

# **The rise of populism in modern democracies**

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## **1. Introduction: Populism and its challenge for liberal democracies**

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on the causes of the rise of populism and its consequences for political representation in modern democracies: why have populist parties gained ground in so many liberal democracies? And how does their emergence and continuing success affect the way political representation works in these systems? We aim to provide answers to these questions by reviewing the extensive (and growing) literature on populism. Despite impressive progress in this field, we also shed light on some gaps and opportunities for future research.

The first challenge in this endeavour is to explain what exactly we mean by ‘populism’. Although many concepts in political science are latent and complex, it is hard to think of an example where the disputes about its core characteristics are as enduring and intense as for populism (e.g. Aslanidis 2016; Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008; Weyland 2001). There is still long-running debate about whether populism is an ideology (e.g. Mudde 2004), a style (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Wodak 2015), a discourse (e.g. Laclau 2005) or a strategy (e.g. Weyland 2001). Researchers also disagree on whether the opposite of populism is political liberalism, elitism or pluralism (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013, Pappas 2013). In popular debates, populism has become a ‘fancy buzzword’ (Rooduijn 2019: 365) that is often confused with related concepts such as Euroscepticism and nativism. The definition researchers use naturally has repercussions for how populism is measured, studied and assessed.

We make use of an increasingly widespread definition of populism as a phenomenon ‘that considers society to be ultimately separated in two homogenous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus the “corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’ (Mudde 2004: 543). This definition is common to most current analyses of populist parties and voters (e.g. Rooduijn et al. 2017; Schumacher & Rooduijn 2013). Importantly, this definition of populism means that it is independent of other ideological stances: populism is thus a ‘thin’ ideology (Mudde 2004: 543). Hence, parties along the entire left-right spectrum can all employ populist rhetoric and embrace populist ideas. In practice, many populist parties are either on the right or left edges of party systems, but exceptions to this rule abound. Given its simplicity and popularity, in this chapter we use this definition of populism and mainly consider research based on it.

We begin our analysis on the rise of populism with an overview of the electoral successes of populist parties and politicians in modern democracies (Section 2). While populism is not a new phenomenon, we aim to show that populist parties have indeed become more common and more successful in recent years. We then turn to the causes for the success of populism. In Section 3, we provide a general portrait of populist party voters in terms of their attitudes, their ideological stances, and their socio-demographic characteristics. While these ‘demand side’ factors help us to get a better understanding of populism, they are not sufficient to explain the rise of populist parties in recent years. Rather, there have to be favourable context factors for the rise of populist parties rooted in the change of political conflict structure and short-term factors emerging from political and economic crises. We focus on these factors in Section 4.

Section 5 is devoted to the consequences of populism for political representation: how do populist parties change the issue agenda and political communication? And how do populist parties fare as government parties? In so doing, we deliberately focus on the empirical consequences of the rise of populism and leave aside the more normative debate whether populism is a threat (cf. Kaltwasser 2012; Weyland 2013) or a corrective, if not an essential element, of democracy (Laclau & Mouffe 1985). We conclude by summarizing key conclusions that emerge from existing research.

