

## 7 Trust towards the EU during the pandemic: a multilevel analysis Eftichia Teperoglou and Alexandros-Christos Gkotinakos

### 7.1 Introduction

Europe experienced several challenges during the last two decades. From the Great Recession and the Eurozone crisis, to the migration and refugee crises, Brexit, the rise of illiberal democratic attitudes and the electoral success of challenger parties (De Vries & Hobolt 2020), the turmoil of the 2020 pandemic and the current war in Ukraine, Europe seems to be in a continuous state of crisis. In this context, it is natural to wonder about their potential impact on the levels of trust in representative institutions (both national and supranational).

It is well-argued that trust is paramount for a well-functioning representative democracy. As van der Meer (2010: 518) argued “Trust in the political system is crucial to warrant the legitimacy of the system: political trust functions as the glue that keeps the system together and as the oil that lubricates the policy machine”. A number of studies conclude that the financial crisis of 2009 had a major impact on EU legitimation and increased anti-European stances too (see among others Armingeon & Ceka 2013; Braun & Tausendpfund 2014; Teperoglou & Belchior 2020), with levels of trust plummeting during its peak. However, in the period after this crisis, there is (with some exceptions) a return to pro-crisis patterns regarding public opinion support towards the EU and levels of trust towards institutions.

The coronavirus crisis, as an exogenous shock, has the potential to strengthen institutional trust, as happens with other similar phenomena (Lazarev et al. 2014). This is exactly the starting point of our chapter. Its overarching objective is to explore how levels of EU trust have fluctuated during the pandemic in a cross-sectional perspective. Secondly, we aim to provide some preliminary findings on the likely effect of several COVID-related policies on EU trust. Our analysis is based on longitudinal data from all EU member -states using Eurobarometer surveys from autumn 2018 to autumn 2021.

The structure of the chapter is as follows. The next section presents a brief literature review to lay out the motivation for this chapter. Next, we review the main theoretical arguments vis-a-vis the explanation of trust to EU institutions and articulate some hypotheses.

We then present the data and operationalization utilized, followed by the main findings. In the final section we discuss the limitations of this chapter and avenues for future research.

## 7.2 Theoretical framework

### 7.2.1 The importance of (political) trust

Following the definition by Almond & Verba (1963) that conceptualizes trust as citizens' confidence in political institutions, we might conclude that it is an important indicator of political legitimacy. It is also argued that no democratic regime can survive without sufficient levels of trust on the part of citizens (Miller 1974). The significance of trust is also relevant when it comes to the stability of the international system in general. More specifically, Russett et al. (1995) argue that higher levels of trust facilitate international peace. Fukuyama postulated that in societies with a high degree of social trust the probability to create more flexible and large-scale business organizations is much more increased compared to countries with low levels of trust towards institutions. In other words, trust is a major parameter in order to understand differences in the success of national economies (Fukuyama 1995). From all these studies mentioned here, we might conclude that the study of trust incorporates a variety of socioeconomic, political and cultural elements (for an overview see also Norris 2011).

David Easton (1965) in his seminal study defines political trust as the sum of political evaluations, and the ultimate indicator of political legitimation. The political system is as a mechanism of inputs and outputs that must function properly to maintain its legitimacy. Both from a theoretical and empirical perspective high levels of trust are associated with higher levels of social wellbeing (Ho 2021). Putnam (1995, 2000) argues that social capital is the 'amount' of trust available and is the main element for the political culture of modern societies. As a main component of social capital, there is consensus among economists that trust constitutes the key factor for long-term economic growth (North 1990) and, by extension, for the quality of public policies (Putnam 1993; Levi 1998; Rothstein 2011). However, several studies find declining levels of political trust across Europe in recent decades (e.g Dalton 2004; Stoker 2017). Nevertheless, there is variation across countries and it might be argued that these

declining trends might be context-dependent and related to specific policy areas (Norris 2011)<sup>14</sup>.

The main goal of this chapter is to explore possible linkages between the COVID-19 crisis and reported increased levels of trust in the EU (*Eurofound 2020*). The coronavirus crisis, being exogenous to the political system, has the potential to act in the opposite direction, such that support for EU institutions increase, as happens with other similar phenomena (Lazarev et al., 2014). In particular, we focus on the potential effect of the COVID-19 pandemic at the supranational level by looking at trust towards the European Union, which has not yet received scholarly attention. Other studies have focused on trust towards the national political arena (for an overview see Devine et al. 2021) or the linkage between governmental measures for the pandemic and trust in national institutions (see Liu, Shahab & Hoque 2021; Jennings et al. 2021).

#### 7.2.2 Trust at the individual level and trust towards the EU

From the formation of the European Community for Coal and Steel back in 1952 and the widespread “permissive consensus” of citizens on supra-national issues, European integration has moved into a post-functionalist phase. As Hooghe and Marks argue (2009), there is a shift towards a “constraining dissensus”. Moving away from the original elite-centered view of European integration is perhaps most obvious after the onset of the financial and economic crisis in Europe. Since then, there has been an ongoing and complex debate about the role and reach of EU institutions. Nowadays, the topic of European integration is highly politicized in domestic politics, and it could be argued that the politicization of European integration has changed the content, as well as the process of decision making (Hooghe & Marks 2009).

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<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, it is also argued that low levels of political trust could be also understood as something not necessarily negative. Citizens have become more critical since they are more educated and are able to assess current political affairs and hold political leadership accountable through voting (Inglehart 1977).

As many previous studies confirm, the different EU crises bring an increase of Eurosceptic attitudes, a series of profound transformations in European societies and, as a consequence, to the EU dimension of political contestation itself. According to certain scholars, this increasing politicization of the EU dimension especially over the last years of the economic crisis, has led to the formation of a transnational cleavage (Hooghe & Marks 2018) understood in the terms of Lipset and *Rokkan's* well-known theoretical framework (1969). Another main research path is related to different approaches in explaining public opinion stances towards the EU. One of them has to do with rational evaluations and the clarity of responsibility (*strategic/rationalist approach*). Another one refers to identitarian concerns and feelings of relative attachment towards the national and European arenas respectively (*affective/psychological approach* (for a summary see among others Hatherfeld, van der Meer & de Vries 2013)).

Starting with the rational evaluation hypothesis, this argument is drawn directly from the economic voting analytical framework, but with an attitudinal dependent variable replacing the behavioral one. From the seminal study by Downs (1957), many studies have attempted to explain electoral behavior in economic terms. However, there is variation in the indicators used in order to capture the impact of the hypothesized economic calculus on voting. For example, some studies use the GDP growth rate, the unemployment rate, or a change in the ratio of GDP to public debt (for a brief treatment, see Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier 2000). At the individual level, the voter may give importance to his personal economic situation (both prospective and retrospective), or to the broader social well-being—ego-tropic and socio-tropic economic evaluation, respectively (Kiewiet 1983). The voter can evaluate the government based on the recent government work (Fiorina 1978), or future expectations.

All these hypotheses have found strong empirical support, and have been incorporated into more complex models. In fact, continuous evaluation of this type is considered to be the basis of political accountability (Dahl 1998). More recent contributions have extended this logic to other policy areas and the multi-level nature of the EU (Hobolt & Tilley 2014). In this regard, the main rationale beyond this utilitarian approach is that the stances of European

citizens towards the process of European integration are influenced by a trade-off on benefits and costs of the EU membership of their country (both for retrospective and prospective evaluations).

However, comparative research has shown that their strength and behavior are not constant and are influenced by a number of contextual factors. Powell and Witten (1993) introduced the concept of implicit responsibility. According to them, factors such as the proportionality of the party system, the degree of federalism, but also the allied governments can blur the perception of responsibility, weakening the effect of each evaluation.

The second main approach is related to the logic of identity (Easton 1965). Here the emotional component of the political process is prominent. It refers to the extent to which citizens identify with the state apparatus, considering it part of their community. In the case of the EU multi-level system, the concept of identity is operationalized either as identification with the nation-state or with Europe. This approach is built upon the type of Euroscepticism which is labeled as “political” and gives emphasis on the multi-level nature of governance in the EU, the loss of sovereignty for nations-states and the debate about multiculturalism vs national identity. Based on these two approaches, two main research hypotheses are formulated which are presented below.

### 7.3 Hypotheses

One of the main research questions of our chapter is how EU trust has evolved during the pandemic and whether there is a homogenous trend across countries. Moreover, we are interested in exploring if policies related to the COVID crisis are associated with levels of trust. Looking at the pandemic from its outbreak to the peak, the EU failed to mobilize immediately with EU-wide policies kicking in at its later stages. One of the main hypotheses of our study is that we expect higher levels of EU trust at later stages of the pandemic compared to its outbreak. This hypothesis builds upon the fact that EU institutions have not supported the EU member states from the economic and social impact of the pandemic immediately. There is evidence that they managed to handle the crisis better at a later stage (see the dataset by Johns Hopkins 2021 and also Haug et al. 2020). This is in line with a series of actions at this later

stage that supported the most hit economic actors and boosted European solidarity, helped EU member states to fund their COVID-19 response, supported the EU health systems and provided safe vaccines, among others.

*H<sub>1</sub>: EU trust higher during later stages of the pandemic*

On the other hand, some countries had more COVID-19 cases and deaths than others (see the dataset by Johns Hopkins 2021). Therefore, we hypothesize that a large number of COVID-cases could spill over to government support in the EU arena.

*H<sub>2.1</sub>: More cases (country-level) are associated with lower EU trust*

During the pandemic, governments decided to implement more closure measures with differing degrees of stringency (for an overview see Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker dataset) and economic support. The hypotheses related to this approach are formulated as follows:

*H<sub>2.2</sub>: More stringent measures are associated with lower EU trust*

*and*

*H<sub>2.3</sub>: More economic support is associated with higher EU trust*

Regarding the individual level predictors of EU trust during the pandemic, existing contributions (Hatherfeld, van der Meer & de Vries 2013), demonstrate that, besides heuristics-based explanations, two main logics explain trust toward EU institutions. First, the logic of identity postulates that attachment with the EU makes citizens more willing to place their trust towards European institutions. The logic of rationality, then, appealing to the rational capacities of citizens places emphasis on their evaluations of governmental performance.

From these remarks, two competing hypotheses could be formulated. On the one hand, crises are associated with boosts in government popularity, and reduced governmental criticism. Thus, we could hypothesize that:

*H3.1: Identitarian logic is stronger than instrumental concerns*

However, crises are also periods that mobilize leadership and call for strong policy innovation. This increased emphasis on responding to the pandemic could lead us to think that

*H3.2: Instrumental logic stronger than identity logic*

#### 7.4 Data, operationalization and modeling framework

In the previous section we elaborated a theoretical framework around political trust and trust towards the European Union and formulated hypotheses regarding the potential effect of the COVID-19 crisis on citizen's trust to EU institutions. In this part of the chapter, we will lay out the data sources, operationalization of concepts and modeling choices.

Beginning with the data set, despite several well-established EU-wide social science surveys (European Social Survey, European Election Study, European Value Survey etc), only the Eurobarometer series gets fielded sufficiently often to let us explore the dynamics of trust during the pandemic period. For this reason, we selected the Standard Eurobarometer studies fielded with the core questionnaire about EU trust between winter of 2018 and the most recent available wave of spring 2021 to cover the immediate pre- and post-COVID emergency period. In total, thus, we have six study waves arranged as time-series with 149.983 observations across all countries included in the survey.

From the Eurobarometer time series we get items on trust towards the EU and national governments, evaluation of the EU, and European identity which are of primary interest for the research objectives of this chapter and a set of control variables such as left-right ideological self-positioning, gender, urban-rural environment, and level of educational attainment.

For country-level variables relating to the pandemic, we turn to the COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (Hale et. al. 2021). The Oxford-based project has been tracking and measuring government responses and provides indicators on containment and closure policies, economic measures, health system responses, and vaccine policies at the day level.

From these data we draw three indicators to help cover important dimensions of the COVID crisis. First, the *stringency index*, relating to the strictness of closure measures for the pandemic. Second, the *economic support index*, tracking the mobilization of national governments for economic support during the crisis, and, last, the number of COVID-19 cases.

