher among challenger<sup>4</sup> and opposition parties. Such parties will be more inclined to appeal to dissatisfied voters by emphasising the unresponsiveness and selfishness of political and ruling elites. Also at the partisan level, ideologically more extreme parties will be more likely to articulate populist discourses directed against status quo elites that resist drastic changes in either direction of the ideological spectrum. And finally, given the intensity of the economic crisis, the hardship of austerity measures, and the centrality of socio-economic cleavages in these three party systems, we expect that materially inclusionary, redistributive populism will be prevalent in these cases. However, the fact that anti-immigration appeals were previously activated in the Greek political arena (Ellinas 2013) – but not in Portugal (Marchi 2013) or Spain (Llamazares 2012) – leads us also to expect the presence of symbolically exclusionary components in the populist discourse of some Greek parties.

## Data and methods

The difficulty of defining conceptually the populist phenomenon mirrors the ambiguity in measuring the degree of populism associated to distinct political actors. A number of approaches have been used to measure populism. Overall, these strategies rely on the ideological conceptualisation of populism (Mudde 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012) that consists of two main dimensions, namely (1) people-centrism and (2) anti-elitism. The first dimension aims to measure references to the 'people', the 'popular will', the homogeneity of the people, etc. The second dimension refers to critiques towards political elites, conceived as the

‘evil’, a minority that controls key decisions against the interests of the people.

To analyse populist discourse, the most common approach is based on content analysis of party documents. The two main variants are based on computerised content analysis and human-coded content analysis (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). This paper relies on a different approach based on holistic grading of party documents. This technique has been developed mainly by Hawkins and his team (Hawkins 2009, 2013; Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2016, 2018). Basically, it consists of attributing a score to the document (election manifesto or speeches) as a whole by looking at the degree of populist discourse. The key unit of observation and analysis is the entire election manifesto, not the single words or paragraphs (as used in Rooduijn and Pauwels’ work).<sup>5</sup> The scoring varies from 0 (no populist elements identified in the document) to 2 (very strong and systematic use of populist discourse). Coders are instructed to look at whether party manifestos contain references to the ‘popular will’, as well as negative opinions on the political or economic elite in general. In each country two coders have examined party manifestos and the final score reflects the average of the scoring assigned by the coders. All party manifestos are in their original language and the coders have a native or near-native knowledge of the language.

Holistic grading presents several advantages for our research objectives. First, it can be easily applied to different parties and countries, allowing us to compare new cases not yet covered by the literature to other European counterparts. Second, this technique provides the opportunity to code several documents, thus examining the evolution of populist discourse before and after the crisis. Finally, it allows us to interpret political discourse, that is, it offers a more fine-grained analysis of the context and the arguments used by both mainstream and challenger parties.

Our units of analysis are the party manifestos of all parliamentary parties in Greece, Portugal and Spain (see online appendix). Party manifestos are considered to represent and express the policy collectively adopted by the party (Budge *et al.* 2001). Moreover, as a number of works have already highlighted (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011), this type of source presents other positive aspects. First, these documents provide a clear overview of the arguments deployed by parties during election campaigns. Second, these texts are readily available and are easily comparable across countries, parties and elections. As for the time frame, in order to gauge populist trends over time we select at least one party manifesto in the pre-crisis era and one in the post-crisis period (i.e. from 2009–2010 until 2018).

We present the holistic grading scores in the next section. We checked the reliability of coding and the robustness of these scores in two ways.

First, we compared them to the values obtained by using Rooduijn and Pauwels' (2011) technique based on a content analysis of party manifestos. This method has been widely used for measuring the degree of populism of a party in Western European countries. The Pearson correlation index between holistic grading scores (values for 2015 in our three countries) and the scores derived from the codification of party manifestos using Rooduijn and Pauwels' (2011) technique equals +0.82 (for 14 cases). Second, we compare holistic grading with the anti-elitist scale included in the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert data (Polk *et al.* 2017). The Pearson correlation between these two measures equals +0.71 (for 17 cases).<sup>6</sup>

In order to qualify the variety of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain, we use the dimensions identified by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) to distinguish between inclusionary and exclusionary populism. Consequently, we complement the quantitative longitudinal analysis with the examination of the material, symbolic and political dimensions.

### **Populism and the crisis in Greece, Portugal and Spain: the background**

In contrast to Portugal and Spain, populism has a long history and a strong presence in Greece. It is often argued that populism was brought into the mainstream of Greek politics by PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) in the aftermath of the 1974 democratic transition (Lyrintzis 1987). PASOK's successful populist appeals to the 'underprivileged' led to populist 'contagion' (Pappas 2014a, 2014b), as New Democracy (ND), the centre-right pole of what turned out to be Greece's stable two-party system up until 2012, adopted similar discourses in order to secure its place on the electoral map (Mavrogordatos 1997). While the two main parties continued to alternate in power until the 2009 election, Greek voters' party identification and levels of trust in the political system had been in decline since at least 2007 (Teperoglou and Tsatsanis 2014: 224–8).

During the first year of the economic crisis (2010–2011), PASOK, a party of social democracy, adopted severe austerity measures in return for a bailout loan from the European Union (EU) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013). Over the crisis period the populist discourse of SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) – an established minor party of the radical left whose aim was to express and represent the economic concerns and anti-party sentiments of the Greek voters that were distancing themselves from PASOK and the other mainstream parties – struck a chord with disillusioned Greek voters. SYRIZA was successful in replacing PASOK as one of the two major

parties in Greece (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014; Tsakatika 2016). On the right and far right, the Independent Greeks and Golden Dawn were also successful in mobilising a lesser, but still significant, proportion of the vote, through the politicisation of immigration and the adoption of populist frames. The peculiarity of the Greek case when compared to the Iberian countries has been the growing salience of immigration, which particularly after the 1990s emerged as a key issue in party competition (Ellinas 2013; Karamanidou 2015). An additional point of confrontation related to the cultural cleavage was therefore also present in Greek party politics when the economic crisis was transformed into a political crisis.

As far as Portugal is concerned, two key aspects are worthy of examination to understand the peculiarities of its political context and party strategies. First, no radical right parties have succeeded in Portugal, due to organisational, programmatic and leadership failures (Marchi 2013). Second, Portugal has been considered an outlier in the populist *Zeitgeist* that has populated European politics over the last decades (Salgado and Zúquete 2017). The main example that resembles European populist counterparts is the National Renewal Party (PNR, *Partido Nacional Renovador*), an extreme right-wing party that has remained a marginal actor in the party system, never achieving more than 0.5% of the votes (Marchi 2013; Salgado and Zúquete 2017). The economic and political crisis that followed the bailout and the Troika intervention has facilitated the emergence of several new parties that ran in the 2011 and 2015 elections. Among these, only the PDR (Republican Democratic Party, *Partido Renovador Democrático*) has adopted an unorthodox style of political communication centred on its leader (António Marinho e Pinto) and a strong anti-elite rhetoric. However, these new parties have failed to innovate the Portuguese party system, whereas the main parties have adopted a very conventional electoral campaign, in terms of both style and issues (see De Giorgi and Pereira 2016). This is also confirmed by the Chapel Hill expert survey, which includes an item related to the anti-establishment rhetoric adopted by European parties. According to these data, Portugal scored relatively low in 2014 in the anti-elitism scale, below the European average and other Southern European countries.

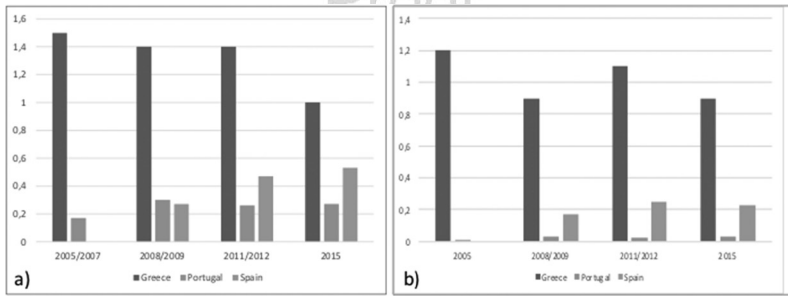
The Spanish party system that emerged after Franco's death was characterised by the absence of populist appeals and discourses. The democratic transition gave rise to a party system structured along two basic dimensions (left-right and centre-periphery). After the demise of the centre-right UCD (*Unión de Centro Democrático*) in 1982, the PSOE (*Partido Socialista Obrero Español*, Spanish Socialist Workers' Party) and the PP (*Partido Popular*, Popular Party) remained the two main parties in the system. They always formed single-party governments at the national

level, even if on many occasions they had to rely on the support of other forces. Until 2014 party system stability went hand in hand with a strong ideological structuration and a persistent absence of anti-elite and populist discourses. A few wealthy businessmen attempted to enter the political arena based on anti-party and populist platforms, but they attained very limited successes (a seat in the European Parliament for Ruiz Mateos in 1989 and control of a few southern city councils in the case of Jesús Gil from 1991 onwards).

However, the Great Recession and the policy switch that the PSOE put into practice after 2010 led to a deep representation crisis in the Spanish party system. This crisis was aggravated by public outrage at corruption scandals coming to light in those same years. The collapse of the PSOE in the 2011 elections, and the populist mobilisation that crystallised in the 15-M movement as a reaction to austerity policies and political corruption, paved the way for the birth and 2014 electoral breakthrough of Podemos, a party that deliberately adopted a populist rhetoric (Giménez 2014; Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2018). In the 2014 European elections, the party attained 8% of the votes. In the 2015 local elections the candidates endorsed by Podemos became the mayors of the two main Spanish cities, Madrid and Barcelona. And in the 2015 national elections Podemos and its political allies achieved almost 21% of the vote. The 2015 general elections also witnessed the upsurge of *Ciudadanos* (Citizens), a centrist party that called for a profound renovation of political life and political institutions and which suddenly attained 13.9% of the votes.

### **Populism in Southern Europe through holistic grading: results**

Overall, content analysis reveals considerably higher levels of populism among Greek political parties in comparison to Portugal and Spain (see Figure 1). We also find that the crisis does not show a general trend on the evolution of populism. Remarkably and counter-intuitively, it would seem that average populism scores in Greece have slightly declined since the beginning of the economic crisis. However, if we consider the averages of populism scores weighed according to electoral performance across Greek parliamentary elections between 2007, the last pre-crisis election won by New Democracy, and January 2015, and the elections that brought the SYRIZA-ANEL coalition to power, there is little variation in the levels of populism encountered in the Greek political system, despite the fact that in the meantime the latter had undergone radical change (see Table 1). These findings seem at odds with our expectation that the crisis heralded higher levels of populism.<sup>7</sup>



**Figure 1.** Populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain according to holistic coding, before and after the crisis (average per country): (a) average holistic scores per country; (b) average holistic scores per country weighted according to electoral performance.