## **2. Populist parties in modern democracies**

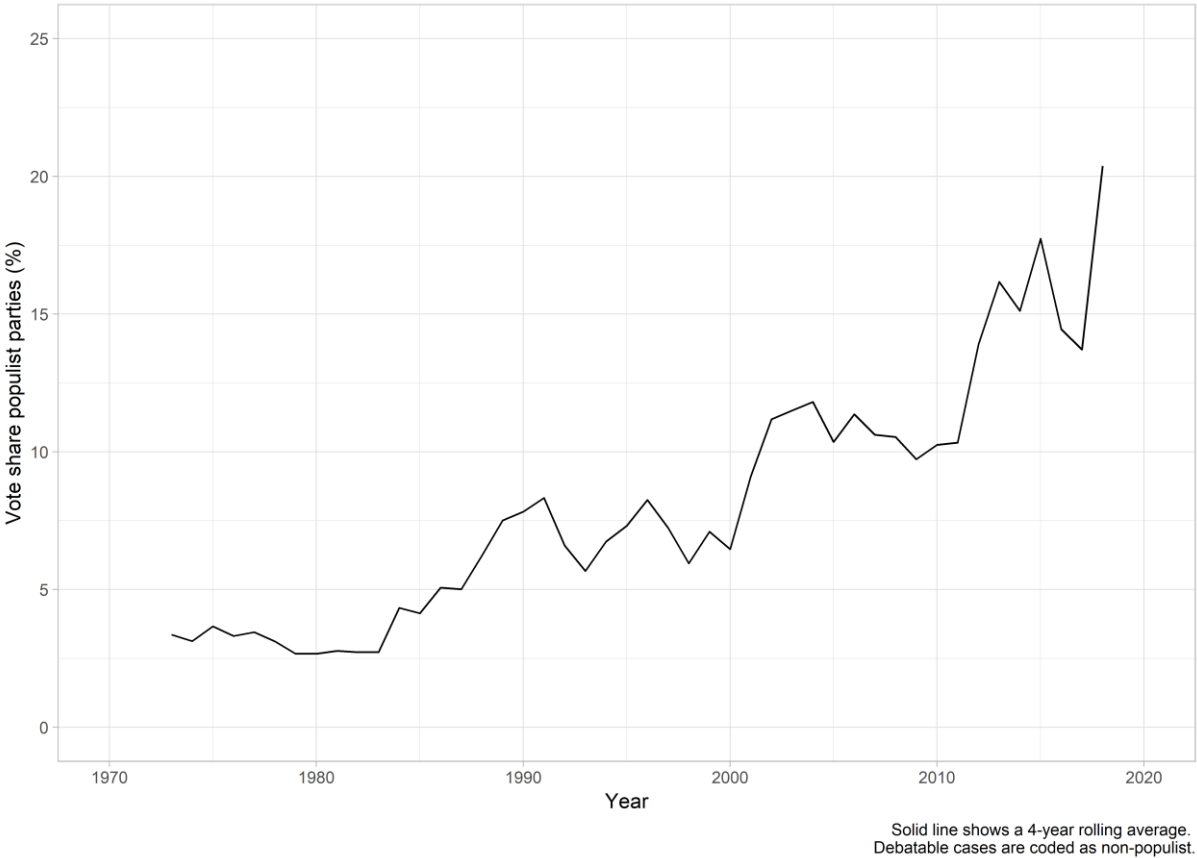
Populism is not a new phenomenon. In fact, history is full of examples of populist politicians, parties and movements (Taggart 2000). In the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, Latin American politics were particularly well-known for successful populist leaders. Getulio Vargas and Juan Perón in Brazil and Argentina are examples from the middle of the twentieth century, with more recent exemplars being Hugo Chávez (Venezuela), Evo Morales (Bolivia) or Rafael Correa (Ecuador) (e.g. Hawkins 2009; Panizza & Miorelli 2009).

More recently, a variety of European parties can be characterized as populist. Many of these are on the radical right, with the French Front National and the Austrian Freedom Party as prime examples (Mudde 2007). The rise of these parties has attracted many researchers who study its causes and consequences (e.g. Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Golder 2003; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005). Other right-wing movements, such as Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, were less extreme in their positioning (see the next section) but still employed populist rhetoric (Albertazzi 2009). Recently, radical-left parties have also been described as populist, such as

Podemos in Spain or SYRIZA in Greece (Ramiro & Gomez 2017; Stavrakis & Katsambekis 2014), with centrist populist parties like the Italian M5S completing the ideologically eclectic profile of populism in Europe.

These parties have also seen increasing electoral success over the past decades. To assess these parties' changing electoral fortunes, we first need to decide which parties count as populist. As researchers often disagree whether (and when) parties such as Fidesz in Hungary or PiS in Poland should be classified as 'populist', we reviewed comparative and single-country studies on populist parties in 36 advanced industrial democracies over more than 40 years (e.g. Aalberg et al. 2017; Rooduijn et al. 2019).<sup>1</sup> We coded as non-populist controversial cases such as the German NPD where we found conflicting evidence (e.g. Decker 2006; Teney 2012). Since we are therefore likely to underestimate the vote share of populist parties, our analysis is a conservative estimate of populist party success. Data on election results comes from the ParlGov database (Döring & Manow 2018).