To harmonize these data with the Eurobarometer waves, we averaged each index to the semiannual level, and merged with the micro data to examine their potential effects. To estimate the latter, our study relies on a two-step approach. First, to answer the question of whether *identitarian* or *evaluational* forces have been more relevant in this period across the sample we estimate two-way fixed effect models to account for heterogeneity across countries and survey waves. However, to explicitly account for forces at the country level, we also estimate hierarchical/multilevel models only for 2021, where we have no missing data on the COVID-19 indicators. In the next section, we also thus present a two-level model with individual survey respondents nested in countries. These models include all individual level predictors of the fixed effects regressions, and additionally account for select dimensions of the pandemic. Models were fit using the *plm* (Croissant & Millo, 2008) and *lme4* (Bates et. al. 2014) packages, respectively.

## 7.5 Findings

This section is devoted to the empirical findings of our study. It begins by looking at some descriptive evidence. Then, it refers back to the hypotheses of the theoretical section to try to answer the research questions posed at the start of the chapter through our models.

Looking at the Figure 7-1 below, with the points representing the average level of trust across all EU countries, it's easy to see two things. The first thing to notice is how the later stages of the pandemic are associated with the highest levels of trust towards the EU. Conversely, it's interesting that almost the exact opposite is the case for the trend of trust in national governments. Thus, while governments seemed to receive a boost in popularity immediately after the hit of the pandemic in 2020, they quickly returned to their pre-COVID level of just below 40 percent. On the other hand, after a slight bump at the first stage of the

pandemic, the levels of EU trust jumped up approximately 10 percent in 2021 relative to their 2018 basis.

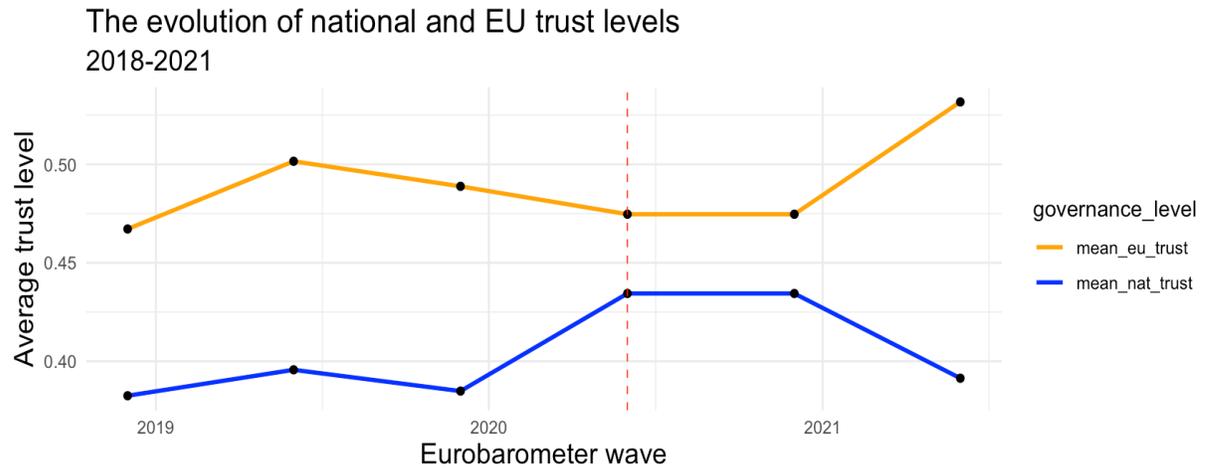


Figure 7-1 The evolution of national and EU trust levels 2018-2021

While the grand mean across countries is helpful in summarizing the big-picture, EU-wide trend, it could also be masking interesting variation. The next two figures represent the same trends disaggregated by country. Despite very few exceptions, such as Slovakia, or the Netherlands, and notwithstanding their difference in absolute levels, a clear pattern of increased trust in EU institutions during the later stages emerges from Figure 7-2.

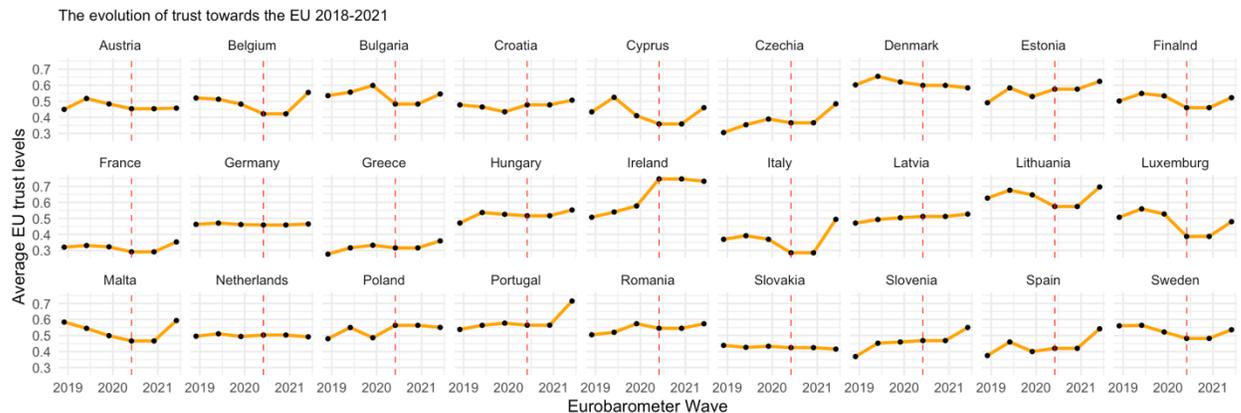


Figure 7-2 The evolution of trust towards the EU 2018-2021

The same is mostly true for trust in national governments. Again, with some exceptions like Belgium, there seems to be a clear negative trend as the pandemic progresses (Figure 7-3).

We can thus conclude that the EU enjoyed increased levels of trust, with the opposite being the case for national governments, and this pattern manifesting itself almost completely uniform across all EU countries.

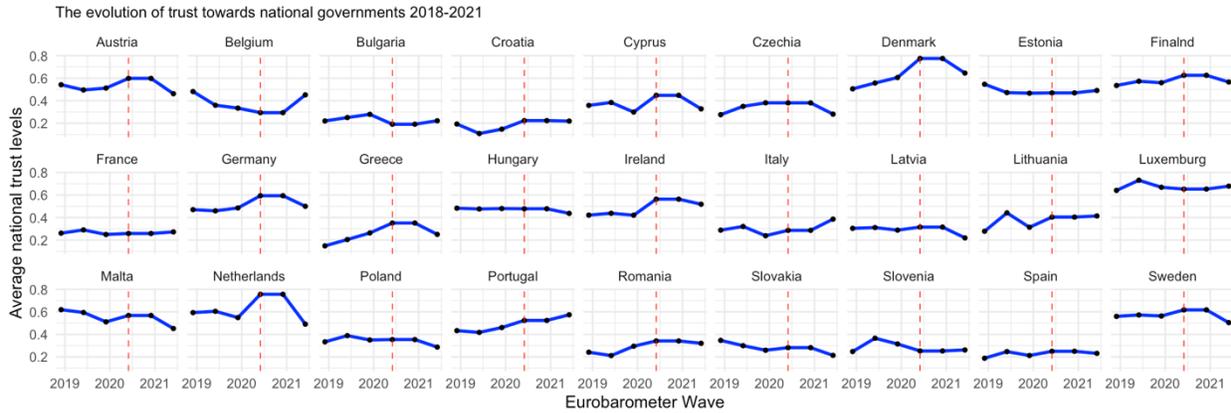


Figure 7-3 The evolution of trust towards national governments 2018-2021

Moving now to the issue of the predictors of EU trust, we begin by looking at the fixed effects models. Model 1 includes only one variable, namely evaluations of EU performance, with every one unit increase in the latter being associated with 0.187 unit increase in trust toward the EU. The effect is significant at the 0.001 level and remains so even after accounting for the effect of European identity. The latter is associated with an equally large 0.193 unit increase of trust for every one-unit change. Both effects remain robust to standard politics research controls in model 3 (left-right ideological position, gender, urban-rural location, level of education) in terms of size and statistical significance, with European identity being the most important of these two explanatory factors. But what is the effect of COVID-related policies in this context?

Table 7-1 Individual-level predictors of trust toward the EU 2018-2021

|               | Model 1  | Model 2  | Model 3  |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
| EU evaluation | 0.187*** | 0.146*** | 0.139*** |
|               | (0.002)  | (0.002)  | (0.002)  |

|                   | Model 1  | Model 2  | Model 3   |
|-------------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| European identity |          | 0.193*** | 0.183***  |
|                   |          | (0.002)  | (0.002)   |
| Left-Right        |          |          | 0.002***  |
|                   |          |          | (0.00006) |
| Gender            |          |          | -0.001    |
|                   |          |          | (0.003)   |
| Urban-Rural       |          |          | -0.015*** |
|                   |          |          | (0.002)   |
| Education         |          |          | -0.042*** |
|                   |          |          | (0.003)   |
| Num.Obs.          | 149983   | 149983   | 129861    |
| R2                | 0.085    | 0.156    | 0.160     |
| R2 Adj.           | 0.085    | 0.156    | 0.160     |
| AIC               | 278973.9 | 266834.1 | 228141.7  |
| BIC               | 278993.8 | 266863.9 | 228210.1  |
| RMSE              | 0.61     | 0.59     | 0.58      |

Coefficients derived from linear probability models

To attempt answering this question we look at Table 2, reporting coefficients from a two-level linear probability model, with and without individual-level controls. Looking at the coefficients for the indexes on stringency, economic support, and COVID cases, it becomes apparent how the coefficients are small and statistically insignificant. Even the effect of COVID-19 incidence seems to get explained away when controlling for the individual-level forces. One could thus easily conclude that the COVID-effect was nonexistent, at least as can be estimated on the basis of these three indicators. At the same time, such a conclusion bears the question: what is it then about the pandemic that drove citizens increased trust for the EU? Of course, issues of omitted variable bias are always relevant in observational research designs. Still, it seems reasonable to attempt operationalizing the potential COVID-effect in different ways, like subjective perceptions of the stringency of virus containment policies or the severity of cases, before concluding its nonexistence.

*Table 7-2 Macro and individual level predictors of trust toward the EU in 2021*

|                  | Model 1  | Model 2  |
|------------------|----------|----------|
| (Intercept)      | 1.507*** | 0.903*** |
|                  | (0.204)  | (0.152)  |
| Stringency index | -0.001   | -0.002   |
|                  | (0.004)  | (0.003)  |
| Economic support | 0.0006   | 0.0003   |
|                  | (0.001)  | (0.001)  |
| COVID-19 cases   | 4e-08*   | 3e-08    |
|                  | (2e-08)  | (2e-08)  |
| EU evaluations   |          | 0.139*** |

|                           | Model 1 | Model 2   |
|---------------------------|---------|-----------|
|                           |         | (0.004)   |
| European Identity         |         | 0.200***  |
|                           |         | (0.005)   |
| Left-Right                |         | 0.002***  |
|                           |         | (0.0002)  |
| Gender                    |         | -0.012    |
|                           |         | (0.008)   |
| Urban-Rural               |         | -0.003    |
|                           |         | (0.005)   |
| Education                 |         | -0.036*** |
|                           |         | (0.007)   |
| SD (Intercept isocountry) | 0.114   | 0.082     |
| SD (Observations)         | 0.604   | 0.547     |
| Num.Obs.                  | 21370   | 18918     |
| R2 Marg.                  | 0.007   | 0.191     |
| R2 Cond.                  | 0.042   | 0.209     |
| AIC                       | 39224.8 | 31077.5   |
| BIC                       | 39272.6 | 31171.7   |

|      | Model 1 | Model 2 |
|------|---------|---------|
| ICC  | 0.03    | 0.02    |
| RMSE | 0.60    | 0.55    |

Coefficients derived from linear probability models

## 7.6 Discussion & Concluding Remarks

This chapter focuses on trust toward EU institutions and the COVID-19 crisis. We descriptively tracked the dynamics of EU trust during the pandemic. Moreover, one of our main goals was to provide some preliminary findings on the likely effect of several COVID-related policies on EU trust. We showed how the latter stages of the pandemic are associated with increased levels of trust to the European Union, on the one hand, and decreasing trust to national governments, on the other. By comparing EU member-states, it seems as if no substantial country differences exist.