Notes: Election years: Greek elections: 2007, 2009, 2012 (May) and 2015 (January); Portuguese elections: 2005, 2009, 2011 and 2015; Spanish elections: 2008, 2011 and 2015.

**Table 1.** Populism scores in Greek parties (2007, 2009, 2012 and 2015 elections).

Party	2007	2009	2012 (May)	2015 (Jan.)
KKE	1.9	1.8	1.8	1.8
SYRIZA	1.5	1.8	1.8	1.4*
DIMAR	—	—	1.0	—
POTAMI	—	—	—	0.5*
PASOK	2.0	1.0	0.3	0.1*
ND	0.4	0.7	1.4	0.4*
ANEL	—	—	1.5	0.5*
LAOS	1.6	1.8	—	—
GD	—	—	2.0	2.0
Average	1.5	1.4	1.4	1.0
Weighted average	1.2	0.9	1.1	0.9

Source: Own elaboration from party manifestos, except for \*Hawkins and Castanho Silva (2018).

The Portuguese case shows clearly the lowest levels of populism. The difference with other new Southern European democracies is even bigger if we consider weighted scores, which demonstrates that populism in Portugal is only related to the periphery of the party system. Indeed, both PCP and BE have displayed some degree of populism, whereas governing parties have been constantly reluctant to adopt a populist strategy (Table 2). As for longitudinal trends, we cannot really see a clear impact of the crisis. If we take 2008 as the beginning of the crisis, populist scores seem to increase after the crisis. However, the 2009 elections were not actually characterised by the discussion of austerity measures. Therefore, our interpretation is that on average the degree of populist discourse has remained relatively stable over time.

By contrast, Spain shows a very high increase in the average supply-side level of party populism, which jumped from 0.27 in 2008, the last pre-crisis elections, to 0.47 in 2011 and 0.53 in 2015 (Table 3). However, if we weight our scores by electoral success we get a much more stable image of the evolution of populism in the Spanish party system.

**Table 2.** Populism scores in Portuguese parties (2005–2015).

Party	2005	2009	2011	2015
BE	0.25	0.7	0.5	0.4
CDS-PP	0.00	0.0	0.0	0.0
PCP	0.55	0.8	0.7	0.7
PS	0.00	0.0	0.05	0.2
PSD	0.05	0.0	0.05	0.0
Average	0.17	0.3	0.26	0.27
Weighted average	0.01	0.03	0.02	0.03

Source: Own elaboration from party manifestos.

**Table 3.** Populism scores for Spanish parties with more than 3% of the national vote (2008, 2011 and 2015 elections).

Party	2008*	2011**	2015***
PP	0.4	0.4	0.2
PSOE	0.0	0.0	0.15
Podemos			0.65
Ciudadanos			0.15
UP/IU	0.4	1.0	1.15
Average	0.27	0.47	0.53
Weighted average	0.17	0.25	0.23

\*Source: Our elaboration, \*\*Hawkins and Castanho Silva (2016), \*\*\*Hawkins and Castanho Silva (2018).

Weighted populism levels moved from 0.17 in 2008 to 0.25 in 2011 and 0.23 in 2015. These contrasting results derive from the fact that the PP, the most voted for party in 2011 and 2015, drastically reduced the populist overtones of its discourse after gaining access to power in 2011. This fact is consistent with the expectation that parties have stronger incentives to use populist appeals when they are in opposition. On the other hand, the sharp rise in non-weighted average levels of populism after 2011 resulted from the fact that the two main parties rejecting austerity policies, the established IU-UP (Unitary Left-United We Can) and the newly founded Podemos, articulated their proposals in a populist discursive framework. Interestingly, voting behaviour studies on the 2015 elections have shown that populist attitudes were one of the elements affecting (directly and in interaction with ideological positions) votes for Podemos, IU-UP, Ciudadanos and, negatively in this case, the PP (Andreadis *et al.* 2018). That is, although by 2015 weighted populism levels were not much higher than before the Great Recession, populist discourses were more present in the party system than in 2011, and furthermore, populist public attitudes had direct and indirect effects on vote choices.

Our analysis also highlights interesting differences between two groups of parties. Moderate and governing parties exhibit in general lower scores than challenger parties. As expected, mainstream parties seem rather immune to populist appeals, with rare elements associated with anti-elitist rhetoric or the ‘popular will’. The exception here is the Greek case, where

mainstream parties also adopt populist discourses when this offers them an advantage in party competition. Two examples are PASOK's high score in the 2007 manifesto (2) when the party was challenging ND for office and ND's populist high watermark (1.5) in 2012, which can be explained by the fact that for a brief period (2010–2012) ND chose to conduct populist opposition to PASOK before being forced to join coalition governments with PASOK between 2012 and 2015. When they have not chosen to adopt populist discourses Greek mainstream parties tend to speak of the citizens, society and 'people', as well as the country and only secondarily of Greeks, while they tend to present 'demagogues', bureaucrats and partyism as the 'enemy'. On the other hand, challenger parties present higher levels of populism. However, country differences remain stronger than the variation within each category of party type. Within this group, Greece still displays the highest scores, while Portugal presents the lowest values.

Another issue addressed in our theoretical framework consists of assessing whether ideologically radical parties are more populist than moderate ones or not. Overall, the findings do confirm our expectations and previous works (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). Yet it is interesting to note that populism is not a generalised strategy for newly created parties. While there have not been new successful populist parties in Portugal, the level of populism for new parties in Greece and Spain is not higher than for old ones. Of all the Greek parties analysed, it is only ANEL, POTAMI and DIMAR that emerged as new parties in the aftermath of the crisis and their discourses do not score higher in terms of populism than most established political parties on the right or left. The fact that the two new parties in Spain are characterised by comparatively high (Podemos) and low (Ciudadanos) populist scores seems to contradict the expectation that new parties will display higher populist scores.

After assessing how the degree of populism varies across countries and party types, we qualify the content of populist discourse through means of qualitative analysis. We begin by focusing on the two parties that constitute Greece's ruling coalition, SYRIZA, the major partner, and Independent Greeks (ANEL), the minor partner, asking how they fare in terms of the inclusionary–exclusionary dimension of populism. With respect to the economic dimension, SYRIZA clearly supports an inclusionary policy of welfare state expansion to improve the lives of those groups that are subject to deprivation, exclusion or discrimination, particularly exacerbated by the economic crisis, in particular the less well off, the unemployed, women, the young and immigrants/refugees (SYRIZA-EKM 2012: 5). These are all groups to which power, income and rights should be extended because they constitute 'the people' (Font *et al.* 2019).

In terms of the political dimension, SYRIZA actively supported extra-parliamentary mobilisation and inclusive direct democratic practices (Tsakatika and Eleftheriou 2013) and advocated the more generalised use of referenda at national and European levels (SYRIZA 2014) while in opposition. Once in government, SYRIZA extended citizenship law to second generation migrants in Greece. Moving on to the symbolic dimension, in ways not dissimilar to inclusive populist frames elsewhere in the world, SYRIZA characterised Greek political and economic elites as subservient to foreign powers such as banks and multinationals, the Troika and its components (EC/ECB/IMF) and, particularly until 2015, Germany and the German leadership (SYRIZA 2014; SYRIZA-EKM 2012: 2). SYRIZA can hence be considered a party that clearly leans towards inclusionary populism.

On the contrary, the Independent Greeks can be characterised as an exclusionary populist party, largely by virtue of its positions – while in opposition – on the question of immigration. On the economic dimension, ANEL would see ‘illegal’ migration eradicated and quotas introduced for legal migration, defined as a percentage of the Greek population (ANEL 2015: 6); it has also put forward policy proposals such as the immediate deportation of migrants involved in illegal commercial activities (ANEL 2012: 27). In the political and symbolic dimensions ANEL can be considered exclusionary by virtue of its opposition to multiculturalism and the close articulation of national identity, the people and Orthodox Christianity (ANEL 2015: 11).

The cohabitation of an inclusionary with an exclusionary populist party in government (Aslanidis and Rovira Kaltwasser 2016) is highly unusual and has on occasion led to intra-governmental disagreements, with the Independent Greeks for example not supporting SYRIZA’s citizenship law which involved extending citizenship to second generation migrants (Kathimerini 2015). Nonetheless, it must be kept in mind that the Greek case confirms the expectation that in the aftermath of an economic crisis in Southern Europe it would be the inclusionary type of populism that could be expected to dominate. Indeed, SYRIZA’s inclusionary version of populism has been significantly more electorally successful (36.3%) than the exclusionary version represented by the Independent Greeks (4.6%) and Golden Dawn (6.3%), if we take the 2015 elections as a benchmark. That said, the expectation that exclusionary populism will also emerge where the cultural cleavage is activated via the immigration issue is also confirmed.

As far as Portugal is concerned, both radical parties are close to the inclusionary type of populism, as both forces defend the protection of the welfare state – to reduce unemployment and poverty and to improve the

healthcare system – and the lower sectors of society. Both BE and PCP have always supported the expansion of social policies through an increase in public spending (Freire and Lisi 2016). Indeed, one of their core principles has always been to help improve the life conditions of weak socio-economic groups. Finally, they both advocate the nationalisation of certain sectors (i.e. transport) and state control of specific industries, as well as the ‘democratic’ control of the bank, which is manipulated and controlled by foreign capital.

However, when we look at the political and symbolic dimensions, a qualitative analysis unveils some peculiarities worthy of examination. On the one hand, their populist discourse is based more on the fact that ‘real’ democracy was incompatible with the dominance of European institutions and the most powerful countries through austerity policies, rather than on broader political participation (as ‘inclusionary’ populism conventionally entails). On the other hand, the two forces have conceptualised the symbolic dimension in rather different terms. In the communist election manifestos, the term ‘people’ is always used as synonymous with workers within a Marxist theoretical framework. The defence of sovereignty, national dignity and the people’s interests were the main objectives of the alternative based on a left-wing and patriotic government (PCP 2015). By contrast, there are no direct references to the ‘people’ in the BE 2015 election programme.<sup>8</sup> This left-libertarian party has come closer to the ‘new generation’ of left-wing populism – like SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain – characterised by a rejection of a traditional Marxist interpretation of social conflicts and by the attempt to build an ‘interclassist’ approach.

The analysis of the Portuguese case reveals that, although radical left parties have adopted an ‘inclusionary’ discourse, this is not an innovation compared to their ideological and programmatic legacy. The crisis has fostered a populist discourse based on the criticism towards external – i.e. European – actors and the EU democratic deficit, leading these actors to strategically ally with ‘populist’ movements (Aslanidis 2017: 311–12). While the ideological legacy accounts for the different tones and arguments used by the two radical left parties, party strategy was also important in articulating populist arguments.