**Figure 1: The rise of populism in advanced industrial democracies**



<sup>1</sup> The countries are the current EU-28 member states, Australia, Canada, Iceland, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, and Switzerland.

Figure 1 presents an overview of the electoral success of populist parties. The line indicates a rolling average of populist parties' vote shares over time. The general conclusion is clear: populist parties have become much more successful in legislative elections. The average vote share in elections has increased steadily from about 3 percentage points in the 1970s to about 20 percentage points in 2018. This astounding success underlines that understanding populist party success needs to be at the centre of any analysis of electoral politics in modern democracies.

### **3. Who votes for populist parties? Attitudinal and socio-demographic correlates of populist party support**

As a first step, we aim to provide a general portrait of populist party voters, focusing on three key correlates of populist support: populist attitudes, ideological stances and socio-demographic characteristics.

#### **3.1 Populist attitudes and populist voting**

The key drivers of support for populist parties at the individual level are attitudinal. It is perhaps unsurprising that supporters of populists themselves hold populist attitudes, in that they think that a (corrupt) elite is unresponsive to the demands of the (pure) people. Voters with strong populist attitudes also have low support for liberal, elitist and pluralist understandings of democracy (Akkerman et al. 2014).

In recent years, important advances have been made in trying to measure populist attitudes in different settings (Akkerman et al. 2014; Castanho Silva et al. 2019; Schulz et al. 2017; Spruyt et al. 2016). Moreover, there is evidence that these attitudes are shared by an important subset of citizens in countries as different as the Netherlands (Akkerman et al. 2014) and the United States (Oliver & Rahn 2016). Existing work in this developing field of research shows that these attitudes are generally closely linked to voting for populist parties, be they on the radical right or left (Akkerman et al. 2017).

Earlier work focused in particular on anti-elite, anti-party attitudes, one of the key components of populism. Often used as simpler proxies for populist attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2017, Castanho Silva et al. 2019), these are established drivers of support for the radical right in particular (Aichholzer et al. 2014; Bélanger & Aarts 2006; Bergh 2014; Hooghe et al. 2011; Lubbers et al. 2002, Oesch 2008). However, anti-elite views also explain support for populist

parties more generally (Akkerman et al. 2017; Hooghe & Oser 2016; Pauwels 2014; Ramiro 2016).

Some researchers also link populist attitudes to more deep-seated traits among individuals that exhibit over-time stability and systematically divide citizens. For example, Bakker et al. (2016) find that populist voters score low on agreeableness, one of the five core personality traits. A dislike of the elite can often merge into a propensity to believe in conspiracy theories (Castanho Silva et al. 2017; Oliver & Rahn 2016).

### **3.2. Ideological stances and populist voting**

While they resemble each other in their anti-elite, pro-people attitudes, populist party supporters on the right and left nevertheless differ in their attitudes in important ways. Indeed, the policy views that underlie party support are likely the key difference between these two types of populist voters (Akkerman et al. 2017; Kriesi 2014; Priester 2012; Schumacher & Rooduijn 2013; Rooduijn 2017; Rooduijn et al. 2017).

Populist radical-right supporters tend to define the ‘people’ in exclusive, national terms. Hence, national pride and identity are key drivers of support for radical-right parties, as are anti-immigration attitudes and authoritarianism (Aichholzer et al. 2014; Akkerman et al. 2017; Ivarsflaten 2008; McGann & Kitschelt 2005; Oesch 2008; Rooduijn et al. 2017). Of course, some of the opposition to immigration may be partly based on economic considerations. For example, voters with welfare chauvinist attitudes believe that social benefits should be restricted to nationals (Oesch 2008). Here, it is hard to disentangle economic and cultural drivers of immigration-based radical-right support.