Looking at the effect of COVID-related policies on levels of EU trust, we failed to confirm any of our hypotheses. Neither the number of COVID-19 cases, nor measures of economic support or closures are associated with significant changes in trust according to the estimated models. One conclusion could be that the pandemic remained irrelevant to the generation of political trust. However, it could also be that experimenting with different operationalizations of aspects of the COVID could lead to radically different estimates.

At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the many limitations of such a first attempt to analyze the existence of a COVID effect. For one, our chapter has no data for the latter stage of 2021 that would allow us to map the fluctuations of EU trust during the full course of the pandemic. In a similar vein, a larger time series going back in time would be useful to put the size of present fluctuations in perspective. Relatedly, it's important to remember that Eurobarometer data are not panel data, and replicating this analysis with another dataset could be a fruitful way forward. At present, thus, we strictly refrain from any causal

claim around the pandemic and EU trust, and suggest looking at subjective predispositions of different aspects of the pandemic on levels of trust.

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## 8 Economic positions of populist parties across Europe. The return of economic populism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Denis Ivanov

### 8.1 Introduction

A substantial part of today's literature defines populism across the *us* versus *them* divide, the presence of the duality in the Manichean worldview, anti-pluralism (Müller, 2016), or in the elements of political discourse or style (Moffit, 2016). In its minimal definition, populism is *thin* – besides the ideological divide between *us* versus *them*, it is not a full ideology, such as communism or liberalism (Mudde, 2017). Instead, the economic and trust dimensions could become additional 'thickening' factors that a party or politician could use for greater appeal. In fact, economic insecurity issues have been heavily emphasized in the political programs of the radical left parties, while the sense of mistrust of the local and supranational establishment as well as the lack of representation of "the left-behinds" is the key salient issue for Eurosceptic and populist far right. The electorate that bases their decision on these prompting factors on the demand side of populism meets the supply through party cues and ideological shifts on economic and cultural dimensions.

However, when it comes to the classification of the populist political parties via their manifestos, ideological stances, or discourse these often overlap and do not exhibit distinct features between party families (Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Rooduijn et al, 2019). Yet, in the past, authors were defining populism differently in emphasising the role of the economy and the matters of redistribution of wealth (Sachs, 1990; Dornbusch and Edwards, 1999). Although mentioned less often in the modern literature, are the definitions of the past still relevant to the discussion of today's forms of populism?

This essay critically revisits the ideas of the past and discusses whether the term of *economic* populism is useful in the analysis of the modern-day populism. I look back at the definitions of political and economic populism through past conceptualization of the macroeconomic mismanagement of the Latin American experience, historical examples of the episodes of economic manifestations of populism, as well as review the modern approaches

around economic side of the supply of populism. Besides its origins in the form of macroeconomic populism in the context of Latin America of the 20th century, the modern wave of both right and left-wing variations of populism has elements of economic factors across the demand and supply division but is not the main determinant of it. This chapter discusses the three waves of economic manifestations of populism as well as introduces a new typology of parties in dividing them in three distinct groups, namely: left-authoritarian, ideologically ambiguous and the redistributive radical left. The chapter uses expert survey data from the Chapel Hill and presents the above-mentioned groupings using descriptive statistics.

## 8.2 Political Populism

The definition of populism varies across the lines of five distinct approaches - (i) populism as ideology (Mudde, 2014), (ii) populism as political strategy (Weyland, 2017), (iii) populism as discourse or style (Moffit, 2016) and (iv) populism as political logic (Laclau, 2005) and the (v) socio-cultural side of populism as a ‘performance’ (Ostiguy, 2017). However, how can we firmly tell whether a political party is populist or not? The classification of political parties, with certain variations, is in line the five approaches focusing mainly on the political aspects: (i) level of populism in stated ideology (Mudde, 2017), (ii) the level of *antielitism* and *antipluralism* in discourse (Müller, 2016), (iii) level of populism in terms of style (Moffit, 2016), (iv) the presence of political discourse sceptic of the system of checks and balances (Taggart, 2000), as well as (v) the rhetoric style of communication (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). While mostly overlapping, the five main definitions are presented below in Table 8-1:

*Table 8-1 The Contemporary Classification of Populist Parties*

| Authors  | Definition  |
|--|---|
| Mudde (2007; 2017);<br>Mudde and Rovira<br>Kaltwasser (2017) as<br>well as Stanley (2008); | parties that employ the minimal definition of populism as a <i>thin</i> -centred ideology or a set of (sometimes contradictory) ideas; an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society |

|                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| rooted in Canovan (1999; 2004);     |  |
| Müller (2016)                       | parties that contain a level of <i>antielitism</i> (necessary, but not sufficient condition) and <i>antipluralism</i> (providing moral justification for the antagonism), combined with identity politics in their discourse |
| Moffit (2016)<br>Stavrakakis (2017) | parties that use populism as discourse or style focused on appeal to the people versus the elite (i); bad manners (ii) and crisis, breakdown or threat (iii)   |
| Taggart (2000)                      | parties that use populism as discourse critical of democratic institutions, pitting the elite against the members of <i>the heartland</i> (a virtually homogenous construct)   |
| Norris and Inglehart (2019)         | parties that use populism as the antithesis to pluralism evidenced in the rhetoric style of communication  |

In their *minimal* definition (Mudde, 2007; 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) as well as Stanley (2008) define populist parties as those which embrace populism as a *thin-centered* ideology. *Thin*, in Stanley’s terms means a distinct concept, which conveys a distinct set of ideas (sometimes contradictory) about politics that interact with the established ideational traditions of *full* ideologies. In it by itself, it is not able to stand alone as a practical political ideology, because *it lacks the capacity to put forward a wide-ranging and coherent programme for the solution to crucial political questions* (Stanley, 2008). Unlike other grand theories, it lacks the capacity to propose solutions to crucial political questions. Other ideologies or their parts with strong economic or social political solutions – Marxist, neoliberal or welfare-state, could in theory, *thicken* populism into a full-fledged ideology (Kubik, 2020). Importantly for our purpose, it implies that economic populism does not systematically comes with political populism. In fact, the economic dimension of populism only applies in a subset of politically populist scenarios where the economic issues are emphasized to *thicken* the populist appeal.

An important aspect that the ideational approach appears to miss is the importance of political and economic institutions to parties via both the demand and supply side of populism. Being sceptic of institutions or constructing a deliberate attack against them could be an additional criteria for the difference between exclusionary and inclusionary populist parties. Blaming Brussels over frustrations or previous regimes of economic mismanagement is part of the story in the attack on the institutions of governance and the system of checks and balances. This important element is related to deliberate weakening of political institutions, especially in the cases of judicial reforms in Poland and Hungary or creation of the new ones or the institutionalization of the political and economic systems under forms of *clientelism* or the return to *statism* in the post-socialist Central and East Europe.

Another aspect of populism are the parties themselves and the far right and extreme (radical) variations of them. The main advantage of this minimal definition of populism is in its inclusivity: it is applicable for a large variety of *populisms* (differing in discourse and ideology and the extent of anti-elitism and anti-liberalism) as well as suitable for cross-nation comparison and empirical work. However, Mudde (2007) highlights three core features of radical right populist parties in Europe being: *nativism*, *authoritarianism* and populism itself. By separating two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the *pure people* versus *the corrupt elite*, radical right populist parties argue that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people, which is a core concept for them. Party classification in his account is based on the ideology of the parties themselves, meaning that the party organization is on par with the leader, the latter playing a role of the spokesperson in the public domain.

Müller (2016) generally agrees on what a populist party is overall, with the difference on the sub-classification of the parties. He highlights that populist actors must contain some form of *antielitism* (necessary, but not sufficient condition), *antipluralism* (providing moral justification for the antagonism), combined with a form of identity politics. In comparison with a minimalist framework produced by Mudde that provides the possibility to assign label and classification in the cross-country, Müller (2016) emphasizes the measurement of the level of

*antipluralism* and *antielitism*. It is then standardized to and a particular threshold needs to be achieved in order to be classified as a populist political actor in regards to the democratic institutions. However, the criterion of anti-pluralism has received criticism as well. More particularly, by advancing a strict opposition between populism and democracy, Müller seems to juxtapose populism with liberalism, instead of focusing on the exact dangers of populism to democratic governance. (Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2018).

In my understanding, the moderate populist parties, especially in the Central and Eastern Europe are characterized by the new ideologically *centrist* populism (Učeň, 2007). Such populism does not necessarily contain the reference to identity politics in the likes of Labour Party in Lithuania or combine leftist distributive stances on economic issues (primarily on job insecurity, family policies, etc.) with conservative preferences on the cultural dimension. The most vivid examples include Fidesz in Hungary and PiS in Poland that successfully combine such positions in the way, slightly reminding of the “reddish” and “brownish” coalitions (communist successor parties and nationalists) in the early years of transition (Ishiyama, 1998; Melito, 2021). The alternative explanation of the rise of is the success of such parties that combine left-authoritarian views, is due to post-communist successor parties – that have programmatically outflanked or crowded out on one or more issue dimensions by competitors on the right (Kim and Borbáth, 2022).

The mostly cultural dimension issues that radical right populist parties in Western Europe try to emphasize fits well in the Manichean duality and the anti-pluralism dimension emphasized by Müller (2016) as well as Mudde. However, the relatively moderate parties in the Central and Eastern Europe are balancing in-between the exclusionary and inclusionary variations of populism and requires a new classification, especially on the economic dimension. This is especially acute in the context of post-crisis Europe, where economic triggers have exacerbated the sense of insecurity and acute dissatisfaction, which arguably propelled the electorate towards the attraction to the anti-establishment rhetoric of some and the opposition to the economic retrenchment of the others.

### 8.3 Populism as political style

Another important aspect, that defines populist parties are having leaders with their political *style* that contains three main features: appeal to the people versus the elite (i); bad manners (ii) and crisis, breakdown, or threat (iii) (Moffit, 2016). For Moffit to classify a party as populist, both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects are important and the form of the discourse. The so-called *performance*, and balancing between *extraordinariness* and *ordinariness* is the key in their electoral success. However, the role of political parties on the foreground is overshadowed by the charismatic leader and their political style. Mediatization plays a crucial role, as it serves as an intermediary or a catalyser in the representation of the people influencing the outcome of a dynamic process between leaders, constituencies, audiences and the media (p.111; also De La Torre, 2010).

However, to what extent can a party be considered populist, just by the style of their leader? Moffit's definition of *style* is a way in which we order or bring together disparate objects or phenomena with similar characteristics so to schematize them in a comprehensive fashion (p.33, 2016). However, as seen in numerous examples (Trump and the Paris Agreements, immigration policy in the US and Italy, judiciary reform in Poland) populists not only talk, but to a different extent deliver on their promises. Therefore, although quite evident in certain case study examples, perceiving populism through style alone, does not allow for a cross-national analysis, nor provides external validity on the temporal basis.

### 8.4 Populists and institutions

Paul Taggart, in his seminal book *On Populism* (2000), defined populism as *an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis* (p.5). Therefore a populist party is one that appeals to *the heartland* as a place where, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides (p.95). In their further interpretation, references to *the heartland* as a virtually homogenous construct is the key in forming a discourse around it, pitting *the people* (numerous and indigenous to *the heartland*) to the elites or minorities, who possess qualities of *extraneous* to it. While there is some depth to what is

meant by *the people*, similarly to *the heartland* there is too much variation and room for interpretation, for such a thin concept to serve as a guiding principle of populism.

Taggart points to the deep ambivalence in attitudes of populists towards institutions - those of the state, universities, bureaucracy, financial institutions, similarly to McCarthyism in the US. Populists present the system of checks and balances as malignant in the times of crises: conspiracy theories, populist reaction to representative politics or parliamentary elections, charismatic and authoritarian leadership are all examples of it (Taggart, 2000, p.78-79). Unlike pure opportunistic or loud party leaders, such an attack on political (and potentially economic) institutions represents if not a real danger to democracy, then some form of *hollowing* and *backsliding* in the democratic representation and performance of the countries where populists are in power (Greskovits, 2015).