The qualitative analysis for the Spanish parties resembles to a great extent that of the Portuguese ones, at least in terms of the domestic dimension. The electoral programmes of UP-IU and Podemos were characterised by their intense pro-redistributive proposals, their defence of civic and political liberties, their emphasis on democratic participation and their opposition to restrictive immigration policies (Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2018; Torreblanca 2015). No exclusionary proposals were

included in the 2015 and 2016 electoral programmes of the two national parties adopting the most populist discourses according to holistic grading analysis. The electoral programmes of Podemos and IU-UP emphasised the systemic association between political elites, large firms and financial capital. By contrast, neither xenophobic nor anti-EU statements were present in the manifestos of these two political actors. The Podemos programmes for 2015 and 2016 proposed the restructuring of the Spanish debt so that banking institutions would pay back the loans they received from the European Stability Mechanism. They also proposed the overhaul of the EU stability pact and the reform of the statutes of the European Central Bank so that the fight against unemployment would become one of its main goals (Podemos 2016: 134, 136). However, they also proposed the development of a common EU fiscal policy and of an ambitious EU budget (Podemos 2016: 136). Podemos policy proposals were remarkably inclusionary in the political and symbolic domains, demanding the access of immigrants to full social benefits and protection. In general, our content analysis confirms the absence of exclusionary populism in the Spanish party system (at least at the national level) and the inclusionary, redistributive and libertarian character of Podemos and IU-UP's populism.

The statistical analysis of the associations between populism levels and ideological and programmatic party positions (Polk *et al.* 2017) allows us to summarise and compare some of the main features of populist discourses in new Southern European democracies. In the first place, extreme or radical parties clearly show higher levels of populism than moderate parties, as shown by the +0.66 Pearson correlation between populism scores and an indicator of left–right radicalism based on the 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk *et al.* 2017; see also Rooduijn *et al.* 2014). This also shows that populism can be used as a discursive resource by groups with very different thick ideologies. There are however some important differences between Greece and the two Iberian countries. In the latter there is a very strong association between left–right party positions (Polk *et al.* 2017) and populism scores (Pearson correlation of  $-0.81$  for all Iberian parties). By contrast, in Greece this association is entirely absent. That is, while Iberian populisms have a predominantly leftist character (Gómez-Reino and Plaza-Colodro 2018; Lisi and Borghetto 2018), Greek populism is equally present at both extremes of the ideological spectrum. Overall, however, parties with higher populism levels tend to be materially inclusionary and pro-redistributive: The Pearson correlation index between populist scores and the positions of parties in the redistribution versus market dimension (Polk *et al.* 2017) equals  $-0.56$ . This association is even stronger when we restrict the

analysis to the Iberian cases ( $r = -0.73$ ). Finally, the association between populism and party positions regarding immigration and multiculturalism is non-existent at the Southern European level (Pearson correlations of  $-0.14$  and  $-0.07$  respectively), but it is strong for the Iberian parties (correlations of  $-0.73$  and  $-0.72$  respectively). In other words, parties with higher levels of populism tend to be more favourable to immigration and multiculturalism in Portugal and Spain. Again, these data reveal the presence of important differences in the substantive correlates of populist appeals between Greece and the two Iberian countries.

## Conclusion

This contribution explores the use that political parties in the new Southern Europe have made of populist discourse after the onset of the Great Recession. Our article is based on a set of interrelated expectations regarding cross-temporal, cross-partisan and cross-national variations in the uses of populism in Greece, Portugal and Spain. In the first place, we assumed that the social malaise triggered by the European crisis had led to a substantial increase in the presence of populist elements in party discourses. In the second place, based on the ideational theory on populism and previous comparative analyses, we assumed that populist elements would be more prevalent among ideologically extreme parties (both right and left) and challenger parties opposing well-established political players. We also assumed that, given the severe social costs imposed by economic crisis and austerity policies, populist discourses would have a predominantly inclusionary character in the material, redistributive domain. However, when political-cultural issues (such as immigration or European integration) had been previously activated by political actors, populist discourses could also take a xenophobic (or nationalist) and culturally exclusionary character. Finally, as far as cross-national differences are concerned, we also expected that current changes would not definitively erase previous contrasts between Greece and the two Iberian countries regarding the intensity of populist discourse, and that the uses of populism would continue to be more frequent in the former case. We have used the holistic grading of party manifestos to evaluate these claims empirically.

Our expectation regarding the evolution of populism works relatively well in the case of Spain, only moderately in the case of Portugal, and not at all in the case of Greece. In the latter case, levels of populism were relatively stable between 2007 and 2015. In Spain supply-side populism increased substantially from 2008 to 2015. However, weighted populism grew moderately from 2008 to 2011, and then remained at a very similar

level in the 2015 elections. Supply-side populism experienced a substantial increase also in Portugal, especially from 2005 to 2009, and the scores show an overall stability in the subsequent period. In general, these results show that there is not a shared pattern of evolution leading to higher populism levels as a result of the Great Recession. Rather, the interaction between exogenous shocks and domestic logics and legacies has shaped the evolution of populism in these three countries.

As far as cross-partisan variations in the levels of populism are concerned, our findings confirm the expectation that populism is associated to challenger parties, which adopt populist frames to criticise mainstream forces and erode their popular support. We also corroborate that there is a strong association between ideological radicalism and degree of populism. As for the inclusionary–exclusionary character of populist discourses, our qualitative case discussion showed the prevalence of materially inclusive, redistributive proposals among the parties employing populist rhetoric elements. This means that, in general, parties that sympathise more with the populist cause tend to be more pro-redistributive, and if we focus on the Iberian peninsula this association becomes particularly strong. As indicated previously, this phenomenon can be explained not only by the dramatic effects of the austerity policies implemented in these three countries, but also by the persistence of the socio-economic cleavage as the main dimension of party competition and the previous lack of party system responsiveness on the left side of the political spectrum. However, the Greek case also shows the possibility of parties adopting explicitly exclusionary populist discourses in the symbolic, polity boundary dimension, a fact that can be connected to the greater salience of immigration, its previous politicisation in this country, and the presence of political entrepreneurs on the right and far right (ANEL, LAOS, Golden Dawn) who over the course of the crisis engaged in competition over the anti-immigration vote (Ellinas 2013: 557).

Finally, our data show that despite the attenuation of cross-national differences, the use of populist rhetoric has remained substantially higher in Greece than in Portugal and Spain. This endorses the path-dependent interpretation that national legacies matter, and that the previous and successful activation of populist styles that characterises ‘populist democracies’ (Pappas 2014a, 2014b) may have created a persistent pattern of populist rhetoric in party competition. From this viewpoint, our analysis suggests that ‘populist democracies’ not only entail lasting and path-dependent dynamics, but also shape the strategy and discourse of mainstream parties. Despite this, strategic choices are also key for understanding cross-time variations, for example the fact that parties in opposition moving to government are prone to reduce

populist rhetoric and vice versa. Overall, the findings lend support to the dilemma between responsible and responsive parties magisterially elaborated by Mair (2011).

There are several broad implications that we can draw from our findings. The first is that populist discourse is a complex phenomenon that can be associated with different substantive policy proposals and ideological frames (Taggart 2017). Indeed, we also find examples of the exclusionary type of populism in Southern Europe, characterised by the prevalence of inclusionary populism. Even more interestingly, we do find some important differences within the inclusionary version of populism (see also Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2018). This means that it is dangerous to characterise the populist phenomenon in global terms, as the specific country setting is key to understanding its content and strategy. The second important implication is related to party system change. Wolinetz (2018) has recently noticed that the use of populist discourse by political parties is associated more often than not with an 'outsider' status and that it is much rarer among mainstream parties. However, favourable contextual (e.g. 'hard' times) and historical conditions may also lead to both the adoption of populist discourses by mainstream parties and to party system change (e.g. Greece, Italy, Spain). Again, this shows that the evolution of populism and its effects on party systems result from a complex, conjunctural combination of contingent, structural and historical factors.

Although ideational theory goes a long way to understanding cross-national, cross-time and cross-partisan variations, it does not explain in and of itself the success of populist parties. This is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that this study cannot address. One interesting puzzle in this regard is the lack of party system innovation of the Portuguese case. Our findings show that the protest and populist components of the two radical left parties may have channelled voters' dissatisfaction with mainstream parties. But there are certainly other factors at play, such as voters' demobilisation (Morlino and Raniolo 2017), the lack of populist leaders (Marchi 2013), the anti-populist approach of mainstream media (Salgado 2018) or the high polarisation of the party system.<sup>9</sup>

This point is related to one limitation of the present study, namely that we focus on populism on the supply-side party level. This means that a partially different picture may emerge if we look at citizens' attitudes, as other studies have already done (e.g. Akkerman *et al.* 2014; Schultz *et al.* 2018; Tsatsanis *et al.* 2018 for the Greek case). Furthermore, the analysis of leaders' speeches might provide us with a more complete and more nuanced picture of the use of populist discourses within these three cases.

The scope of this analysis is limited to just three South European countries. However, this focused comparison has both comparative and theoretical interest. On the one hand, comparative empirical studies on the characteristics and dynamics of populism in these countries are needed. On the other, this analysis can enrich our understanding of the factors conditioning the evolution and the substantive political content of populism in Europe after the Great Recession. Future research should aim to expand the empirical analysis both geographically and longitudinally, as well as to assess how and when populist rhetoric leads to electoral success.

## Notes

1. This paper deals mainly with populism on the supply-side level, i.e. looking at populist discourse of the party as a whole. We are aware that this phenomenon can be examined from other 'angles' – e.g. looking at leaders' discourse or citizens' attitudes.
2. Both dimensions are included in Kriesi and Pappas' (2015) work. According to their indicators, Italy seems to diverge from new Southern European democracies as it did not experience a deep economic crisis (only a political one).
3. Salgado and Stavrakakis (2018) have examined populist political communication in Southern Europe, mainly from a media research perspective. Gómez-Reino and Plaza-Colodro (2018) have also addressed the evolution of populism in Portugal and Spain. Their work reveals the leftist character of Iberian populism, but their analysis focuses on the presence of Eurosceptic appeals among populist parties. The focus and scope of their analysis are therefore different from those of this article.
4. The concept of 'challenger party' refers to those actors that have never participated in government coalitions (see Hobolt and Tilley 2016; van der Wardt *et al.* 2014).
5. Unfortunately, we could not rely on speeches because this material is not available for the three countries and for the period before and after the crisis.
6. Polk *et al.* (2017) report a +0.51 correlation between the CHES anti-elitism indicator and Rooduijn and Pauwels's scores for the parties in the Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom.
7. We know that in the January 2015 elections populist attitudes had a positive impact on voting for SYRIZA, ANEL and the KKE (Andreadis *et al.* 2018), but we lack comparable empirical evidence for previous elections and cannot ascertain whether the diffusion or the electoral effects of populist attitudes changed across time.
8. One of the few references to the people in BE's manifestos can be found in 2011 electoral programme, when it uses the term 'people' to identify the victim of the bailout negotiation (BE 2011: 29).
9. According to Dalton's index, Portugal displayed higher levels of polarisation than Greece and Spain during the crisis period (data available through the ParlGov website: <http://www.parlgov.org/>).