On the populist left, the corrupt elite encompasses financial and economic actors, with the ‘people’ seen in class terms (Dunphy & Bale 2011). Social inequality is a major ideological driver of populist left support (Akkerman et al. 2017; Bowyer & Vail 2011, Rooduijn et al. 2017; Visser et al. 2014). In the United States, for example, support for Donald Trump was characterized by a strong national identity and a dislike for experts, while support for Bernie Sanders was characterized by feeling socially marginalized (Oliver & Rahn 2016). Hence, key drivers of populist left support are left-wing economic attitudes.

### **3.3. Socio-demographic correlates**

Moving beyond attitudinal drivers, the socio-demographic correlates of populist party success have been discussed extensively, with a particular focus on various economic characteristics. However, evidence that economic grievance leads to populist party support is weak and

inconsistent. On the one hand, support for populist parties is often particularly strong among working-class voters, though mostly on the radical right (Arzheimer & Carter 2006; Lubbers et al. 2002, McGann & Kitschelt 2005, Oesch 2008). Radical-right populist parties also receive disproportional support from small business owners (Oesch & Rennwald 2018). Class voting patterns are less clear on the radical left (Visser et al. 2014), despite the historical association between Communist parties and the working class (Ramiro 2016). Indeed, in some countries such as Switzerland the main class support for the radical left is among socio-cultural and technical professionals (Oesch & Rennwald 2010).

Populist radical right voters also tend to have lower levels of education (Arzheimer 2009; Lubbers et al. 2002), but this pattern is less present for the populist radical left (Pauwels 2014; Rooduijn 2017). In fact, radical-left voters may even be particularly highly educated (Ramiro 2016). Overall, while it has often been suggested that populist voters are ‘losers’ of modernization and globalization (Betz 1994; Kriesi et al. 2006), Rooduijn (2017) finds that this is not generally the case; at least in the sense that they are more likely to be unemployed, have lower incomes or be less educated than other voters.

In sum, attitudinal and socio-demographic characteristics help us to identify supporters of populist parties. Yet, especially the socio-economic characteristics of populist party supporters vary considerably across parties, especially among populist parties on the left and on the right. Moreover, focusing only on the ‘demand’ for populist parties is insufficient to understand the *rise* of populism, as many of these factors are relatively stable over time (and across countries). Hence, to get a better understanding for the rise of populist parties, we need to consider the competitive environment for populist parties. This is to what we turn next.

#### **4. Explaining the rise of populist parties**

The success of populist parties not only depends on a demand for their stances; these parties oftentimes gain momentum when the background conditions change in their favour. In this section, we discuss how the political context, in particular party competition and political and economic crises, can help explain the timing for the rise of populist parties.

##### **4.1. Changing structures of political conflict**

A key contextual factor that explains the rise of populist parties is the changing political conflict structure in post-industrial democracies (Kitschelt & McGann 1995). The shift from industrial to post-industrial economies has altered the nature of distributional conflicts

between classes and re-shuffled the size and nature of different employment sectors (Beramendi et al. 2015; Oesch & Rennwald 2018). In addition, globalization has increased the interdependence between countries and incentivises parties to converge on economic policy (Hellwig this volume; Milner & Judkins 2004; Ward et al. 2015). Moreover, increasing prosperity, the educational revolution, and inter-generational change have led to an increasing share of ‘postmaterialists’ who prioritize self-expression and autonomy over economic and physical security (Inglehart 1977).

These changes have altered party competition. First, the new issue landscape has drastically changed the traditional electoral winning coalitions of mainstream parties (Oesch & Rennwald 2018). For example, while Social Democratic parties have always struggled to appeal simultaneously to their working-class and middle-class supporters, bridging this gap has become increasingly difficult. Social Democrats have faced difficult decisions about how far to move to the centre in economic terms and how far to embrace liberal social attitudes.