### 8.5 Anything in-between?

An alternative definition of populist parties is given by Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2019) who divide populist parties into *Authoritarian-Populist* parties versus *Libertarian-Populist*<sup>15</sup>. Their definition of populism is focused on the form of discourse (rhetoric style of communication) about the first order principles of governance, delegitimizing established power structures and the role of elected representatives in liberal democracy while claiming that *the people* should rule. Instead of the division into right-wing and left-wing, far-right/left and extremes they claim that *all populists are illiberal*. Working to hide their authoritarianism under the veil of loud rhetoric, they communicate through a particular style of political communication, reaching those who had not participating in electoral exercises previously, nor were interested in politics in the first place (Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

They place populism as the antithesis to pluralism. In such a reverse negation, all the elements and features of populism which pluralism is not, they construct the definition of what populist parties are. Basing their operationalization on the value dimension, their innovation is the analysis of the emergence of the new cleavages – left-right division over economic values;

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<sup>15</sup> A third variation in their classification is a White Supremacist party organization.

-legitimate source of governance and -authoritarian -libertarian on cultural values (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). While being very liberal in their definition of what populism is what parties are classified under its umbrella definition of political program and the style of communication, they put emphasis on the empirics, which is the key in adaptability and replicability of their work, and it is among the best-suited for the cross-sectional research.

All five approaches to the classification of populist parties evolve around the mostly political aspects of populism with variations across certain aspects that generally overlap when it comes to the actual classifications of the parties. Classifications of Roodujin et al. (2019), Stavrakakis et al. (2017) as well as Norris and Inglehart (2019) differ, but the consensus on the core of the populist parties generally remains the same. In order to include the variation and distinct features, it is necessary to go back into the older definitions of populism rooted in economic grievances.

#### 8.6 The Latin American Macroeconomic Populism

The first attempt at defining the economic aspects of populism as a separate phenomenon has been done by Dornbusch and Edwards (1990, 1991, 2007) in their analysis of 20<sup>th</sup> century populism in Latin America. However, several authors refuse to apply the populist label to many of the new movements, especially those that enact neoliberalism (Weyland, 2001). Other authors argue that the term populism has been overused when it comes to the ‘Pink Tide neopopulism’ and even neoliberal governments enact some features of economic populism (Grigera, 2017). Although widely contested, Dornbusch and Edwards (1990, 1991, 2007) provide systematic and cross-country approach in the path-dependency perspective.

They define macroeconomic populism as:

*an approach to economics that emphasizes growth and income distribution and deemphasizes the risks of inflation and deficit finance, external constraints, and the reaction of economic agents to aggressive nonmarket policies (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991, p. 9).*

They point to the fact that in most cases of populism, it manifested itself as irresponsible macroeconomic prudence in the post-Washington consensus Latin America, which led to an overall collapse of the economic system. Heavy constraints in foreign exchange, extreme inflation as well as massive political instability, coups, and violence as the result of growing inequalities were among the direst consequences of such short-sighted economic policies (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991). Moreover, while populist movements might have had (dynamic) strategic considerations to use the macroeconomic tools when in power, their emphasis on macroeconomic management as a tool of solving the consequences that created the societal inequalities was *particularly weak*.

In terms of policy-making mechanism, they present the populism paradigm in Latin America as having three key features: *initial conditions* (i), the absence of constraints (*no constraints*) (ii) and *policy prescriptions* (iii). *Initial conditions* (i) represent the background that attracts the support for populists – the overall dissatisfaction with the slowing down of economic performance of the region. The stabilization policies and the unpopular implementation of liberalization programs in the Latin American region as well as the consequent stagnation explain the dissatisfaction with the status quo by the general population of these countries. The second feature of economic populism is having virtually *no constraints* (ii) on its economic policies. The policymakers were prone to overuse the economic instruments at hand without the risk of running into external constraints, under the logic that expansion is not inflationary. While rejecting the mainstream conservative economic thinking by ignoring the constraints on the macroeconomic policy, populist policymakers ran into dire consequences that included hyperinflation and the rise of the economic inequalities. The third feature are the *policy prescriptions* (iii) of the populist programs, which emphasize the three elements, closely associated with the left-wing policies: *reactivation, redistribution of income, and restructuring of the economy*. However, in most of the cases, such strategies resulted in an active use of macroeconomic policy to redistribute income, which, in the long run, created massive structural problems, since overcompensation for economic losses of the most vulnerable ended up in the patronal networks of the ruling elites.

## 8.7 The Return of Economic Populism

Modern studies (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Guiso et al., 2017; Rodrik, 2018) point to the fact that the recent success of populism around the world is at least partially a supply-side phenomenon related to the economy. On one hand, Guiso et al. (2017) refer to supply as a mix of policies in political documents that populist parties offer to its potential voters. Guriev and Papaioannou (2020) as well as Norris and Inglehart (2019) conceptualize the supply of populism in terms of political strategies of political parties. On another hand, Funke et.al (2020) focus on economic policies of populists in power, while Guiso et al. (2017) provide a second definition of populist supply in terms of economic policies that aim at short-term protection with the disregard for future consequences, referring both to the right and left-wing of populism.

For Rodrik (2018), short-sighted economic policies are not the basis for the *economic* populism, instead he focuses on (mostly) economic determinants of the rise of populism, and the economic cleavages that are being used by left-wing populists to further gain support. While generally agreeing with Dornbusch and Edwards' account in the case of the Latin American experience, Rodrik (2018) considers the modern-day European populism to be different for two reasons. First, the regional specificities as well as the ideological position of populists in power is a key difference in the economic variety of populisms around the world (also in Binev, 2022). Second, in Rodrik's view, the Latin American populism of 1980s was mainly of the left-wing type, mostly due to pre-existing economic cleavages. The presence of the narrow, but visible wealthy groups with a strong bargaining power within the economy, created a minority that dictated the rules of the game, pitting themselves against the lower income groups without access to power (Rodrik, 2018).

Instead of the salience of inequality in Latin America, the mostly right-wing European populism is based on cultural, national, ethnic cleavages, and the *us* against *them* (outsiders) divide (Zasllove, 2009). While inequality is a salient issue as well, it is of a different kind. It is namely welfare chauvinism and increased competition with immigrants for in-kind benefits and public housing, that had propelled populists forward on the economic dimension in Western

Europe (Rodrik, 2018). Interestingly, the US case presents a zone for both kind of cleavages and the emergence of the two types of populism in parallel – the left and the right-wing variations, as exemplified in the presidential campaign of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders. Rodrik (2018) goes to identify that:

*imports (especially from China) and trade agreements (with Mexico, Asian countries) were politically salient issues, around which large number of voters could be mobilized. The financial crisis and the differing fates of large banks versus low-income homeowners engendered anger at the financial elites. At the same time, immigration from Mexico, the threat of radical Muslim terrorism, and lingering racial divides were ripe for political manipulation (Rodrik, 2018).*

He emphasizes the two salient economic issues that have grabbed attention of populists in power: trade agreements in the US, and competition over welfare payments in Western Europe. In Rodrik's assessment, globalization and its consequences, which is important in both cases, are the main determinant of the emergence of the *breeding ground* for the support for populism. While in Europe benefits from globalization have been more equally distributed by inclusive institutions through an expansion of the overall economic welfare for many citizens, in Latin America it has generally produced distortions, regional inequalities, wide discrepancies in economic outcomes as well as a significant number of people on the flip side of the gains from global trade. However, while globalization surely has a big upside in promoting mobility of capital and those actors who are capital-abundant, the impact of robotization and labour substitution might feel different for the blue-collar workers, who are the most susceptible to such risks. This produces general concerns over job insecurity, across the region, which takes the form of perception of unfairness of the system and unequal opportunities for fair and stable work conditions (Benczes et al, 2020; Rawls, 1971; Dworkin, 1981; Roemer, 1998).

If the definition of Dornbusch and Edwards (1990, 1991, 2007) and Rodrik's (2018) references to the economic populism are still valid, we would expect three aspects to hold true. First, populist parties to be primarily emphasising redistribution over other issues in their policy positions. Second, the level of salience of the economic issues in their ideological positions to be high. Third, we would expect such positions to be distinct to those of the non-populist parties.

## 8.8 Waves of economic manifestations of populism

While the definitions of political populism does not seem to include a direct reference to the economic side of it, as well as the earlier experiences with Latin American macroeconomic populism not being directly applicable to the current times, I propose to conceptualize the phenomenon through the prism of three distinct waves associated with the manifestations of the economic aspect of populism presented in Table 8-2.

The first wave are historical examples of policies that have managed to show elements of economic populism. As highlighted by Rodrik (2018), such examples include the New Deal policies under Francis Roosevelt in the United States. The stabilization policies for the banking sector during the Great Depression, minimal wages and maximum working hours, the introduction of the wealth tax for the rich as well as Social Security Act and new programs to aid tenant farmers and migrant workers between 1933 and 1939 all became part of the New Deal. While the implementation of reforms had political goals of enlarging the voter base, its aim was primarily redistribution in the aftermath of the crisis as well as the minimization of the burden on the most economically insecure strata of the population.

To an extent the regulation of the eight-hour workday and the capped 40-hour week preventing excesses, abuses as well as the forbidding child labour in the early periods of industrialization in Britain as well as on the fourth day after the October Revolution in Soviet Union was an economically populist policy as well. Coming out of a social movement (also known as the short-time movement) with an aim to regulate the length of a working day, in the Soviet Union it took form in line with the Marxist doctrine with an aim at reducing inequality. In Europe, the policy took a turn for the rights of the workers and the socio-democratic policy

mix, while in Soviet Union it perfectly within the Marxist fights for the rights of the “true people” the proletariat.

Table 8-2 Waves of the economic manifestations of populism

| First Wave:<br>Historical<br>Examples of<br>Economic<br>Populism        | Second<br>Wave. Latin<br>American<br>Incumbency   | Third Wave. The European Experience   |   |  |
|---|---|---|---|--|
|   |   | Left-<br>Authoritarian  | Ideologically<br>Ambiguous  | Redistributive Radical<br>Left   |
| New Deal –<br>US; Eight<br>hour work<br>day – Britain,<br>Soviet Union. | Argentina,<br>Brazil,<br>Chile, Peru,<br>Mexico and<br>Nicaragua<br>of the 70s<br>and 80s | Fidesz<br>(Hungary),<br>PiS (Law and<br>Order)<br>(Poland),<br><i>Smer</i><br>(Slovakia),<br><i>Ataka</i><br>(Bulgaria) | DP - Labour<br>Party<br>(Lithuania),<br>M5S - Five Star<br>Movement<br>(Italy), <i>Sinn Féin</i><br>(Ireland and<br>UK), SP -<br>Socialist Party<br>(Netherlands) | Syriza and MR25<br>(Greece), <i>Symmachia</i><br>(Citizen Alliance)<br>(Cyprus), [La France]<br><i>Insoumise</i> (France<br>Unbowed), <i>Die Linke</i><br>(The Left) (Germany),<br><i>Levica</i> (The Left)<br>(Slovenia), <i>Podemos</i><br>(Spain) |

Both policies seemed to have a goal to fight inequality, and can be interpreted as a policy with a rather short-term prospect at the time, fitting the definition of Dornbush and Edwards (1991) that implied a significant public spending in the case of the New Deal or loss in tax revenues and flexible labour arrangements as in case with the 8-hour work day program. However, as posited by Rodrik (2018) contrary to expectations, these policies had a consistent positive effect within a long-term timeframe, and cannot be deemed “bad” economic decisions.

The second wave is the Latin American experience of the 80s, and particularly the incumbency of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Mexico and Nicaragua during the 1970s and 1980s. The economic stabilization policies implemented during this rule, as documented by

Dornbusch and Edwards (1991) could be characterized as macroeconomically populist due to the “bad” economics that lead to the economic mismanagement. Consequently, in the later time periods of 1990s, the intensions of redistribution from the wealthy to the poor and overcompensation for the perceived unsuccessful privatization and liberalization under the recipe of the Washington consensus represented the delivery on the promises to protect the common interest of “the people” from “the corrupt elite”.