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Proof

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# Assessing the diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe

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## ABSTRACT

The more populism enters public debates, the more it needs close scrutiny. Central and Eastern Europe offers a useful context for exploring the diversity of parties identified as populist. Anti-establishment rhetoric provides a suitable conceptual starting point because of its pervasive role in the region's political discourse. Using a new expert survey, this article details the relationship between anti-establishment salience and political positions, showing that anti-establishment parties occupy a full range across both economic and cultural dimensions and many occupy more centrist positions. Narrowing the focus to content analysis of anti-establishment parties' 'thin ideology' in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia, it is concurrently found that for many actors (including those usually labelled as populist) anti-establishment rhetoric is indeed predominant, yet not always extensively combined with other elements of populism: people-centrism and invocation of general will. The findings are important for understanding multiple varieties of anti-establishment politics also beyond the region.

Cases from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE, which for the purposes of this paper includes the 11 states on the eastern edge of the EU with histories of communist rule) demonstrate systemic patterns that can enrich the broader understanding of populist politics as it is practised in contemporary democracies. Central and Eastern Europe is home to a number of political parties that link populism's 'thin ideology' – the expression of the general will of a homogenously virtuous people in opposition to a homogenously corrupt elite (Mudde 2004) – with other ideologies across a broader political spectrum. Several studies suggest that alongside the usual suspects on the radical right (Minkenberg 2015; Mudde 2007; Pirro

2015; Pytlas 2015) and the radical left (March 2007; March and Keith 2016), populist politics in CEE includes parties sometimes termed 'centrist populists' (Pop-Eleches 2010; Učeň 2007) that belong to neither of these categories. The region is also home to parties that adopt only some of the elements related to populism while leaving others behind, resulting in broad anti-establishment discourse in the region which includes not only populism but also technocracy, clientelism and other modes of challenging the existing political elite (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Sikk 2009). An analysis of CEE makes visible the discursive varieties of anti-establishment politics, including populist political communication (Hawkins 2009; Jagers and Walgrave 2007) and highlights the degree to which different actors combine anti-establishment rhetoric with other key elements of populism – people-centrism (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011) and the notion of general will (March 2017) – within their 'thin ideological' discourse.

Central and Eastern European cases offer extensive raw material for studying anti-establishment politics in general and populist politics in particular. Throughout the region, patterns of political instability related to the rise of anti-establishment actors are more than just electoral 'earthquakes'. They seem instead to be a long-term, system-wide phenomenon brought about by constantly (re-)emerging new challengers to more-or-less established parties. The effect in some cases was a creation of a sub-party system of 'self-sustaining, cyclical' anti-establishment supply (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015: 68). Contemporary scholarship suggests several contextual explanations for changes in support of anti-establishment parties (including populist ones) including economic and political crises, corruption (real and perceived), as well as the instability of party systems (Engler 2016; Hanley and Sikk 2016; Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Overall, however, these studies reveal a complex relationship between particular conditions and populist success that is at best 'fuzzy' (Kriesi and Pappas 2015).

Explanations for the growth of anti-establishment politics are also difficult to establish with precision in Central and Eastern Europe because both crises and the anti-establishment parties have been present from the beginning of democratization. Whereas the 2008 economic crisis in Western Europe initiated a period of relatively high unemployment, austerity policies, personal and systemic financial uncertainty, and increased distrust in political leaders that might explain political change, all of these symptoms were already old news to the inhabitants of Central and Eastern Europe who had experienced them on and off for nearly two decades (Kornai 2006). Likewise, the region was long accustomed to politicisation of socio-cultural conflicts, mainstream diffusion of radical right threat narratives against ethnic and social minorities, and framing contests over collective identity issues in the midst of mainstream party

competition (Pytlas 2015) by ambitious political entrepreneurs who already had significant practice in the art of ‘performing crisis’ (Moffitt 2016: 9). External events may have propelled some changes, but the region was already rich in active political agents who had learned how to pull those triggers as part of their anti-establishment political initiatives. Observing the many programmatic and discursive varieties of populist political agency in Central and Eastern Europe can therefore provide us with crucial lessons on patterns that are increasingly gaining relevance for party systems in the West and elsewhere around the world.

This article explores the varieties of anti-establishment and specifically populist politics in Central and Eastern Europe from both a programmatic and a discursive perspective. It analyses how parties combine the anti-establishment element of populism with characteristics of thicker ideological streams, and how the internal elements of populism are themselves combined with one another in varying degrees and combinations. Our motivation is both conceptual-analytical and empirical. First, instead of contrasting populism as a ‘thin ideology’ with populism as ‘discourse’, we instead underscore their complementarity as multiple dimensions that can find creative and versatile application in the hands of populist political agency. Second, as there have been few systematic comparative tests of assumptions about multiple varieties of populism in CEE, we analyse them empirically by triangulating quantitative and qualitative analysis. Given the aforementioned conceptual premises of extant research, we begin with the broad category of anti-establishment politics in general, analysing the patterns of combination between this key ‘thin’ feature of populism and different ‘thick’ ideological positions not only on the radical left and right, but also in a variety of spaces often identified as the ‘centre’. We empirically test previous claims of left-centre-right programmatic variety (Učeň 2007) by looking at the distribution of anti-establishment parties in the ideological space across the region, combining a new expert survey on parties’ use of anti-establishment rhetoric in parliamentary electoral campaigns (Engler *et al.* forthcoming) with the Chapel Hill expert survey on party positions (Bakker *et al.* 2015a, 2015b). In the second part of the paper we narrow the extension and widen the intension of the observed phenomena (Sartori 1970) with an in-depth analysis of the degree to which anti-establishment parties combine the three narrative building blocks of populism. For this purpose, we focus on all major anti-establishment actors in Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic and conduct a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Content Analysis of their social media electoral campaign discourse.

Overall, we find not only that anti-establishment parties occupy a wide variety of positions on the ideologically ‘thick’ dimensions of culture and

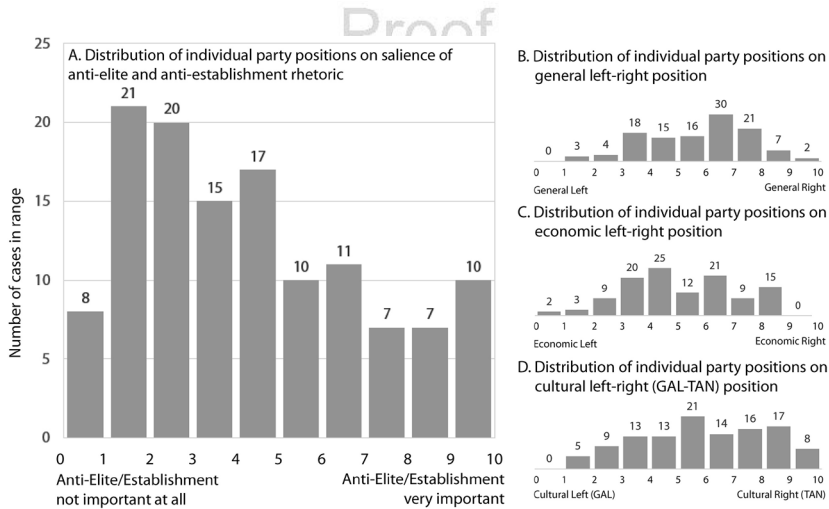
economics, but also that they exhibit considerable variation in constellations of narrative elements that are associated with the 'thin' ideology of populism. Our analysis provides comparative empirical evidence that in Central and Eastern Europe, anti-establishment rhetoric can be found across the ideological spectrum (including the centre) and constitutes a predominant discursive building block of these actors' 'thin ideological' supply. At the same time, anti-establishment claims are not necessarily linked to other key elements of populist discourse such as people-centrism or, most notably, the general will.

### **Anti-establishment politics in the ideological landscape of Central and Eastern Europe**

Before looking deeper into the more complex elements of populism, it is useful to begin with the category of anti-establishment politics which exhibits fewer dimensions and includes a larger number of cases. Expert survey data shows that anti-establishment politics has distinct contours within the party systems of the region and that some of these patterns run counter to expectations.

By combining data from a new expert survey that measures the salience of anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric (Engler *et al.* forthcoming) with data from the Chapel Hill expert survey (Bakker *et al.* 2015a, 2015b) it is possible to explore how the use of anti-establishment rhetoric is distributed among Central and Eastern European parties of different ideological camps. The new expert survey, conducted in winter 2015/2016, asked experts to indicate the salience of anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric<sup>1</sup> of political parties in their electoral campaign on a scale from 0 (not important at all) to 10 (extremely important). The dataset fully covers all national parliamentary campaigns of all political parties between 2009 and 2016 in the 11 EU member states of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>2</sup> In total, 122 experts (11.1 experts per country; from 5 experts in Latvia to 18 experts in the Czech Republic) participated in the survey. The complementary Chapel Hill expert survey measures expert assessments of party positions on a unidimensional left–right scale (*lrscale*) and in a two-dimensional ideological space with an economic (*lrecon*) and a cultural dimension (*galtan*). A combination of the two datasets allows for a comparison of the ideological positions with the anti-establishment rhetoric of political parties between 2009 and 2014.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1 provides the overall distribution of party positions on four questions and shows a wide distribution of locations on the anti-establishment position (with a peak near the lower end of the distribution) and a roughly symmetrical, centre-peak distribution of positions on the general,

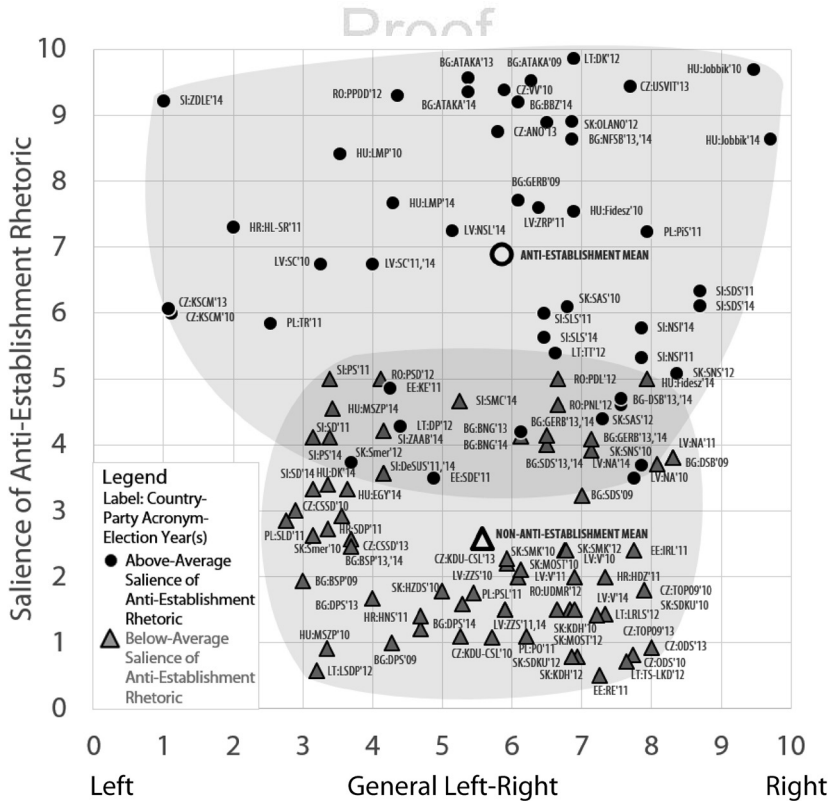


**Figure 1.** Distribution of individual party positions on anti-establishment and left-right axes for political parties in Central and Eastern Europe, 2009–2014.