Second, party systems have fundamentally changed in terms of their actual issue content, as the policy conflicts have gradually shifted from an economic divide towards socio-cultural policies (e.g., Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Kriesi et al. 2008). This has been to the advantage of new competitors with strong stances on these issues, in particular for populist radical right parties with their focus on nativism and authoritarianism. These changes are accelerated by events such as political and economic crises, addressed below.

Third, mainstream parties have likely lost votes to challengers by converging ideologically (Dalton 2018; Kitschelt & McGann 1995; Meguid 2008; Spoon & Klüver 2019; van der Brug et al. 2005). The rise of the populist left may especially be due to mainstream party convergence on economic issues. Similarly, the rise of the populist right could be attributed to fact that mainstream parties fail to take sufficiently critical stances on immigration. In other words, the electoral success of populist parties has been argued to stem from the fact that mainstream parties are no longer able or willing to represent many voters (Mair 2008).<sup>2</sup>

#### **4.2. Political and economic crises**

Parties such as SYRIZA in Greece, ANO in the Czech Republic, and the Pim Fortuyn List in the Netherlands became very popular in short periods of time. Clearly, largely stable factors such as personality (Bakker et al. 2016) as well as slowly moving factors such as changes in

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<sup>2</sup> Yet, evidence for this thesis is not unequivocal. For example, Norris (2005: 191-196) finds no support for the convergence hypothesis, while Ignazi (1992) argues that the increasing polarization in the party system has helped extreme parties to emerge.

the political conflict structure cannot account for sudden increases in populist party success. To get a better understanding for such sudden changes, we also need to take the immediate political context factors into account.

Political and economic crises such as the Euro crisis or the so-called immigration crisis might serve as critical junctures that activate existing voter demands. The slow-moving changes created by sociodemographic shifts and the transformation of political conflict may culminate in sudden party system change in the wake of sudden crises.

Turning first to economic crises, the economic challenges in some countries, for instance Spain, Italy and Greece, may be particularly to blame for the current increase in populist party success (e.g. Kriesi & Pappas 2015). March and Rommerskirchen (2015) indeed find that the radical left does better during bad economic times, while Hernández and Kriesi (2016) show that populist right and left parties have benefited most from the post-2008 economic crisis in Europe. Despite these findings, an explanation for populist party success based on economic crises needs to be treated with some caution. For example, Oesch (2008) finds that economic determinants, such as wage pressure or competition over welfare benefits, help little in explaining workers' support for radical-right populist parties, while Rooduijn (2017) only finds mixed evidence for the 'losers of globalization' hypothesis. Levels of inequality as a contextual factor also fail to influence populist radical-left voting (Visser et al. 2014).

However, the Euro and immigration crises have also changed issue agendas, pushing topics to the fore that may in particular benefit populist parties. Many voters may reward eurosceptic and anti-immigration stances. Issue agendas can change rapidly, as during the immigration crisis in 2015. In 2017, the focus on immigration arguably helped to propel the German populist radical-right AfD to parliament and the Austrian populist radical-right FPÖ into power. The gradual changes in the issue agenda over the past decades may have laid the groundwork for the profound impact created by recent crises.

More generally, some argue that we are witnessing a representational crisis: in this view, populist parties are successful because populist (anti-elite, pro-people) attitudes are becoming more prevalent. Using public opinion surveys, Foa and Mounk (2016: 5) thus argue that 'citizens around the world have become markedly less satisfied with their form of government and surprisingly open to nondemocratic alternatives' and that this is a core reason for the rise of populist parties and politicians. However, this finding has been questioned extensively by other researchers and should be treated with the appropriate caution (e.g. Alexander & Welzel 2017; Norris 2017; Voeten 2017; Zilinsky 2019).



## **5. The consequences of populist party success for political representation**

In this section, we turn to the consequences of the rise of populism: how did the emergence and success of populist parties change the way political representation works in modern societies? In particular, how did the emergence and success of populist parties affect issue agendas, political communication and policy outputs?