The third wave of economic manifestations of populism are the examples of politically populist European examples that have appeared on the political horizon in the aftermath of the global economic crisis of 2008. In the current wave of populism, macroeconomic prudence seems to be followed so much more closely than it was in the 80s and 90s, because of lessons learned from the past and the existence of stringent borrowing mechanisms. A seemingly irresponsible form of economic policy by which a government engages in a period of massive public spending financed by foreign loans, periods of hyperinflation and harsh economic adjustments are less common. In some cases, an overall trend of better governance, the ability to sustain the current account deficit as well as use the exchange rate flexibility can increase the capacity of a country to accommodate external shocks (Edwards, 2004; Özmen, 2005). In others, both the net-borrowers and net-creditor governments as well as the increasing intergovernmentalism of crediting bodies, as well as stringent balanced budget rules dampen the political business cycle (Rose, 2006). This, in combination with the effect of globalization, makes periods of hyperinflation and macroeconomic mismanagement less unnoticeable for other players in the world economy, and thus less plausible.

I propose to divide the third wave in three separate categories of populist parties: left-authoritarian (i), ideologically ambiguous (ii) as well as the redistributive radical left (iii).

The current political horizon is dominated by many successful populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe, that can be characterized by so-called “left authoritarianism”, that is, a combination of highly distributive stances on economic issues with conservative preferences on the cultural dimension. The politically conservative component is important for

the left-authoritarians for two reasons. First, using the thin ideology of populism, it delineates which groups belong to “true people”, using appeals to nativism, xenophobia and nationalism. Second, the embrace of populism in their discourse and through the thin ideology prepares the ground for redistribution and compensation of “the true people” through family policies, public work programs, price caps, etc. The most vivid examples include Fidesz in Hungary, PiS in Poland, *Ataka* in Bulgaria and *Smer* in Slovakia that successfully combine such positions, in a way reminiscent of the “reddish” and “brownish” coalitions (communist successor parties and nationalists) of the early years of transition (Ishiyama, 1998). For the most part, Central and Eastern European populist parties acquire the left authoritarian profile, if they had the combination of left-wing economic policies and authoritarian/nativist stances, further exacerbated by the global economic and refugee crises. These parties fit the ideological definition of populism in its definition as a thin ideology and have been the most successful with multiple stints in power. In addition, this group has been the one that had either contained a dose of economic program aiming at redistribution in their political manifestos or managed to implement short-sighted economic policies, when in government.

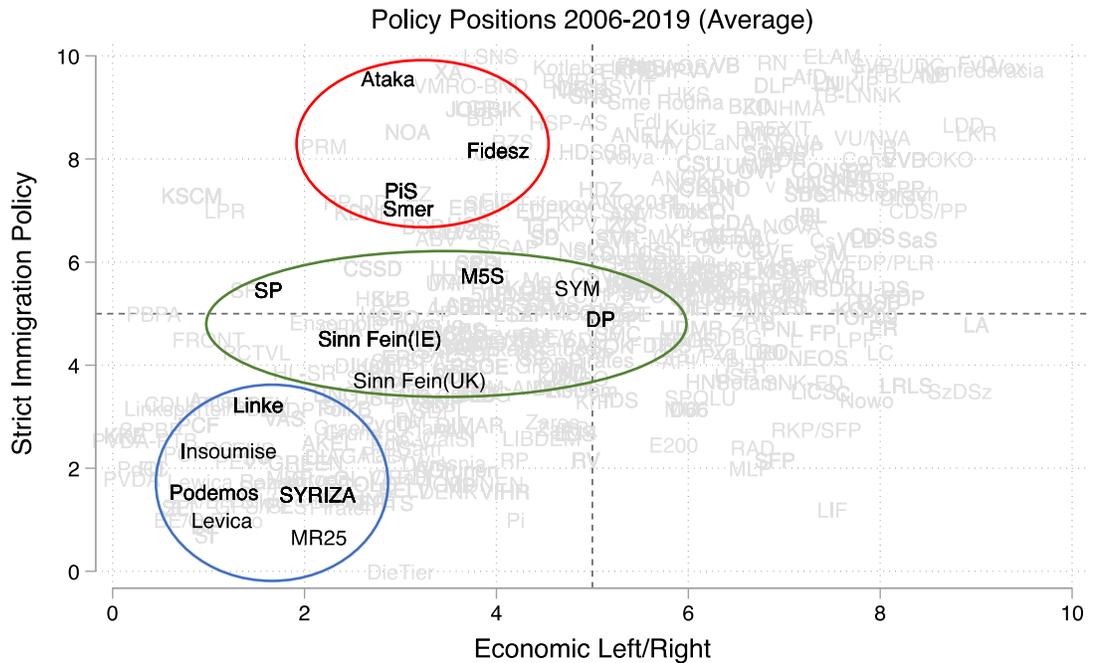
The second category includes the ideologically ambiguous populist DP - Labour Party (Lithuania), M5S - Five Star Movement (Italy), *Sinn Féin* (Ireland and UK) and SP - Socialist Party (Netherlands). All three parties started out as initially left-wing, but have used nativism as electoral tool or have shifted their positions between elections to make them closer to the centre or less well-defined. Some, like the Lithuanian Labour Party or the Italian Five Star Movement do not have a clearly defined ideological stance, but have served in coalition governments. Others, like *Sinn Féin* or the Dutch Socialist party are left-wing, deeply rooted in republicanism and a subject to historical specificities of the respective party systems in these countries, and thus have moderated their positions throughout time, while in opposition.

The third category of the wave of the anti-austerity movement produced the redistributive radical left, which, while quite remain reminiscent of the Latin American experience in the second wave of economic populism and the turn to progressive economic and social policies of the “pink tide”. Some, such as Greek Syriza and Cypriot *Symmaxia* and

are most vivid examples of parties that came to the forefront on the wave of the opposition to the austerity and the politics of retrenchment as mitigating measures of the global economic crisis. Others, appeared on the political horizon in the aftermath of the economic crisis, organizing protests against inequality and corruption and in favour of direct democracy, inspired by the move of the experience with economic populism. The latter includes other parties on the far-left spectrum of the Spanish *Podemos*, German *Die Linke*, Slovenian *Levica*, French *La France Insoumise* and Greek MR25, placed on the left of social democracy (March, 2012).

### 8.9 Policy Stances and Issue Salience

As per Figure 8-1, the parties seem to be grouped according to their distinct positions on the cultural (policy stances on immigration) and economic (left-right) dimension. As compared to the rest of the parties with electoral representation in European Union (normally distributed, in the background), all three groups of economically populist parties are situated on the economically left spectrum according to the averages. The left-authoritarian group includes the populist parties of Bulgarian *Ataka*, Hungarian Fidesz, Polish PiS and Slovak *Smer* are the leaders in terms of a strict stance on anti-immigration. The episodes include an open embrace of the anti-Brussels rhetoric in case of refugee relocation schemes, engagement with hate speech in their discourse. All parties in the group have experience in government, as well as in policies that could be characterized as economically populist: nativist family policies (Fidesz, PiS, *Smer*), public work scheme (Fidesz), unconventional use of monetary policy (Fidesz), extra tax on foreign companies (Fidesz) and politicization of the economic institutions (central bank in the Hungarian case, in particularly).



Source: Chapel Hill Data Survey

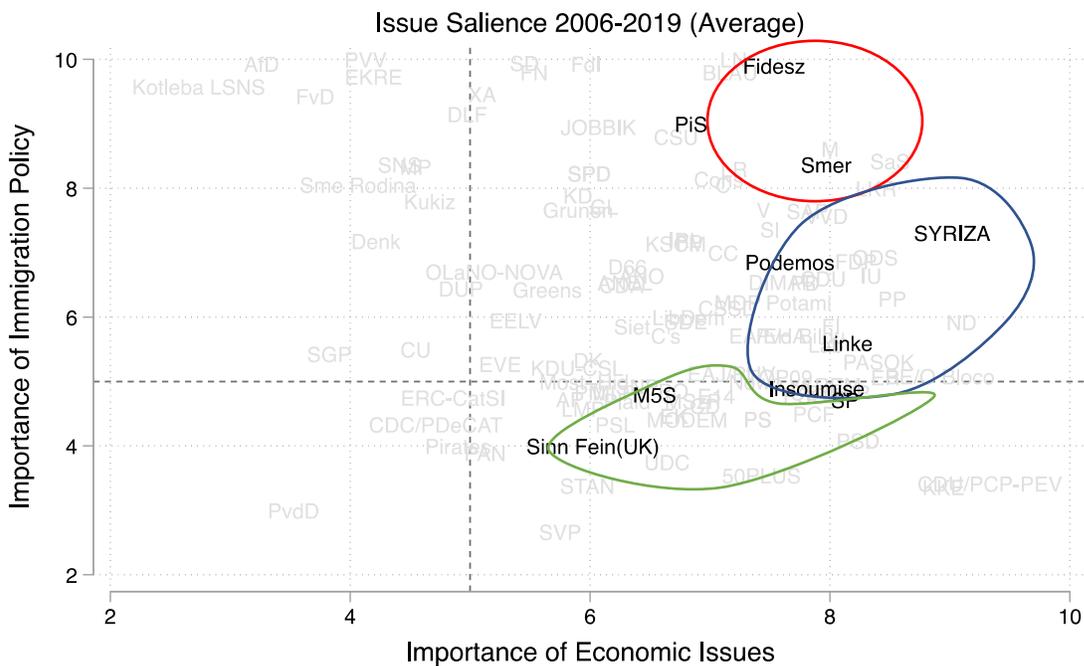
Figure 8-1 Policy Positions on Immigration and the Economy

The second group includes Italian Five Star Movement, Dutch Socialist Party, *Sinn Féin* (IE and UK) short-lived Cypriot *Symmaxia* as well as Lithuanian Labour Party (marked as DP on the figure) and distributed closer to the centre in the value dimension. This group includes primarily left-leaning populist parties, which, although initially had a highly distributive stance on overpromising on the increases in minimal wage, social payments and pensions, either softened their economic position (*DP*, *Symmaxia*) due to the experience in government, competition in the party system or historical legacies (*Sinn Féin* and *Symmaxia*). The cultural dimension seems also to be either quite vague (*SP*, *Sinn Féin*) saw its stance on migration due to experience in a coalition government (*M5S*) or an extreme in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, which did not pay off and eventually had to give it up and reduce to its ambiguity (*DP*).

The third group includes the far-left parties, with a highly leftist economic stance with a strong consistent focus on the issues of redistribution combined with a relaxed stance on immigration. Such parties belong to the political systems of countries with established

democracies and primarily in the non-post socialist context (except for the ex-Yugoslav Slovenia). This group includes Spanish *Podemos*, Greek Syriza and MR25, German *Linke*, French *Insoumise* as well as Slovenian *Levica*. Except for Syriza and *Podemos*, other parties do not have experience in government for the period of the analysis, and, thus did not have time to implement their economically leftist policies in practice.

Figure 8-2 shows the salience (importance) of the two policy stances, showing to what extent do the two issues represent the importance of the cultural (policy stances on immigration) and economic (left-right) issues in their political programs.