Source: Engler *et al.* (forthcoming); Bakker *et al.* (2015a, 2015b).

economic and cultural left–right question (where GAL stands for Green/Alternative/Libertarian, approximating the cultural left and TAN stands for Traditional/Authoritarian/Nationalist, approximating the cultural right).

Figure 2 looks at the use of anti-establishment rhetoric by all major parties in all CEE elections between 2009 and 2014 according to the parties' left–right orientations. Since levels of anti-establishment rhetoric differ from country to country, Figure 2 also uses dark, circular markers to identify those parties that are above average compared to other parties in individual national party systems. The figure clearly shows a high diversity of orientation among those parties categorised by the experts as giving more salience to anti-establishment rhetoric than average for a given election (and for brevity we refer to those here as 'anti-establishment parties' or AEPs, though it is important to note that the classification relates to parties in particular elections rather than for their entire existence). We find such parties on the far left, on the far right, and everywhere in between. There is no correlation between the salience of anti-establishment rhetoric and the position on a left–right scale ( $r = 0.017$ ). The lack of linear correlation along the left–right axis, however, fails to address the T-shaped pattern of cases that is visible in the scattergram, which shows that anti-establishment parties range from far left to far right (1.0 to 9.7 on the 11-point scale), but parties with lower use of anti-establishment claims occupy a much narrower range (2.7 to 8.3 on the same scale). Many parties follow the predictions of the literature on populism by



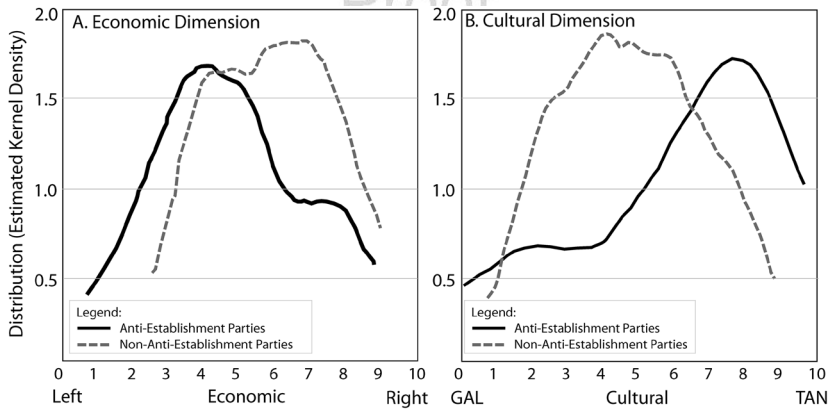
**Figure 2.** The salience of anti-establishment rhetoric by political parties in Central and Eastern Europe by position on the general left–right dimension.

Note: Because the threshold for ‘above average’ and ‘below average’ salience is based on the average for the five strongest parties in each individual election it is possible for the same raw salience score to fall in the above- or below-average category depending on the overall salience in the election itself.

Source: Engler *et al.* (forthcoming); Bakker *et al.* (2015a, 2015b).

combining anti-establishment rhetoric with thick ideologies on the far left and far right. A striking finding, however, is the high number of AEPs that are *not* located in the ideological extremes, and ideologically fit into the category of neither the radical right nor the radical left.

Some of the apparent centrism is the result of the common but inadequate method of categorising parties along a single left–right dimension. A single dimension makes it difficult to place parties such as Bulgaria’s xenophobic, but economically leftist party Attack (Ataka). It is therefore necessary to take a closer look at the distribution of salience of the party positions on the two main dimensions of political competition: an economic dimension defined in terms of left versus right, and a cultural dimension defined in terms of GAL and TAN.



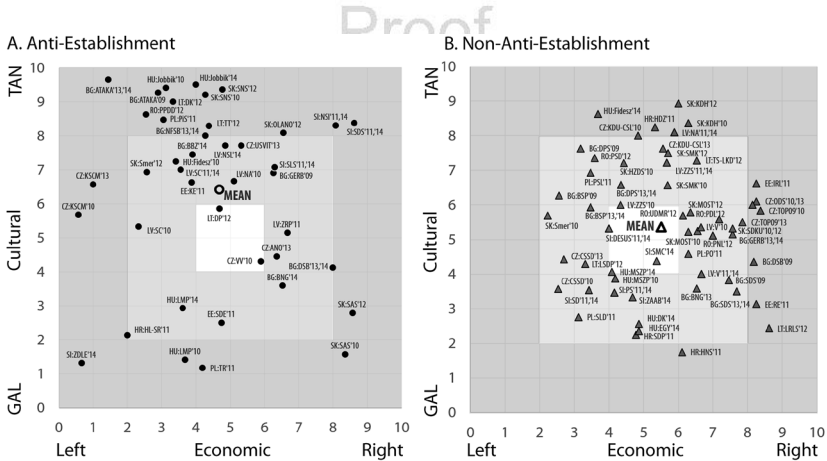
**Figure 3.** Distribution (density curve) of anti-establishment parties and non-anti-establishment parties over the economic and cultural dimensions.

Note: Anti-Establishment Party: above average salience of anti-establishment rhetoric; Non-Anti-Establishment Party: below average salience of anti-establishment rhetoric.

Source: Engler *et al.* (forthcoming); Bakker *et al.* (2015a, 2015b).

Figure 3 compares the distribution across the economic and cultural dimensions of parties with above-average and below-average salience of anti-establishment rhetoric. The figure suggests that the above-average parties, which we refer to as anti-establishment parties, are more likely to be found on the centre-left on economic questions and on the traditionalist/authoritarian side of cultural questions; but to assess the full picture, we must put both dimensions together.

Figure 4a illustrates the ideological distribution of AEPs while Figure 4b shows the distribution of non-AEPs.<sup>4</sup> The difference in patterns clarifies the pattern in Figures 2 and 3: Non-AEPs are generally located closer to the centre and only rarely take positions that are close to the end of one or both dimensions. AEPs have a relatively similar mean (especially on economic questions) but are far more widely spread across both dimensions of the graph. Some fall near the far-left pole of the economic dimension, such as the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) and the Slovenian Unified Left (ZDLE), while others fall near the TAN pole of the cultural dimension that is usually associated with the radical right such as Bulgaria's Ataka, the Movement for a Better Hungary (commonly known as Jobbik) or the Slovak National Party (SNS). A large number of AEPs, however, occupy the same ideological space as their non-AEP counterparts while others represent positions far from those associated either with the cultural-driven definition of the populist radical right or the economic-driven definition of the populist radical left, such as Poland's culturally left-wing Your Movement (TR) or Slovakia's pro-market Freedom and Solidarity (SaS).<sup>5</sup> This finding also



**Figure 4.** The distribution of anti-establishment parties and non-anti-establishment parties in the two-dimensional space of party competition in Central and Eastern Europe (economic left/right, GAL-TAN).

Note: Anti-Establishment Party: above average salience of anti-establishment rhetoric; Non-Anti-Establishment Party: below average salience of anti-establishment rhetoric.

Source: Engler *et al.* (forthcoming); Bakker *et al.* (2015a, 2015b).

corresponds with emerging literature which claims that many of the successful anti-establishment parties in Central and Eastern Europe, including populist ones, are located within the ideological mainstream<sup>6</sup> (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Pop-Eleches 2010; Učeň 2007). Commonly cited examples of *centrist AEPs* include the Czech Republic’s Alliance of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO) or Lithuania’s National Resurrection Party (TPP) with no clear ideological platform, and also include parties such as the moderate-left Politics Can Be Better (LMP) in Hungary, or the centre-right Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB).<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, other parties with strong anti-establishment views fall clearly into space often associated with populism, but do so in a way that undermines attempts at a binary distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary populism. On the socio-cultural dimension, some parties that take an exclusionary, traditionalist-nationalist stance seek supporters through redistributive economic policies as long as they benefit only the ‘in-group’ (cf. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). This combination of left-wing economic policies and authoritarian/nativist stances appears to be more widespread in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West but seems to be expanding its geographic reach (see Kitschelt 1992; Marks *et al.* 2006; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2009). Parties with this ideological profile occupy a wide range on the unidimensional left–right spectrum in Figure 2, including the social-conservative right such as Poland’s Law and Justice

(PiS), the Hungarian Fidesz (Pytlas 2015; Vachudova 2008), nationalist communists (such as the Bulgarian Socialist Party [BSP], or the Czech KSČM), and even mainstream left parties such as Direction (Smer) in Slovakia or Romania's Social Democratic Party (PSD) (cf. Pop-Eleches 2008; Pytlas 2013). These mixed cases, along with the AEPs that are moderate on both dimensions, illustrate the need to approach inclusionary and exclusionary populism carefully, treating them not as rigid, exclusive categories but as positions on two dimensions of a multidimensional frame (cf. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013) that in practice are often subject to stretching and blurring.

The multifaceted nature of the dimensions, and particularly the complexity of the definitions behind those concepts (not to mention the problem of choosing a clear threshold between radical and non-radical), suggest caution in assigning these categories to particular parties, but the evidence clearly suggests that in Central and Eastern Europe, anti-establishment rhetoric extends far beyond categories of the populist radical right and left originally derived from research on Western European democracies.