### **5.1. Issue competition**

Populist parties on the left and right take up positions that are held by many voters, but that are often unrepresented by political parties, thus filling in ‘blind spots’ of political representation (Thomassen 2012). For instance, Eurosceptic and anti-immigration stances in the electorate have arguably only found proper representation since the radical-right populist parties have become successful. Anti-capitalist views find representation by the populist radical left. Beyond questions of issue representation, it has been found that populist parties in opposition in Latin America have a positive impact on democratic quality (Huber & Schimpf 2016b), though government participation has a negative impact on this in both Latin America and Europe (Huber & Schimpf 2016a, 2016b). Of course, one may ask whether any positive impact on issue-based voter representation is weakened by the challenge that populist parties represent to liberal democratic systems.

Beyond questions of representation, populist parties can have a systemic impact on politics by shifting the party system issue agenda, i.e. the issue stances and emphases of other parties. Most existing research focuses on mainstream parties’ responses to populist parties of the radical right. Their electoral success had led to ‘contagion’ (Van Spanje 2010) as mainstream parties shift to the right on immigration-related issues (e.g. Abou-Chadi 2016; Abou-Chadi & Krause 2018; Han 2015). In Western Europe, parties have gradually shifted to the right on liberal-authoritarian issues, while these issues have also become more prominent on the parties’ issue agendas (Wagner & Meyer 2017). Yet, this does not mean that mainstream parties adopt all of the radical right populist parties’ positions. For example, Rohrschneider and Whitefield (2016) note that mainstream parties have been fairly unresponsive to the Euroscepticism of extreme parties in the wake of the financial crisis.

Can mainstream parties push back populist parties by adopting to their issue stances? The answer to that question seems to depend on the *timing* of the response (cf. Mudde 2007: 241f). Competing with populist parties on ‘their’ issues might be easiest when they have not

yet built a reputation for dealing with these issues (Abou-Chadi 2016; Meguid 2008: 37). In this case, the influence of populist parties on the party system agenda is mostly indirect: the threat by populist parties moves the issue agendas of mainstream parties. Once populist parties have had their first successes, adopting their issue stances might however do little more than legitimize their policy stances (Bale 2003). Thus, parties responding late are more likely to suffer from the shift towards the populist parties' issue stances.

## **5.2. Populism in political discourse**

Populist parties may not only affect the issue agenda, but also *how* politicians and the media communicate about politics (de Vreese et al. 2018; Engesser et al. 2017). Has populist rhetoric, opposing 'the people' and 'the (corrupt) elite', diffused into the communication of other parties in the party system and the news media? And if so, can populism in political communication change citizens' attitudes and behaviour?

Researchers have analysed the degree of populism in party communication based on content analyses of party broadcasts (Jagers & Walgrave 2007), election manifestos (Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017; Rooduijn et al. 2014; Rooduijn & Pauwels 2011), presidential speeches (Hawkins 2009), newspaper articles (Rooduijn 2014) and social media posts (Schmuck and Hamelers 2019; Zulianello et al. 2018). The key idea is to use content analyses to code whether the author(s) of the text refer to 'the people' and/or criticize 'elites' (e.g. in the political, economic or media arena). These counts are usually aggregated to obtain populism scores for parties or politicians.

These analyses show relatively clear empirical patterns. First, the results provide some face validity to the other evaluations of political actors: parties and politicians classified as populists indeed appear to use an us-versus-them discourse where elites are juxtaposed with a 'pure people' (e.g. Hawkins 2009; Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017). Second, a more interesting finding is that there is no populist contagion in party systems, at least in West European politics. That is, traditional mainstream parties have *not* become more likely to engage in a populist discourse, opposing 'the people' and 'the (corrupt) elite' (Rooduijn et al. 2014). In contrast, populist parties may even tone down their populist rhetoric when they are electorally successful (Rooduijn et al. 2014), to the extent that some such parties may no longer be properly considered populist. Podemos in Spain is one potential example of this. Third, the rise of populism correlates with a rise of populism in the news media (Rooduijn 2014). This seems to suggest a causal relationship from parties to the media, where parties' populist messages are taken up in the news media. Yet, much more needs to be

done to identify the causal relationships and the conditions under which populist messages make the news.