Source: Chapel Hill Data Survey

Figure 8-2 Policy Salience on Immigration and the Economy

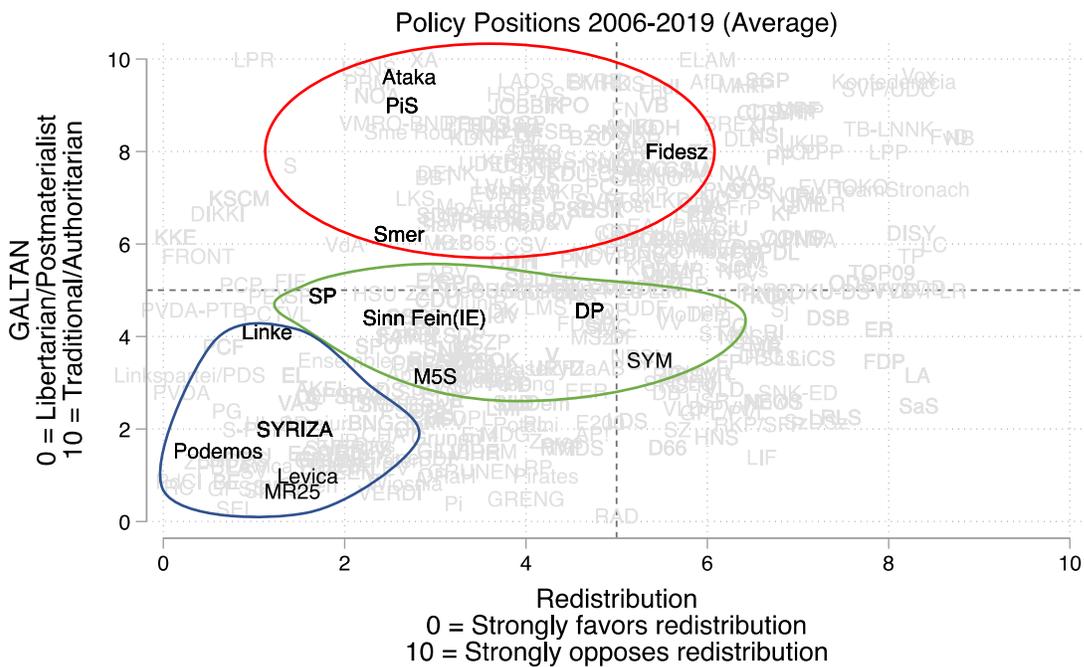
When analysing the importance of immigration and economic dimension in the stances of economically populist parties, with some degree of data limitations, left-authoritarians are at the top upper right scale for both dimensions. The ideologically ambiguous parties are on

the bottom of the scale of importance of these issues for them (Five Star Movement, *Sinn Féin*, SP) and the redistributive radical left is in-between the two.

There are two main reasons for this effect. As stated by Haughton and Deegan-Krause (2015) the previous two decades, party competition evolved around two main themes: the role of the market and issues related to national identity for the whole region of Central and Eastern Europe. Parties from the post-socialist region seem to emphasize immigration and the economic issues to a similar extent to the redistributive radical left counterparts from the Western European countries. The second reason is the competition in the party system, and the party strategies of retaking issue ownership from other niche party competitors during the time of the crises. As seen from the distribution of the parties with electoral representation (background, in grey), many smaller niche parties try to outcompete the more established mainstream ones, and, thus the emphasis on immigration and economic issues during the time of the crises is used as a party strategy to prevent vote losses. Spoon and Klüver (2020) also conclude that although, many established parties have adopted a so-called ‘accommodative strategy’ by taking a more immigration-sceptical policy, going tough on immigration does not help mainstream parties to prevent vote losses to their far-right competitors.

Figure 8-3 shows the policy positions on Green-Alternative-Libertarian and Traditional-Authoritarian-Nationalist (GALTAN) dimension as well as stances on redistribution. The groupings persist with similar trends in the GALTAN dimension as well as positions favouring redistribution. Figure 8-3 presents the position of a party in 2019 in terms of their views on social and cultural values (GALTAN) and an average of positions on redistribution (2006-19). While the distribution of all the parties with electoral representation seems to be skewed towards centre in terms of redistribution and towards more libertarian/postmaterialist values on the value dimension, the three groups seem to occupy separate spaces. Generally, they score high on redistribution disregarding whether they believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues or not. In addition, there seems to be a consistent division on the division between the Western Europe and the parties in the post-socialist space, with the former region’s left-authoritarians more

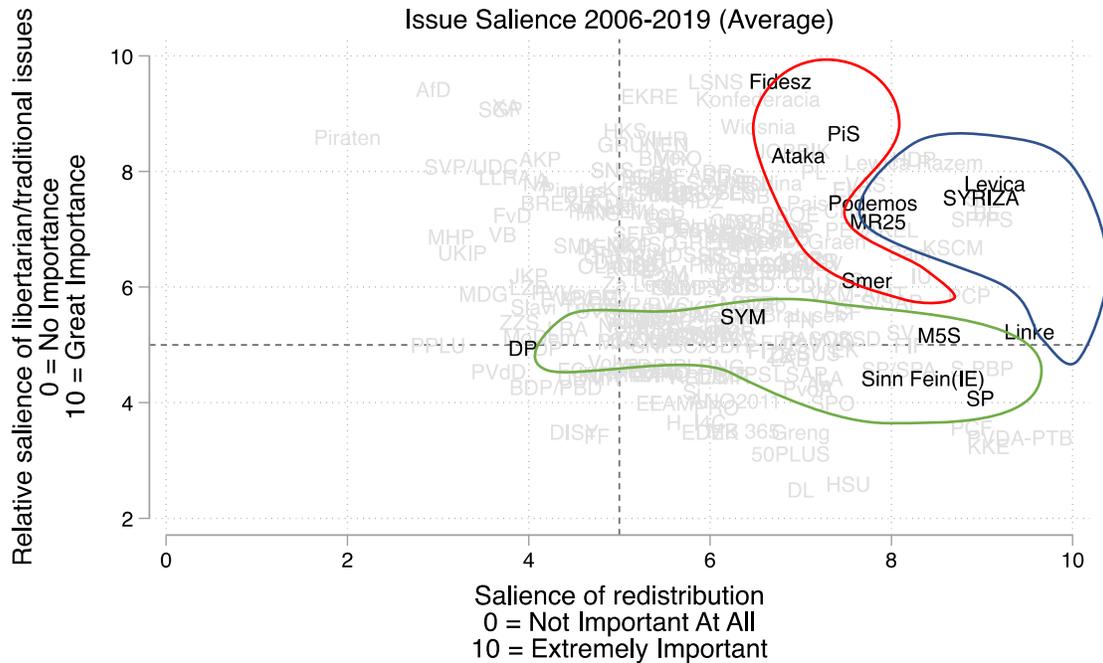
prone to opposing expanded personal freedoms: abortion rights, divorce, and same-sex marriage. “Traditional” or “authoritarian” parties in the likes of *Smer*, PiS and *ATAKA* are also in favour of redistribution of wealth from the rich to poor, except for *Fidesz*, which is an exception and is closer to the centre in this regard. The ideologically ambiguous Labour Party (DP), *Symmaxia* (SYM) *Sinn Féin* and Five Star Movement are closer to the centre on those issues than the rest of the grouping. The redistributive radical left strongly favours redistribution as well as hold libertarian positions on the GALTAN dimension.



Source: Chapel Hill Data Survey

Figure 8-3 Policy Stances on GALTAN dimension and Redistribution

Figure 8-4 shows the salience (importance) of the two policy stances, showing to what extent the two issues represent the importance of the cultural (GALTAN) and economic (redistribution) issues in their political programs.



Source: Chapel Hill Data Survey

*Figure 8-4 Issue Salience of Libertarian/Traditional and Redistribution Dimensions*

Similar trends can be seen in the salience of value and redistribution dimensions for the three groupings of the parties as well. As seen from the overall distribution of all parties with parliamentary presence in the background, both issues seem to be of a more than average importance for the parties in the EU. Figure 8-4 shows that cultural dimension is important for all the parties, except for the ideologically ambiguous, which are situated around the midpoint (5 out of 10). Moreover, for all, except for the Lithuanian Labour Party, salience of redistribution is much more than the center. This points to the ideological ambiguity of Labour Party on one hand, as well as disappointment of the electorate as the result of not delivering on promises when in government and consequential change of strategy. During the early stages, the Labour Party structured its political discourse and all its electoral manifestos around the issues of social security: raising pensions, minimum wages and boosting unemployment benefits. The emphasis on economic issues, as well as the charismatic Russian-born leader of the party, hinted at a symbolic flirting with the times of full employment in the Soviet past. The emphasis on social security, calling for higher public investments, securing social rights

and job creation as well as willingness to participate in various types of coalitions after the elections, signalled centre-left allegiances (Jurkynas, 2004). However, the loss of salience of the issues of redistribution after a successful comeback from the economic crisis, left the party at a loss of identity and turned it to soften its economic stances. The potential effect of the party system in most of Baltic states that is ideologically tilted against redistribution, consistent with the variety of capitalism in the region in support for the neoliberal economic thinking is not excluded as well. The rest of the groupings remain in line with the proposed classification, with the division between strong emphasis on the value dimension in post-socialist countries and an even greater importance of economic matters for the radical left.

### 8.10 Conclusions

Dornbusch and Edwards' theoretical framework clearly suits the region-specific context of the second and third wave of populism in Latin America of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, as it relies heavily on the left-wing populism, where the issues of inequality and redistribution are the most acute and stay at the root of the populist discourse. The real question is to what extent does their understanding of economic populism translate to modern-day Europe, which is dominated by the right-wing discourse on populism?

Instead of trying to apply the economic populism to the current modern-day Europe, the current economic manifestations are seen through the prism of political populism in ideology (Mudde, 2014) and discourse (Moffit, 2016) and a division of *us* versus *them* in the economic sense – of the winners and losers of globalization (Müller, 2016).

The emergence of the three separate groups of parties: left-authoritarian (Fidesz, PiS, *Smer* and *ATAKA*) ideologically ambiguous (Labour Party, Five Star Movement, *Sinn Féin* and the (Dutch) Socialist Party) as well as redistributive radical left (*Syriza* and *MeRa25*, *Symmaxia*, *La France Insoumise*, *Die Linke*, *Levica*, *Podemos*) provides the variation of the emphasis on the compensation of the economically insecure groups through left-wing economic policy positions on economic redistribution.

Unlike in the Latin American experience of the last century, the economic manifestation of populism is in the emphasis of redistribution policies, carefully packaged with other issues

in their policy positions. Left-authoritarian parties do it, while suggesting a “traditional” or “authoritarian” conservative position on abortion rights, divorce, and same-sex marriage in a combination with highly redistributive policies, thus *thickening* its *thin* populist ideology (Kubik, 2020). The ideologically ambiguous populist parties change their positions between the elections or try to oscillate closer to the centre on the issues of immigration and redistribution, while the redistributive radical left are on the extreme end of the values for redistribution (March, 2012).

For the most part, contrasting the definition of Dornbusch and Edwards (1990) positions of left-authoritarian and ideologically ambiguous (except for the redistributive radical left) populist parties on the economic dimension are left-leaning, but not extreme, thus not distinct from those of the non-populist parties. This could be partially explained by the difference in experience of the consequences of the economic shocks, where in the aftermath of the economic crisis in the European context, the inflation is under control, foreign debt is sustainable and budget deficits are manageable, which goes against the “economic mismanagement” definition of Guiso et al. (2017). Instead, a trend of the decline in global inequality around the world, accompanied by an increase in rising economic inequalities and the emergence of new cleavages within countries is present and presents the issue of concern for the redistributive radical left (Milanovic, 2016). Not only the majority of Western Europe, but also the Central and Eastern European region is struggling with regional disparities, adverse effects of out-migration and job insecurities (Béland, 2019). These issues become more salient and might lead to more frictions, as well as demand for anti-establishment and unconventional solutions for mitigation of such dire socio-economic conditions.

However, specific cases of macroeconomic mismanagement or short-sighted policies on time-defined and region-specific cases exist. Variation of post-economic crisis responses in Greece and Spain, the build-up of the verticality of economic power, workfare and the return of family policies in Poland and Hungary are all good candidates for case studies of short-sighted economic policies that need to be further explored. Just do not call it *economic* populism.

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## 9 The Populist Radical Right in Latin America and their Connections with European Populism

### Cristóbal Sandoval

#### 9.1 Introduction

The characterization of Latin American populism based on three different waves understood as temporal and spatial clusters (Elkins and Simmons 2005, 35), of the phenomenon makes the region central to studying the evolution of populist discourse in different historical contexts and their articulation with different ideological traditions. In this way, following Mudde and Rovira (2017), the first wave corresponds to the governments between 1929 and 1960 of Juan Domingo Peron in Argentina and Getulio Vargas. The second was carried out by neo-populists (due to the contingent articulation between neoliberalism and populism) such as Carlos Menem or Alberto Fujimori in the 1990s. Finally, the third wave of populism in Latin America was led by left-wing political processes such as the governments of Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, and Evo Morales. However, in recent years it has been possible to observe the emergence of new political parties and leaders with different characteristics than the former waves.