### **Anti-establishment politics and the extent of populism in Central and Eastern Europe**

Our evidence confirms that anti-establishment politics in Central and Eastern Europe has multiple faces and is not a phenomenon constrained to the ideological extremes or to one ideological camp. While this is a valuable insight in itself, it points to the need for a deeper exploration of patterns of anti-establishment discourse, particularly its combination with other building blocks of populism. Observing the extent to which anti-establishment actors are populist (if at all) is important not only in the cases of the radical right and radical left (March and Keith 2016; Mudde 2007; Rydgren 2017), but also for less-studied parties nearer the centre that also lean heavily on their opposition to the establishment. While some scholars refer to non-radical anti-establishment parties in CEE exclusively as '*centrist populists*' (Pop-Eleches 2010; Učeň 2007), others argue that not all of these actors are in fact populist, instead describing such cases as '*anti-establishment reform parties*' (Hanley and Sikk 2016; Sikk 2009). A more systematic empirical test of these categorisations requires a closer look into party discourses deployed by anti-establishment political entrepreneurs from the left, centre and right in CEE.

This step of our analysis is informed by several extant discourse-analytical attempts to assess elements of populism (see Caiani and Graziano 2016; Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009; Hawkins 2009; March 2017;

Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011) that employ the understanding of populism as a 'thin ideology' (Canovan 2002; Mudde 2004). In line with Mudde (2004), populist discourse can be seen as a combination of three elements: general people-centrism, general anti-establishment rhetoric, and a claim that politics should express a monist *volonté générale*. A measurement of appeals to the general will is nevertheless not always isolated in previous studies that empirically identify populism only as a combination of anti-elitism with people-centrism (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). We therefore agree with March (2017) that it is crucial to account for all three discursive elements of populist discourse, for reasons of both conceptual scrutiny and empirical clearness. Identifying general people-centrism allows it to be separated from specific class-based discourse. Measuring the prominence of general anti-establishment claims helps to identify 'merely' demotic discourse, i.e. non-antagonist rhetoric of closeness to a homogenous 'people' (cf. March 2017). In turn, accounting for invocations of general will allows to better distinguish specifically populist discourses from solely technocratic (Caramani 2017), as well as 'merely' demotic or clientelist rhetoric that can also be articulated by non-populists (March 2017; Mudde 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Capturing this narrative diversity requires close attention to a large number of statements from each party. It is therefore necessary to use a restricted but representative subset of the cases above.

The following section relies on a content analysis of social media discourse of significant anti-establishment parties during recent parliamentary election campaigns in the Czech Republic (2013), Poland (2015) and Slovakia (2016). The case selection method follows Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) and includes cases that allow observation of the broad variety of anti-establishment politics across ideological positions while not differing significantly from the region as a whole. Although the three countries under scrutiny occupy a compact geographic space within the overall sample, they are nevertheless broadly representative of the region's parties: the overall average position of these countries' parties on the economic left-right, GAL-TAN and anti-establishment measures is statistically indistinguishable from the other countries in the region and the standard deviations of party positions are also extremely similar between the sample and the whole region. Within the three selected countries, the sample of parties chosen for the content analysis consists of political actors that in the latest election gained parliamentary representation or received at least 3% of vote and were attributed an above-average salience of anti-establishment rhetoric (salience above country mean, see Table A1 in the Online appendix).<sup>8</sup> In two cases in Poland continuity issues with party social media made it preferable to analyse the social

media content of the party leaders: Robert Winnicki of Ruch Narodowy (RN) and Janusz Korwin-Mikke of the Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic-Liberty and Hope (KORWiN).<sup>9</sup>

Our measurement of claims related to populist discourse proceeds by means of rule-guided Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDA) (Kuckartz 2007), a technique previously applied to empirical analysis of radical right politics in the region (Pytlas 2015). The CAQDA follows general principles of rule-guided qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000), in that the core non-automated, interpretative coding procedure is systematically controlled by clearly operationalised, theory-based analytical categories. The advantage of rule-guided CAQDA is that it allows us to strike a balance between nuanced, hermeneutic identification of narrative patterns within party supply and a systematic quantifiable comparative analysis (cf. Pytlas 2015) that helps to account for contextual and tactical variety of anti-establishment supply both within and across ideological positions. A fine-grained content analysis that 'takes populism apart' (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009) by disaggregating its particular discursive building blocks furthermore allows us to isolate the anti-establishment character of party supply that is not necessarily people-centred or does not invoke a uniform *volonté générale*.

Our analytical categories follow the ideational definition of populism by Mudde (2004). We account for articulated fundamental division between 'the People' and 'the Elite', as well as arguments that politics should express a uniform 'general will'. Anti-establishment rhetoric is operationalised through a challenge to 'established politics' or 'elites' in their homogenous or *pars pro toto* portrayal (cf. March 2017), such as 'standard parties', 'mainstream media' or 'big capital'. We exclude references to particular groups or institutions such as a specific party, newspaper or bank unless these were rhetorically exhibited as systemic representatives of antagonistic 'established politics' or 'elite'. This allows better control for contextual variety and tactical blurring while still clearly distinguishing general anti-establishment rhetoric from specific anti-incumbent or anti-elitist claims.

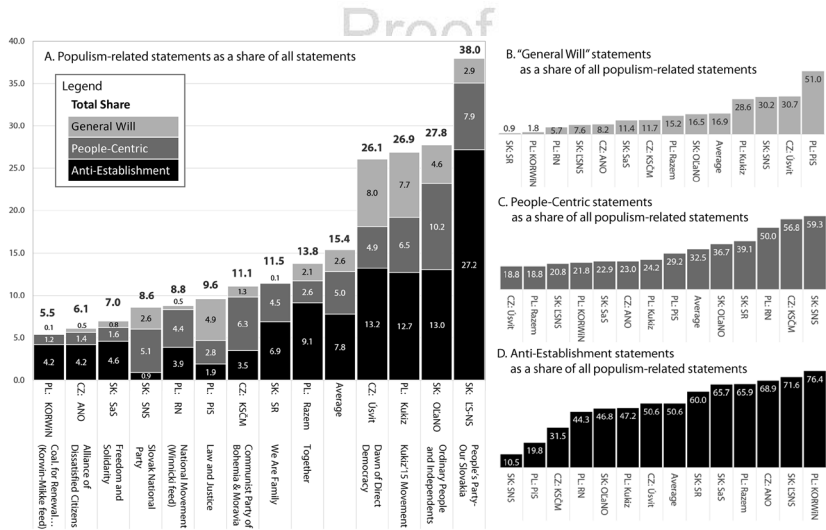
People-centred statements describe claims that positively refer to a homogenous 'people'. They also include references to related notions that imply a collective character of the people, such as 'the citizens', 'the sovereign' or 'the nation'. This category excludes diffuse appeals to 'us' or 'you' where the subject is not clearly distinguishable, as well as, again, claims that reference a subgroup of the population such as 'workers' or 'young people', except where these represent the entirety such as 'all families' or 'common people' (cf. March 2017).

Invocations of general will are operationalised by positive references to popular sovereignty in its monist and majoritarian interpretation,

including appeals to popular control and demands for referendums. Following March (2017), these claims were distinguished from people-centrism and coded as the general will only if the reference to 'the people' had an action-oriented normative emphasis, such as 'our politics is guided by what the people want'. If the claim accentuated problems of 'the people', but was not action-oriented (such as 'the common people are struggling every day'), it was instead coded as people-centrism.

The textual corpus selected to identify these categories consists of public Facebook status posts of the selected actors gathered for a narrow time period around the election (three months prior and one week following). The choice of medium reflects the role of social media as one of key channels of political communication for radical parties and anti-establishment challengers (see Aalberg *et al.* 2016; Caiani and Parenti 2013; Gerbaudo 2014 among many others). Social media campaigning is crucial, especially for newly founded anti-establishment parties that lack organisational resources such as a press office, as well as those that (whether for political or organisational reasons) draft only rudimentary party manifestos prior to the election. The analysis of official social media outlets, most particularly Facebook fan pages, furthermore captures a 'political conversation *about a party* that is actually under the *control of the party*' (Arzheimer 2015: 548, italics original). It thus fulfils similar functions to press releases: presenting 'a picture of party-refined and party-desired impact on public opinion' (Pytlas 2015: 92) and thereby is better than the more static positions of party manifestos at capturing a fine-grained and dynamic picture of various patterns and adjustments of discursive strategies deployed by anti-establishment challengers in the course of the campaign. The coding unit is a quasi-sentence (Budge *et al.* 2001; Kleinnijenhuis and Pennings 2001). A quasi-sentence is 'an argument or phrase which is the verbal expression of one idea or meaning' (Klingemann *et al.* 2006: xxiii). As shown by March (2017), coding quasi-sentences allows us to draw a more nuanced picture of articulated claims. All quasi-sentences not attributed to any discursive element of populism were coded into a separate category to allow comparison between anti-establishment, people-centrism and invocations of general will relative to all statements during a particular electoral campaign.

The analysis demonstrates the wide diversity of anti-establishment politics in the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia. The picture of this manifold variety emerges already from a first descriptive look at the extent to which particular actors deployed elements of populism in their electoral campaigns. As Figure 5 demonstrates, particular anti-establishment actors varied in the intensity with which they legitimised their supply with 'thin' building blocks of populism. Of the analysed parties,



**Figure 5.** Elements of populism as a share of all social media campaign claims in anti-establishment parties of Central and Eastern Europe. Source: Pytlas (forthcoming).

claims related to populism constitute a considerable part of political supply especially for the Slovak Ordinary People and Independents (OLaNO) and People's Party Our Slovakia (LSNS), as well as the Czech Republic's Dawn of Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura (Úsvit) and the movement of Paweł Kukiz (Kukiz) in Poland. On the other hand, for some primarily anti-establishment actors such as KORWiN in Poland, ANO in the Czech Republic and SaS in Slovakia, the usage of other claims related to populist rhetoric in their election campaigns is minimal. Particular actors differed significantly in the extent to which they used and combined the particular elements of populism *within* their 'thin ideological' discourse.

As Figure 5 shows, for the majority of the cases under study, the general anti-establishment rhetoric formed the largest share of their populism-related discourse, but there is significant diversity even within the ideological camps. Of the economically left-wing anti-establishment parties, the Czech KSCM puts much less focus on challenging 'the elite' than the newly emergent Polish party Razem, which adopted a general 'anti-partyism' platform comparable to Spain's We Can (Podemos). Anti-establishment claims also tended to dominate among more economically and culturally centrist parties. Of these only the Slovak OLaNO (whose position on any dimension is hard to define) exhibited a significant share of other populism-related claims to supplement its anti-establishment positions. Among parties on the right, the overall patterns also differed. A relatively even distribution of categories (like that of OLaNO) appeared in the statements of Úsvit in the Czech Republic, and in those of Kukiz in

Poland, whose main anti-establishment thrust was directed against what the party leader described as a detached and tribalistic ‘party-crazy’ (e.g. Kukiz 2015a). For several actors with a TAN orientation associated with the ‘radical right’ – especially the LSNS and KORWiN – anti-establishment rhetoric constituted the predominant narrative within the ‘thin ideological’ discourse. This confirms our findings that although anti-establishment appeals are somewhat more likely toward the TAN pole of the cultural spectrum, they can be found across the ideological space.