While diffusion of populist language into the communication of other parties and the news media is important, its ultimate goal is to reach and to affect potential voters. There is some evidence from experimental studies (Hameleers et al. 2017; Sheets et al. 2016; Wirz 2018) showing how populism in news reports increases the citizens' political cynicism, emotional reactions and their populist attitudes. Yet, these effects are contingent on the readers' political predispositions: for example, exposure to populist media reports increases populist attitudes among those with strong populist attitudes prior to the exposure, but decreases populist attitudes among those with prior anti-populist stances (Müller et al. 2017). This suggests a polarization in political attitudes, with the content of populist messages reinforcing prior beliefs and attitudes.

These are tentative findings in a small but growing research area. Systematic evidence on how populism in media reports affects citizens is still sketchy (e.g. Aalberg et al. 2017). For example, experimental studies often focus on news reports dealing with issues such as immigration (Sheets et al. 2016) and the EU (Hameleers et al. 2017) that are traditionally linked to radical-right parties. It is therefore difficult to differentiate the effect of populism in the political discourse from that of related concepts such as nativism and Euroscepticism (Rooduijn 2019). Future research should therefore intensify the effort to explore the effects of populism in political communication and its effect on citizens' attitudes and behaviour.

### **5.3. Populist parties in government**

Unlike in Latin America, where populist presidential candidates frequently enter office, European populist parties have so far been less successful at entering (coalition) governments. This is in part due to the fact that populist parties are often at the fringes of the party system, and extreme parties have a lower 'coalition potential' than those at the centre of the policy space. Another factor is ostracism by mainstream parties, who frequently explicitly rule out coalition governments with (populist) radical parties (van Spanje & van der Brug 2007). Yet, especially in recent years, an increasing number of populist parties have entered (or supported) coalition governments in Europe; recent examples include the M5S and the League in Italy or the Freedom Party in Austria.

Their participation in government has raised the question of whether populist parties leave a policy footprint. Studies analysing how populist parties in government shape public policy suggest that they have left their trace on cultural, economic, and constitutional issues: they

have shifted public policy on immigration to the right (e.g. Zaslove 2004), refrained from measures to retrench the welfare state (compared to other centre-right governments; Röth et al. 2018), and attacked liberal principles (e.g. protection of minority rights) for the sake of ‘true’ democracy (Albertazzi & Mueller 2013). Yet, these findings are based on a comparatively small number of cases.

A second question relates to the populist parties’ electoral performance after entering government: are populists rewarded or punished by voters for their participation in government? Populist parties (in Europe exclusively those of the radical right) are no exception to the general rule that government parties tend to be punished in future elections (Akkerman & de Lange 2012). Yet, there is substantial variation in the electoral performance of populists in government. In the 2002 federal election, for example, the Austrian Freedom Party lost badly (-16.9 percentage points) after its first term in office. In contrast, the Northern League gained votes (+0.7 percentage points) after its participation in the Berlusconi cabinet from 2001 to 2006.

The variation in the electoral performance of populist radical right parties has been attributed to three different factors (cf. Akkerman & de Lange 2012): a party’s policy record, the performance of its cabinet members, and party cohesion. In Western Europe, populist radical right parties have mostly governed with centre-right parties that favour liberal economic policies. Such demands are often at odds with demands of the populist radical right’s voter base, so that these parties face a trade-off between office and votes (Afonso 2015). Giving in to their coalition partners’ preferences for welfare retrenchment thus often results in electoral defeat in future elections. One way to deal with this dilemma is to cut back on welfare provision for foreigners (‘welfare chauvinism’: van der Waal et al. 2010) as such cuts are also popular among the party base.

The performance of cabinet members is another factor to account for variation in populist parties’ performance. While some populist parties have no difficulties in selecting and recruiting suitable candidates for public office, others struggle to nominate candidates with sufficient talent and expertise (Akkerman & de Lange 2012). Clumsy, incompetent and inexperienced appointees were in part responsible for Austrian Freedom Party’s electoral dilemma in 2002 after the party had to replace several of its cabinet members (the first minister left the cabinet after 25 days) (Akkerman & de Lange 2012: 588).