In a similar way to political phenomena in the global north such as Donald Trump's presidency in the US and the populist radical right in Europe, Jair Bolsonaro's presidency in Brazil represents an innovation in the region as a radicalization of the mainstream right with a strong appeal to nationalist discourse against globalization and anti-elitist components. Similarly, the emergence of the Partido Libertario led by Javier Milei in Argentina and Jose Antonio Kast's Partido Republicano in Chile evidence the existence of new right-wing political discourses with many similarities to the populist radical right of the global north studied by Cas Mudde (2019). Thus, after three different waves of populism in Latin America, are we facing a new wave close to the populist radical right? What discursive characteristics does it share with the PRR parties of the global north? What kind of connections do these leaders and parties have with European PRR parties? How do relevant ideas and discourses adapt to the socio-political context of Latin America? To what discourses these new political phenomena in the region are reacting? This essay seeks to address these questions, if only briefly and partially.

As a starting point to problematize this phenomenon, I consider relevant the end of the geographical divide posited between inclusionary Latin American populism and European exclusionary populism proposed by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013). In this sense, the emergence of parties such as SYRIZA in Greece (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014) and Podemos in Spain after the 2008 economic crisis showed that was possible the emergence of more inclusionary populist discourse in the context of the global north because of the austerity policies implemented by the European Union. Similarly, what Cas Mudde (2019) calls the fourth wave of the populist radical right is not limited by the geographical boundaries of the global north. However, it can now be characterized as a global phenomenon with a more complex variety of hybrids and with a closer connection with the traditional right wing, especially in issues such as immigration and law and order policies. Hence, globalization's development has permitted stronger connections between far-right parties producing a network of transmission of this kind of ideas and discourses between different regions.

Finally, another relevant element to problematize the emergence of the populist radical right in Latin America is the role of materialist and post-materialist values. Following Zanotti and Roberts (2021), contrary to the European context, material values are still relevant in Latin American societies, thus the emergence of populist radical right discourses are not a reaction to post-materialist values such as identity politics or ecological ideas. This can explain why this kind of phenomenon is still an exception in the region. However, it is possible to hypothesize that populist radical right parties and leaders can be a reaction to the third wave of populism in the region, as well as to the heightened role of feminist discourses in some countries.

To understand this new political phenomenon, the essay is divided in three parts. Firstly, I will define the main elements of the populist radical right and briefly discuss how this kind of discourse gets disseminated from Europe to other countries. Secondly, I shall illustrate the emergence of populist radical right discourses in Latin America, especially in the case of Chile, focusing on connections with Vox in Spain. Finally, I will present some preliminary

conclusions on the topic in order to put forward elements of a new research agenda helping us to understand the contemporary emergence of a populist radical right in Latin America.

## 9.2 The populist radical right and their diffusion

In simple terms, the populist radical right can be defined as those radical right-wing political discourses that center on the notion of the 'common people' as a homogenous community that is oppressed by the political and cultural elite. As the seminal work of Mudde (2007) has shown, the populist radical right articulates the populist ideology with authoritarian and nativist ideas, advancing thus an exclusionary project that seeks the restoration of a 'heartland' lost in ongoing transformations related to the very process of globalization (Taggart 1995; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). As already mentioned, this type of populism emerged in the global north as a reaction to the rise and diffusion of post-materialist values related to globalization and the development of late capitalist societies (Ignazi 1992), especially with the growth of immigration. Thus, this kind of discourse articulates itself with Eurosceptic ideas in a defense of cultural homogeneity and nationalist protectionism against international institutions like the European Union and the United Nations.

The contributions by Jens Rydgren (2005) and Steven Van Hauwaert (2019) on the diffusion of the populist radical right in Europe are relevant here because they allow us to explain how the incorporation of new discursive elements differs from the older versions of the far-right, such as fascism. Therefore, populist radical right discourse operates as a general interpretative scheme or master frame (as an articulation between anti-elitism and ethnonationalism) that relates and synchronizes different demands and allows political parties to emerge around specific ideas. This view posits a series of structural elements – the political regime, the electoral system, and citizens' trust in institutions, among others – that reveal the emergence of the party family of the populist radical right in Western Europe as the result of the diffusion of a master frame that was adapted or translated according to the different contexts reaching different levels of success depending on the structural elements mentioned.

The different adaptation of populist discourses around the globe takes us to the concept of translation. Following Rydgren (2005: 431), the process of adapting the master frame of

populism requires the frame to resonate in different cultures and political systems, allowing a 'creative modification.' Thus, to understand the processes of global diffusion and circulation of populist discourse between different contexts, it is necessary to emphasize the translation processes through which the master frame of populism, in its various versions, is adapted across contexts and regions. Such diffusion of political ideas and policies involves a process of innovation constrained by specific context-specific, pre-existing logics or bounded rationalities (Weyland 2019). In other words, translations allow us to 'reframe' what has been disseminated, allowing us to understand the variations of the circulating elements.

Additionally, 'networking, for any political party, represents an important political activity particularly on an international level, functioning as a crucible for the exchange of ideas and information on policy and praxis' (Macklin 2013, 177). In other words, the existence of international and transnational networks facilitates the connections and learning processes between political forces from different contexts, becoming more complex and faster through the development of the internet and social networks as communication channels (Caiani 2018).

The formation of transnational networks has been studied in diffusion theory related to the existence of epistemic communities. However, to critically explain the diffusion and circulation of populism it is necessary to adopt a more flexible definition of epistemic communities than the traditional approach as 'a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain' (Haas 1992, 3). Instead, following Ramos and Torres's (2020) work on the study of the transmission of ideas and practices of the far-right between the United States and Europe, we consider epistemic communities as social networks with shared values, knowledge, practices, and political beliefs that are not based on expert knowledge and do not 'necessarily reflect evidence-based reasoning' (Ibid., 91). In other words, different political actors as political parties, NGOs, and international meetings of leaders and militants, among other, facilitate the formation of networks that work as epistemic communities, which allow and expedite the diffusion and circulation of populism.

Hence, we propose that the dynamics of diffusion and circulation of populism are mediated by the formation of transnational networks of agencies, in which populist discourse, as a master frame, becomes a circulating reference to be later translated by political agents in multiple ways within the different sociopolitical contexts where populist discourses emerge.

### 9.3 Case-study: The Chilean Partido Republicano and their connections with Vox in Spain

Once we understand the main definition of the populist radical right, as well as capture the importance of the diffusion of this type of discourse between different countries and socio-political contexts, it is possible to account for the emergence of the populist radical right in Latin America along these lines, using as a relevant illustration the case of Jose Antonio Kast's Partido Republicano in Chile and their strong connections with Vox in Spain. The *Partido Republicano* is a novel political vehicle that competed in Chile's 2021 election and won fifteen seats in the House of Deputies and one in the Senate. Moreover, Kast obtained 27.9% of the first-round vote in the presidential race, making him the most voted-for candidate. While he lost the second-round election, his project has become quite attractive to a substantive segment of the electorate. It is worth noting that Kast represents an evident innovation in the Chilean right-wing camp. The agenda of the party incorporates elements of the populist radical right from the global north (both from Europe and the United States), such as an appeal to the 'common people', understood as the silent majority at odds with the political and cultural elite – portrayed as progressive politicians, intellectuals, the mainstream media, feminist activists, etc. – that denies the traditional values of Chilean culture (Rovira Kaltwasser 2019; Campos 2021).

Even if the discourses elaborated by the Partido Republicano and Kast can be generally seen as resulting from diffusion processes of emulation and learning from the populist radical right of the global north, it is particularly important to highlight their connections with Vox in Spain because of the long-term relationship between Chilean and Spanish right-wing political parties and between the dictatorships of Francisco Franco and Augusto Pinochet, as well the catholic tradition in both countries. In this vein, Vox has been characterized as a populist

radical right party (Rama et al. 2020) with narratives that appeal to the traditional values of the Spanish culture (Divita 2022; Esteve-del Valle and Costa López 2022). In both parties, we encounter many elements characteristic of the populist radical right of the global north with a twist. Firstly, nativist ideas in defense of national values against the global elites, especially the United Nations' 2030 agenda and a position against immigration. Secondly, a shared populist logic in which they recognize themselves as the voice of the silent majority against the political and cultural elites at a national and global level. Finally, based on the revindication of the authoritarian past of the dictatorships, both parties promote authoritarian ideas and an agenda of law and order.

Additionally, since its emergence, the *Partido Republicano* has formed an Ibero-American network together with other far-right political forces. Preliminary investigations have shown that this novel populist radical vehicle remains close knit and has an affinity with parties such as *Vox* in Spain and Jair Bolsonaro's presidency in Brazil. This circulation network is built on the *Foro de Madrid*, conceived as a reaction to the left-wing *Foro de São Paulo*. The *Foro de Madrid* is led by the president of *Vox*, Santiago Abascal, and Kast was a signatory of the *Carta de Madrid* along with many other right-wing political leaders in the Ibero-American sphere (Foro de Madrid 2020).

Finally, even though I observe a process of diffusion of the populist radical right master frame with many similarities to other parties in Europe and North America (Campos 2021), this is not a mechanical or automatic process since it is mediated by a distinct translation logic as well as the bounded rationality of political actors in Chile. For example, after the popular revolt of October 2019, the *Partido Republicano* portrayed the protests as pure vandalism and demanded the mobilization of the military, taking an antagonistic position towards the movement (Duran and Rojas 2021). At the same time, Kast and his party advanced a harsh critique of the Communist Party and other left-wing actors, which were depicted as authoritarian forces willing to implement a Cuban/Chavista program in Chile. Seen in this light, although it is true that Kast presents himself as an innovation, the bounded rationalities of the Chilean right wing make it difficult for him to take a different position on the popular

revolt from the rest of the Chilean right; he resorted to a Cold-War era political jargon (Weyland 2019).

#### 9.4 Conclusions

To summarize, it is possible to recognize the emergence of populist radical right parties and leaders in the Latin American context with many similarities to those in Europe and North America. However, ongoing diffusion processes are not mechanical processes neutrally transmitting elements from one socio-political context to another but involve processes of translation or creative modification depending on the country. Additionally, it is interesting to note that the Latin American versions of the populist radical right may be understood as a reaction to the diffusion of left-wing ideas related to the third wave of Latin American populism instead of connecting them with post-materialist values. However, from my perspective, it is too soon to talk about a fourth wave of Latin American populism, especially when most of the new governments in the region are left-wing.

Contrary to most of the European populist radical right, where nativism is related to a defense of the welfare state as something restricted to natives (so-called welfare chauvinism), indicating a more or less internal dynamic, the role of Spain in the diffusion of far-right ideas in Latin American – because of the colonial past of the region (Ibero-American network) – as well the role of the US in the recent history of the region have been central (consider, for example, the spread of neoliberal and "libertarian" ideas). In this vein, the focus of these discourses involves the reduction of the welfare state and of the social rights promoted by left-wing government of the past decade in the region.

In sum, the emergence of the populist radical right represents a challenge in studying the far-right around the globe. As Cas Mudde has explained, this phenomenon is now global and with more complex characteristics than the traditional PRR of Europe. The combinations of different ideological traditions as well as the role of the populist logic in these political hybrids are central. Most crucially, it is necessary to understand these political agents not as something specific to a particular region but as resulting from processes of interdependence

between different political forces which emulate and learn from each other through the formation of networks.