In the more established parties on the right – SNS in Slovakia and PiS in Poland – attacks on the homogenous ‘elite’ played a smaller role than other core elements of populism, in part because these parties focused on a specific rival rather than employing a general anti-establishment campaign. The SNS under the new leadership of Andrej Danko strategically moderated its supply of general anti-establishment rhetoric and instead focused its ire against a relatively close competitor, the Christian Democratic Movement, and against an easy target, the party Bridge (Most-Híd) which had strong ties in the Hungarian minority. In Poland, PiS targeted its traditional nemesis, the ruling Civic Platform (PO). During its electoral campaign of 2015, PiS also strategically toned down its radical rhetoric. During the electoral campaigns it framed its self-portrayal as a challenger force against the elites of ‘liberal Poland’ reified by the PO (cf. Pytlas and Kossack 2015; Szczerbiak 2007) through a moderated, specific anti-incumbent rather than general anti-establishment lens.

These findings compel further exploration of other populist elements in the discourse of anti-establishment parties. Figure 5 suggests that relatively few parties focused their appeals on a ‘people’ defined in homogenous terms. Differences within some ideological camps were again high. On the anti-establishment economic left, the predominantly demotist discourse of the left-authoritarian KSČM in the Czech Republic was much more pronounced than that of the ‘New Left’ Razem which to a stronger extent articulated classical socialist interest-based politics focused on particular occupational groups. Anti-establishment parties on the economic right also tended to avoid people-centrism and instead made appeals to various societal groups rather than to a homogenous ‘people’. ANO for example referred to employers, seniors, single parents or (job-seeking) school graduates (cf. ANO 2013a). On the cultural right the people-centred discourse was more common and appeared frequently in statements by parties such as SNS in Slovakia and Winnicki’s RN in Poland, most often in the specific form of a homogenous ‘nation’ standing in for a homogenous ‘people’. Other parties took different approaches. Slovakia’s OLaNO constructed its anti-political agenda by pitting a corrupt professional political class against non-political civic activism of a unitary

collective actor made out of 'ordinary persons' while its competitor We Are Family (SR), founded by the businessman Boris Kollár, used clientelist appeals both to a uniform 'People' and to specific groups (the youth, families). SR candidates frequently referenced the 'family' emphasis of the party's name but tended to frame its support for Slovak families mostly in socio-economic terms – 'We seek a radical change in Slovakia, a change for the better so that it could be a joy to live, work and start a family in Slovakia' (cf. Sme Rodina 2016b) – rather than from traditional socio-cultural judgments about what constitutes a morally-appropriate family.

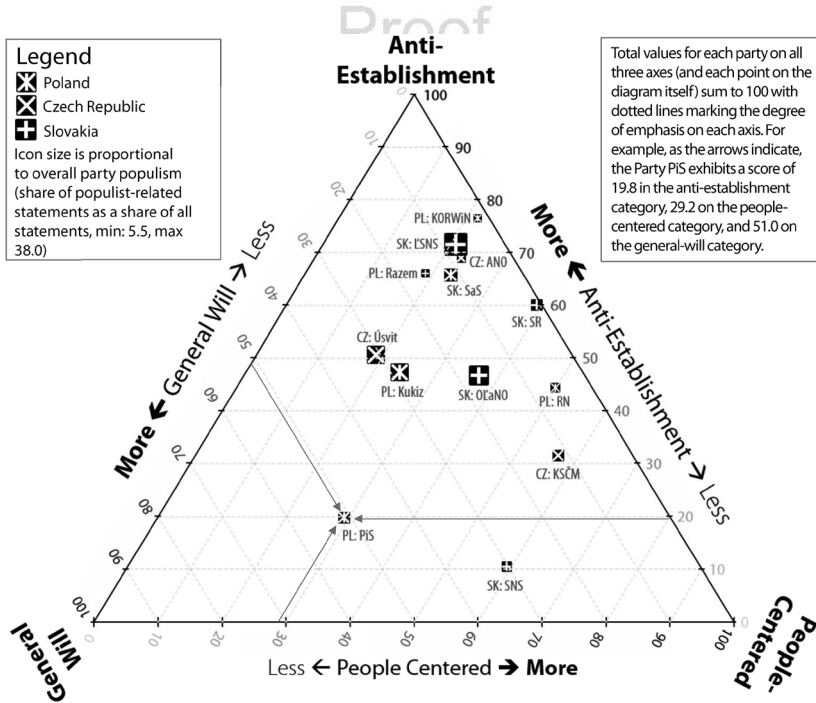
This picture becomes even more refined once references to *volonté générale* are brought into equation. On the left, Razem invoked participative, non-authoritarian calls for citizen empowerment and 'real' popular control of politics (Razem 2015). In the centre, OLaNO presented itself as an expression of non-political civic activism. At the same time, several anti-establishment parties on the cultural right, such as Kukiz, SNS, Úsvit and PiS, indeed put more focus on active expression of the homogenous 'will of the people' to augment their people-centrist and anti-establishment appeals.

For the SNS, these appeals consisted of classical radical right claims to represent 'the national interest'. Other, newer parties such as the Czech Republic's Úsvit as well as the Poland's Kukiz demanded steps to enable direct political representation of a homogenous will of 'the people' while their other ideological positions remained fluid on the TAN borderline of the radical right. During their first parliamentary elections, they articulated nativist positions describing Islam as a threat to the nation state and Europe (cf. Okamura 2013a; Kukiz'15 2015). Concurrently, their most salient issue and distinctive anti-systemic appeal rested in presenting themselves as champions of direct democracy and citizen activation (cf. Okamura 2013a; Kukiz 2015a). After Okamura left Úsvit in 2015 because of severe internal conflict, he went on to create a new party, Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) built on an ideological foundation of overt nativism directed against Islam. SPD won 10.6% of the vote in the 2017 election, marking a political consolidation of Okamura's radical right profile. It remains to be seen whether Kukiz, whose electoral lists and parliamentary caucus included persons who belonged to or were endorsed by the extreme right RN, will follow in Okamura's footsteps. In relative numbers, the party with the most common references to the 'will of the people' was Poland's PiS. After taking power in 2015, the party dropped more moderate aspects of its self-presentation in favour of further pursuit of what it sees as a homogenous *volonté générale*. Claims to politically embody and express the 'general will' quickly became the main

exculpation for government policies leading to the dismantlement of constitutional checks and balances (Pytlas 2018).

On the other hand, as Figure 5 further demonstrates, references to *volonté générale* during their electoral campaigns were marginal for most other anti-establishment parties. For RN and the LSNS, the frequent references to a homogenous 'Nation' rarely translated into the invocation of the 'will of the people'. The discourse of Janusz Korwin-Mikke also avoided references to the general will. The reluctance in his case resulted from his elitist and anti-democratic ideology fuelled by monarchism and extreme libertarianism that led him to self-censor all words referring to the *demos* (e.g. 'd\*\*\*cracy', Korwin-Mikke 2012). Slovakia's SaS, on the other hand, engaged much more in laissez-faire interest-based politics than a claim to represent the will of the people. While Slovakia's SR vowed to help families in need (cf. Sme Rodina 2016a), it did not bind itself to following a homogenous *volonté générale*. Finally, the Czech ANO of billionaire Andrej Babiš, which emerged victorious from the Czech election campaign in 2017 with 29.6% of votes, represents a technocratic rather than populist variant of anti-establishment politics. In the 2013 campaign Babiš argued that he is not a politician, but a manager, and that in order to fix the functioning of the state, the Czech Republic needs someone who could run it just like a company (Kopeček 2016). Babiš tended to portray himself as an amicable philanthropic manager who knows how to care for those in his charge (whether employees or citizens) (cf. ANO 2013b), rather than as a populist *tribunus plebis*.

The summary graph in Figure 6 shows the positions of all parties in this section on all three aspects of populism in a common space. Although all of these parties were classified by the expert survey as anti-establishment parties, the cluster near the upper anti-establishment angle shows the degree to which, for many parties, anti-establishment rhetoric is really the *only* significant populist element, leaving little room for references to the general will or the people. Actors that come closest to a populist discourse, where all elements of this 'thin ideology' were both balanced and used extensively, are Kukiz, Úsvit and OLaNO. These parties focus explicitly on the question of the general will, which in all three cases involves a call for more popular control of government and use of referendums to determine policy. The three oldest parties in the sample show the least attraction to the anti-establishment argument during their electoral campaigns, but subsequently differ on whether to emphasise the general will (PiS) or solely people-centrism, and in the case of the latter to focus on class (KSČM) or ethnicity (SNS). In Poland, Winnicki's extreme right RN emphasized the people (defined in national terms) almost to the same degree as SNS but with more rejection of the



**Figure 6.** Relative frequency of three populism-related reference categories in anti-establishment parties of Central and Eastern Europe. Source: Pytlas (forthcoming).

establishment and less emphasis on the general will. For some parties, anti-establishment appeals were the only identifiable element of populism in absolute terms, and even here the challenge to ‘the corrupt elite’ differed widely between the extreme elitist Korwin-Mikke, the centrist *laissez-faire* SaS and the technocratic ANO.

Central and Eastern Europe thus reveals a significant variety of anti-establishment politics not only across and within left-wing, centre and right-wing ideological positions, but also beyond populism. Most especially, the content analysis provides systematic empirical confirmation of the assumption by Hanley and Sikk (2016): not all centrist anti-establishment parties in CEE are populist – at least with regard to their recent electoral campaign discourse on social media. It is advisable to be cautious about assigning specific categories to political parties because of the inherently dynamic and blurring character of political discourses and extent to which the electoral context and tactics of political actors cause them to select different elements of populism (see the case of PiS), but our qualitative approach helps to control for these factors while retaining conceptual clarity. The evidence corroborates and expands upon the

conceptual findings of March's (2017) case study of the UK. The larger set of anti-establishment cases available in CEE demonstrates the importance of analytically isolating the general will aspect of populism when compared to approaches that measure populism solely as the combination of anti-elitist appeals and general people-centrism (cf. Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). Not only does it allow for a sharper distinction between populist and 'merely' demotic claims (March 2017), but also between populist and 'merely' anti-establishment rhetoric.