The third factor is a lack of party cohesion. Perhaps due to internal tensions caused by policy decisions (Afonso 2015), some populist parties witness severe internal cracks and disputes.

Again, the Austrian Freedom Party's record between 2000 and 2006 is a prime example of how intra-party dissent leads to electoral decline (Fallend & Heinisch 2016).

However, a big caveat to these analyses is that they are almost exclusively based on populist parties of the radical right. This makes it difficult to distinguish between the fate of radical right and populist parties in government coalitions. We can only overcome this problem by including more cases in future governments (e.g. the Liga-M5S coalition government in Italy, SYRIZA in Greece) or by expanding the empirical scope to other regions.

## **6. Conclusion**

Populist parties are commonly identified based on their consistent opposition to elites and their rhetorical support for the 'pure' people. In this chapter, we first discussed who votes for populist parties. Like the parties they support, populist party voters are also often critical of the political and/or economic elites and want politics to follow what is seen as the general will of the people. They also share some socio-demographic characteristics, such as comparatively low social positions in terms education and economic resources, but this varies a lot across parties. The other attitudes that characterise populist party voters greatly depend on whether one considers parties of the populist right or the populist left.

Populist parties have witnessed increasing popularity in Europe in the past decades. The causes for this success can be found in longer-term changes to political conflict in Europe as well as short-term political and economic crises. The resulting success of populist parties has fundamentally affected the content and style of political discourse, especially in the news media. However, the long-term substantive influence and electoral permanence of populist parties remains to be seen. We do not yet know what the rise of populism means for political representation: while some voters will be happy about having a stronger voice in politics, it is clear that populist parties also pose a fundamental challenge to the principles that underlie liberal democracy.

Research on populist parties and their support bases is therefore vital, and luckily this field has made substantial and impressive advances in recent years. For example, the development of questions measuring populist attitudes among voters is proceeding quickly, and initially findings are encouraging (Akkerman et al. 2014, Akkerman et al. 2017; Spruyt et al. 2016, but see Castanho Silva et al. 2019). Concerning populist discourse, there is a growing literature as well as a canon of research methods to analyse it, while the consequences of populist

popularity has been studied using a synthesis of quantitative comparative analyses and qualitative and quantitative case studies. While much needs to be done (especially outside Western Europe), this is promising. Overall, this field has quickly achieved a high level of sophistication and complexity.

However, research on populism also shows some important weaknesses and thus opportunities for development. First, it is important to distinguish the impact of party-level populist ideology from other aspects of party programmes such as Euroscepticism, anti-immigration stances or left-wing economic views. Sometimes, it is very hard to single out the distinct effect of populism compared to other party characteristics (Rooduijn 2019). Concerning the radical right, for instance, some authors identify populism as a key characteristic of such parties (e.g. Mudde 2007), while others prefer to refer to radical right (e.g. Norris 2005) or anti-immigration parties (e.g. Van der Brug et al. 2005). Thus, it is not clear how much the adjective ‘populist’ adds to these theoretical accounts. If it carries additional meaning, we should be able to single out causes (and consequences) of populism that are independent to those of related concepts.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, analyses of support for populist parties show that left and right populist may differ in more ways than they resemble each other. Second, we need to know more about the prevalence of populist discourse in politics and whether this has effects on voters. Here, promising first steps have been made, but additional, particularly comparative findings are needed. Finally, we still know little about voter-level populist attitudes, including how they should best be measured (Castanho Silva et al. 2019), but also what its antecedents and determinants are. The field of populism research is young but progressing quickly, and its development will be key to understanding changes to modern democracies.

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<sup>3</sup> A notable exception is the theoretical framework by Kitschelt & McGann (1995: ch. 1). They theorize that the electoral success of *populist* radical right parties hinges on the convergence of mainstream competitors and strong party patronage in the respective system (e.g. Austria in the 1980s and 1990s).

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