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## 10 Contemporary Populism Research: Challenges and New Directions<sup>16</sup>

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### 10.1 The Challenges and the Mainstream

A multitude of heterogeneous and even antithetical phenomena are currently being debated under the rubric of populism. Mainstream media, established political forces and academics are quick to denounce their *scandalous* nature. Most often, populism is seen as violating or transgressing an established order of how politics is *properly*, *rationally* and *professionally* done (Stavrakakis 2017a). Such an exclusively pejorative perspective, which reproduces stereotypical views of normality, often relies on the myths of a unidirectional modernization theory, ignores methodological diversity and downplays the historical genealogy of populism, which reveals a predominantly democratic, egalitarian canon going back to the US and Russian populism(s) of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In addition, it often suffers from a Eurocentric insistence on the exclusive association of populism with the far right due to a lack of comparative analysis. All in all, ‘[t]he study of populism is [still] instructive about the consequences of condescension, *arrogance*, and *ignorance* on the part of elites and intellectuals’ (Vann Woodward 1981: 32, emphasis added).

Perhaps the first fundamental challenge populism research is facing today is a self-critical one: the need to seriously reflect on the language games developed around the ideological uses of ‘populism’ within academic and media discourse from Richard Hofstadter, from the 1950s, to the present day. When we study populism, we *talk* about populism, we articulate meanings in *language* and *discourse*, and language is never innocent. In the long run it naturalizes significations that were initially partisan, even arbitrary, and reifies into supposedly neutral objectivity crystallizations of historically-dependent power relations

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<sup>16</sup> This is an expanded version based on a talk given at the DATAPOPEU Conference, Thessaloniki, 8/12/2022. The text draws on a series of recent publications (as referenced) to provide a succinct presentation of the discursive approach to researching populism today.

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(Stavrakakis 2017b). And, of course, such language games crosscut politics, the media, and the academic field, establishing choreographies of mutual constitution.

We may need, then to both (1) expand and broaden the scope of populism research (to encompass discourses *about* populism and ‘the people’ as well as the networks ensuing between them on various levels, on top of populist and anti-populist discourses, narrowly defined), and (2) highlight the relevance of populist phenomena *not* only with abnormality and anti-democratic monstrosity *but* also – and most centrally – with the political-theoretical rubrics of democratic politics and representation and the associated tropes of political modernity, its potential and its limitations.

Part of the mainstream (especially Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013, 2017) seems to be moving in such a direction, registering the existence of both *exclusionary* and *inclusionary* variants of populism and indicating that populism can be both an *enemy* but also an *ally* of democracy. Nevertheless, the ideational approach remains, more or less, trapped within schemas emanating from the 1950s and 1960s (insisting on the moralistic status of populism and its reliance on fantasies of purity/homogeneity) (see, for a critical perspective, Stavrakakis & Jäger 2018, Katsambekis 2022).

## 10.2 The Discursive Approach

A discursive approach accepts that (along with other individual characteristics often associated with populism) moralization and the nostalgia of purity affects a multitude of political families and cannot be exclusively attributed to populism, where it may not exist at all, depending on the context (political culture). Attempting to distinguish what is core to populism from what may be peripheral, it also highlights a set of minimal (formal) criteria whose *combination* may allow one to capture the dynamic particularity of populism and to account for its different ideological mutations and their circulation on various societal and political levels (Stavrakakis 2017a, Panizza & Stavrakakis 2021). In addition, it takes very seriously into account the impact of the genealogies of democratic institutions and representation on debates about populism and anti-populism.

Let us start from the latter issue. As far as the emergence of populism is concerned, liberal democratic regimes have historically emerged as a compromise, simultaneously (1) addressing, to a certain extent, the so-called ‘social question’, but (2) in ways sustaining a stable government. ‘Popular sovereignty’ became, in this context, a foundational constitutional principle, but every effort was made to ‘gentrify’ it. The resulting representative systems have not always been capable to sustain legitimacy. When plebeian/popular strata feel marginalized (economically, socially, politically), a crisis of representation may ensue. New political forces then emerge, promising a better implementation of ‘popular sovereignty’. They act ‘in the name of the people’ in a bid to articulate a multitude of social and political forces in order to construct a collective subject potent enough to impact on decision-making. Such forces are often demonized by a delegitimized establishment as ‘populist’ irrespective of their ideological credentials and/or profile. Within this context, an opposition between populism and anti-populism develops, which can also take the form of a long-term cleavage (Barbieri 2021).

Let us now pass to the former issue. As far as the definition of populism is concerned, within the aforementioned context,

*Populism involves a dichotomic discourse in which ‘the people’ are juxtaposed to ‘the elite’ along the lines of a down/up antagonism in which ‘the people’ is discursively constructed as a large powerless group through opposition to ‘the elite’ conceived as a small and illegitimately powerful group. Populist politics thus claim to represent ‘the people’ against an ‘elite’ that frustrates their legitimate demands and present these demands as expressions of the will of ‘the people’ (De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017: 310).*

Such a conceptualization of populism, drawing on the contributions by Ernesto Laclau (1977, 2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2018), relies on two main (minimal) criteria:

- (1) *People-centrism*: The signifier ‘the people’ typically operates here as a *nodal point*, a point of reference around which other peripheral and often antithetical signifiers and ideas can become articulated; and

(2) *Anti-elitism*: A split representation of the socio-political field between *Us* (the marginalized, the underdog, ‘the people’) and *Them* (the establishment, the 1%, the elite) (Stavrakakis 2017a: 527-8).

Obviously, people-centrism and anti-elitism could be found separately in a series of different political (often non-populist) phenomena; it is, thus, only when their performative combination facilitates the emergence of a new collective subject with hegemonic pretensions that we can speak, from a discursive perspective, about a populist rupture. Most crucially, such an orientation avoids the *a priori* pejorative demonization of populism plaguing the mainstream (in one way or the other) and embraces a flexibility able to account for the plurality of populist hybrids emerging within representative democratic frameworks, also taking into account the socio-cultural aspects of hegemonic struggles (Savvopoulos & Stavrakakis 2022).

A discursive approach also calls for the elaboration of corresponding typologies to the extent that ‘the people’ and the ‘elite’ are conceptualized in different ways by different movements/parties/leaders operating within different historical conjunctures thus leading to distinct types of populism that, very often, share little between themselves. This is particularly crucial in distinguishing what is *populist* proper from what may be predominantly *nationalist* with only secondary references to a populist grammar and/or what is ‘inclusionary’ populist from what is ‘exclusionary’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013).

In previous publications (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, Stavrakakis 2017a: 530), it has been attempted to develop a rigorous typology to assist identification and classification in this respect. Indeed there are two crucial differences between the two that become visible when they are examined through the formal lens of discursive architectonics: (1) in inclusionary populism ‘the people’ operates as an fluid ‘empty signifier’ without a fixed signified, while in exclusionary populism it usually refers back to a fantasmatic transcendental signified (the nation, race, etc.); in addition (2) in inclusionary populism the dichotomization of the political space is arranged in a mostly vertical manner (up/down, high/low), while exclusionary populism involves a horizontal (inside/outside) dichotomic arrangement. The important analytical consequence of

this theorization is that what is often debated as extreme right-wing or exclusionary populism is, in effect, a nationalist/nativist, xenophobic ideology with only peripheral and/or secondary populist elements.

In populist discourses proper, then, apart from being located at the core of the discursive articulation, ‘the people’ operates as an empty signifier, as a *signifier without signified*, so to speak (Laclau 2005: 69-72, 161-163). In contradistinction, when nationalist discourses employ the signifier the ‘people’, this is either located at the periphery of their chain of signification or, even *when it is given a more central place*, its populist emptiness is moderated significantly, referring it back to ‘race’ or ‘nation’, discursive units that in extreme right discourse often function as naturalized, original (mythical) points of reference, as Derridean ‘transcendental signifieds’ attempting to fix signification once and for all. In this sense, whereas (predominantly inclusionary) populist discourses potentially expand the chain of significations associated with ‘the people’ – even including immigrants – (predominantly exclusionary) nationalist uses of ‘the people’ attempt to arrest and limit this fluidity (see Stavrakakis *et al.* 2017). At the same time, in spatial terms, populism proper is largely structured around a vertical, down/up or high/low axis that refers to power, status and hierarchical socio-cultural positioning while nationalist or national-populist discourses prioritize a horizontal arrangement fashioned along the lines of nationalist out-grouping (De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017, Stavrakakis 2017a).

Table 10-1 adapted from De Cleen & Stavrakakis 2017

**TABLE 1**  
Discourse-theoretical conceptualisation of nationalism and populism

| <b>Formal criterion</b>   | <b>Nationalism</b>   | <b>Populism</b>   |
|---|--|---|
| Nodal point of chain of equivalence, and claim to represent             | The nation and/or the people-as-nation   | The people-as-underdog  |
| Subject position offered  | Citizen of “the nation”  | Member of “the people”  |
| Outside constitutive to creation of chain of equivalence/identity       | Non-members and/or other nations   | The elite/establishment   |
| Orientation of relation between nodal point and constitutive outside(s) | Horizontal: in/out (membership, identity—related to shared territory and time) | Vertical: down/up (hierarchy, power, recognition, incorporation, socio-economic and/or socio-cultural position) |

### 10.3 Empirical Examples

During the last few years, the discursive analytical framework and the associated toolkit have been utilized in a series of concrete analyses of populist discourses and the surrounding conjunctures.

Already in 2014, Stavrakakis and Katsambekis have published an analysis of the left-wing populism of SYRIZA in crisis-ridden Greece (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014). Embarking on a detailed examination of Tsipras’s and SYRIZA’s discourse before and after the 2012 elections has demonstrated that the signifier ‘the people’ emerged, during this period, as a privileged reference, a nodal point that overdetermined this discourse from beginning to end, in accordance with the first criterion put forward by discourse theory (*people-centrism*). At the same time, SYRIZA’s discourse was clearly articulated on the basis of a dichotomous, antagonistic schema, with the antagonistic pattern ‘us/the people against them/the establishment’ being the dominant one (*anti-elitism*). On both counts then, Stavrakakis & Katsambekis have concluded that SYRIZA’s discourse qualifies as a populist one.

And yet, the content of SYRIZA's discourse could not be furthest from extreme right-wing rhetoric, the stereotypical model usually associated with populism within a European context. On the basis of a typology similar to the one developed in this short text, Stavrakakis & Katsambekis have concluded that at least two very different conceptualizations of the 'people' were circulating in the Greek public sphere: the first, put forward by SYRIZA, seemed to be active, inclusive, democratic and emancipatory (in other words, 'the people' here operated as an empty signifier along the lines of a predominantly vertical antagonism); the second, characteristic of extreme or extremist right-wing parties like Golden Dawn, was passive, racially and ethnically pure, anti-democratic and authoritarian (in other words, associating the signifier 'the people' with a mythical nationalist signified along the lines of a horizontal ethnic division) (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014: 137-8).

The POPULISMUS research team (2014-5) and more recent research efforts from the same source have contributed analyses of additional inclusionary as well as exclusionary variants from other contexts (see, for example, Stavrakakis *et al.* 2016, 2017), also focusing on the before and after of potentially populist articulations as well as on the broader hegemonic socio-cultural dynamics involved (Savvopoulos & Stavrakakis 2022) and the psycho-social dimensions activated (Stavrakakis 2021; Stavrakakis & Galanopoulos 2022). Other researchers have also enriched the field of empirical applications of the said model (see, for example, from the very recent production, Kim 2022) pointing, in addition, to some limitations of populism research (Glynos & Mondon 2016).

#### 10.4 Conclusion: Future Research

Arguably, the discursive orientation has opened new avenues for reflexive and more nuanced research within populism studies. But it has not been alone. New ethnographic and psychosocial methods seem able to enrich the field in the near future. What is also promising is attempts to articulate quantitative methods with a conceptual framework drawing on the discursive approach (see, for example, Andreadis *et al.* 2016, Andreadis & Stavrakakis 2017).

Simultaneously, new research rubrics leave the periphery and become entrenched within populism research. These include:

- The role of emotions/affects in populism.
- The populism/anti-populism cleavage.
- The performativity of populist articulations.
- Populism and feminism.
- Constitutional and institutional aspects of populism.
- Populism in opposition/in government.

Many of the conceptual and methodological innovations involved will be developed in some detail in the chapters of the forthcoming *Elgar Research Handbook on Populism* (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis forthcoming) and are, at any rate, expected to expand the scope and increase the methodological and analytical rigour of contemporary populism research, within the spirit of a much-needed methodological pluralism.

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