While a case can sometimes be made for the use of 'diminished subtypes' of a particular phenomenon, this is less warranted with concepts such as populism that are already contested and fraught with disagreement. Concepts such as 'thin populism' or 'anti-elitist populism' (Jagers and Walgrave 2007) may confuse rather than enlighten because they simply omit one or more of the concept's necessary elements (March 2017), and because there is a wide range of acceptable alternatives that are more precise and do not obscure critical distinctions between populist and non-populist discourses. According to March,

what passes for ... 'thin' populism is not really populism at all but *demoticism* (closeness to ordinary people), which is necessary but by no means sufficient for populism. Therefore, analysts should not call parties 'rather populist' just because their rhetoric is demotic. (March 2017: 3)

As we demonstrate, this conceptual point is valid not only with regard to non-antagonistic people-centrism but also for anti-establishment claims. Rhetoric that is anti-establishment can easily be deployed in technocratic and even clientelist political strategies, and it is only with the addition of both a homogenous vision of 'the people' *and* a willingness to countenance a 'general will' that it rises to the level of populism. The tendency to see the victory of populism in the success of every party opposed to the establishment makes it more difficult to understand the nuances of contemporary political shifts.

## Conclusion

The many and varied political entrepreneurs who have challenged conventional politics in Central and Eastern Europe over the past two decades makes the region ideal for exploring the multiple varieties of anti-establishment politics from a programmatic and narrative perspective. For a deeper understanding of the character, dynamics and evolution of populism and anti-establishment politics more broadly, it is useful to look beyond Western Europe. Combining quantitative expert surveys of CEE with qualitative content analysis reveals important underlying

patterns in the region and also illuminates recent developments in Western Europe and in the rest of the world as well.

In terms of programmatic distribution, we provide expert survey evidence that in CEE anti-establishment politics is not confined solely to populists on the cultural radical right and the economic radical left. Although anti-establishment challengers are more common at these extremes of the cultural and economic spectrums, there are almost as many anti-establishment parties that stand in the political centre or exhibit alternative combinations of extreme and moderate positions. Unlike the more easily labelled 'exclusionary' or 'inclusionary' positions of the Portuguese, Spanish and Greek cases studied by Lisi *et al.* (2019), many of the CEE parties defy quick categorisation.

The wider framework needed to account for CEE cases has also broader cross-national implications, providing a better scheme for understanding other Western European cases, such as the findings by Mosca and Tronconi (2019) that Italy's Five Star Movement combines strong anti-establishment rhetoric, ambiguous statements and centrist voter preferences on other issues in a pattern closely akin to many parties in CEE. Furthermore, the article by Bernhard and Kriesi (2019), disaggregating populism into three subcomponents akin to those used here and examining populism in relation to distinct types of left and right, sets the stage for a similar comprehensive analysis across major Western Europe party systems.

In terms of discursive variety, we offer empirical confirmation of suspicions that many parties labelled as populist because of their anti-establishment rhetoric are not necessarily very populist in other, fundamental ways (Hanley and Sikk 2016). In the subset of countries studied here, most anti-establishment actors placed relatively less emphasis on a homogenous people or on the invocation of the *volonté générale*. In some cases, due to the marginal role of these elements in the examined electoral discourse at the particular point in time, the 'thin' ideology of some parties cannot be qualified as populist even if assessed as a matter of degree. This is true not only of anti-establishment politicians who are also anti-democrats (such as Poland's Korwin-Mikke), but also of anti-establishment parties with a technocratic focus (such as the Czech ANO), or parties without any recognizable ideological profile (such as Slovakia's Sme Rodina). This study shows how much research is left to be done on parties from the anti-establishment centre, and inspires to examine the various populist and non-populist characteristics of their rhetoric within other discourses (beyond election campaigns and social media).

Evidence that not all populist parties are to be found on radical positional fringes, or that some parties do not link their disdain for the

establishment with other elements of populism, may dispel some concerns about the emergence of an ideologically coherent populist juggernaut, but for those concerned about the stability of party systems and democracy, such findings are not particularly comforting. The threat posed by anti-establishment parties is not immediate or universal – indeed some of these parties can be quite useful in breaking up real political monopolies, restoring competitiveness, or empowering an inclusionary civic agency – but anti-establishment parties may create problems of their own. When elected, some of these political challengers remain aloof and refuse to become part of governments that they themselves do not control; others head immediately for the most lucrative potential sources of revenue in government. Many of them, furthermore, do not make it to the next election, creating a hole that is often filled by an even newer, and even more intensely anti-establishment party, enhancing the stability of instability within CEE party systems (Haughton and Deegan-Krause 2015). Concurrently, even established parties can in some circumstances successfully make use of anti-establishment tools, doubting the legitimacy of politics as a whole as a way to undercut their adversaries in rival political parties and in independent state institutions. When parties such as Hungary's Fidesz and Poland's PiS succeed in combining their existing organizational strength and entrenched position in the middle of the party system with anti-establishment appeals, nativism and a self-image as the agent of the general will, the political dominance of such actors makes the threat of democratic backsliding quite tangible (Pytlas 2018).

In a world of increasing distrust of leaders, segmented communications channels, easy-to-build institutional structures and premiums for those who can construct and forge crises, these patterns do not seem likely to disappear anytime soon. Exploring this multi-layered diversity of anti-establishment and populist politics hence provides both a challenging task for further research and a chance to better understand the mechanisms of political mobilisation and entrepreneurial strategies linked to this political agency.

## Notes

1. For the sake of convenience, we will only use the term 'anti-establishment rhetoric' in the sections that follow. The wording of the question we asked (retrospectively) to all country experts was as follows: 'We would like you to consider the salience (i.e. importance) of the following issues for Party X in the electoral campaign of the national parliamentary elections between YYYY and YYYY: salience of anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric (0 not important at all; 10 extremely important)'. According to our understanding, anti-elite and anti-establishment rhetoric does not differ substantially and both can include the political establishment/elite as well as

other types of dominant groups in the society (such as the economic elite, intellectual elite etc.) However, we are aware that there is the possibility that these two terms might not be considered by everyone as interchangeable. The reasons to include both terms in the questions have been twofold: first, it allows a direct comparison with the data of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey that uses the same wording ( $r = 0.89$ ) and, second, including both terms minimises the risk that claims against the elite or the establishment are not reported. In addition, we have provided a definition to all experts in order to make sure they have a common understanding of the question: ‘Those engaging in anti-establishment rhetoric explicitly identify with “ordinary people” and contrast themselves against a separate and coherent “political class” that is composed of all political opponents undifferentiated by party affiliation and may also (but need not) include economic, intellectual and/or international elites.’

2. Since the survey is conducted retrospectively, for each party of each election we asked the following question: ‘Now, we would like you to self-assess your judgement in the last two questions. How confident are you of your responses on [party] for each election? (1 very uncertain; 4 very confident).’ We excluded answers that are too uncertain to consider (responses with a confidence level lower than 3).
3. The data on anti-establishment rhetoric has been combined with the Chapel Hill survey using the version that follows an election, i.e. 2009 and 2010 elections: 2010 data; 2011–2014 elections: 2014 data.
4. Government participation can be a reason for the reduction of anti-establishment rhetoric that might in some cases lead to the transformation of an AEP to a non-AEP (as it is the case for GERB and Fidesz between 2009 and 2014). However, as the cases of governing parties among AEPs (SNS in 2010, SaS in 2012 and NA in 2010) and the numerous opposition parties among the non-AEPs illustrate, the government–opposition pattern is not the main determinant of the classification into AEP/non-AEP. Moreover, when looking at the patterns over time, the differences between AEPs and non-AEPs are usually larger than the changes of a single party over time (see Figures A1 and A2 in the online appendix for an illustration of Poland and Slovakia). For example, while PiS had its lowest value of anti-establishment rhetoric while in government in 2007 (7.6), the value is still much higher than the values of PO while in opposition (never higher than 6.4). The same is true for SNS in Slovakia. It had its lowest salience while in government (2012: 3.7); but this was still higher than the highest salience among non-AEPs, even while in opposition (2.2). Smer is an exception, since it has clearly transformed from an AEP (former centrist populist, see Učeň 2007) with a high salience of anti-establishment rhetoric during its first two terms in opposition into a non-AEP since 2010. It had a slightly higher anti-establishment salience than the average in opposition in 2012, that was, however, still low in absolute terms.
5. The populist radical right is defined as a combination of populism with nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde 2007). The definition thus includes these elements of the cultural dimension, while the economic position can vary. Academic debate on definitional standards for the populist radical left in Western Europe are much scarcer; however, parties are usually considered as populist radical left when they combine economic leftist

stances with populist elements (March 2007, 2017, see also Bernhard and Kriesi 2019). For AEPs with strong neoliberal and/or strong libertarian stances there is no common term.

6. The ideological mainstream is defined as the opposite of radical left (i.e. no extreme leftist position on the economic dimension) and the opposite of the radical right (i.e. no extreme traditionalist/authoritarian/nationalist position on the cultural dimension; Hanley and Sikk 2016: 523).
7. It is important to mention that those parties are usually new parties which often transform ideologically and/or abandon their anti-establishment discourse over time and thereby cease to be a centrist populist party. See for example GERB in Figure 4 that does not transform ideologically, but in 2014 belongs to the group of non-AEPs. This is important when it comes to the case selection for the second part of the analysis that focuses on the most recent election up to 2016 (e.g. Slovakia 2016, Poland 2015 and Czech Republic 2013). By the time of these latter elections, two former centrist AEP parties, Smer and Your Movement (formerly Palikot's Movement), had reduced their anti-establishment salience to a point below the election-wide average and therefore are not included in the sample of AEPs (see online appendix, Figures A1 and A2).
8. Data on challengers that did not cross the electoral threshold (Razem, KORWiN) or those that entered national parliaments unexpectedly (SR, LSNS) are missing in the expert survey. For these actors, anti-establishment salience was estimated by a holistic analysis of electoral manifestos, as well as campaign events reported in traditional media.
9. In two cases in Poland, social media profiles of party leaders (Janusz Korwin-Mikke, currently leading the extra-parliamentary party Freedom of Janusz-Korwin Mikke; as well as Robert Winnicki of Ruch Narodowy) were coded instead of party profiles. Focusing on the person of Korwin-Mikke is due to his iconic status among the supporters of his personal vehicle parties, such as KORWiN, and allows a more rigorous analysis than the assessment of his ephemeral political projects. Coding the profile of Robert Winnicki, on the other hand, allows continuity following the deletion of Ruch Narodowy's Facebook profile. The claims of Winnicki can be seen as exemplary of RN discourse due to his central role as party leader and as the only remaining formal member of Ruch Narodowy in the Polish Parliament, after several members of RN elected to the Sejm from the Kukiz lists left the party in May 2016.

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