



# Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective

Gilles Ivaldi, Oscar Mazzoleni

## ► To cite this version:

Gilles Ivaldi, Oscar Mazzoleni. Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective. *Populism*, Brill, 2019, 2 (1), pp.1-28. 10.1163/25888072-02011022 . halshs-02144389

**HAL Id: halshs-02144389**

**<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02144389>**

Submitted on 30 May 2019

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**Economic Populism and Producerism.  
European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective**

Gilles Ivaldi (gilles.ivaldi@unice.fr)  
Oscar Mazzoleni (oscar.mazzoleni@unil.ch)

This is a **pre-peer-review, pre-copyedit and pre-print version** of an article published in *Populism* in 2019. The definitive publisher-authenticated version Ivaldi, Gilles and Mazzoleni, Oscar (2019) Economic Populism and Producerism: European Right-Wing Populist Parties in a Transatlantic Perspective, *Populism*, 2(1), p.1-28, <https://doi.org/10.1163/25888072-02011022>, is available online at: [https://brill.com/abstract/journals/popu/2/1/article-p1\\_1.xml](https://brill.com/abstract/journals/popu/2/1/article-p1_1.xml)

Abstract

*This article aims to develop a conceptual framework to address the economic dimension of right-wing populism. Moving beyond classic left-right economics and the divide between economic and cultural approaches, it argues that the political economy of right-wing populists is intertwined with cultural values in the construction of the ‘true’ people as an economic community whose well-being is in decline and under threat, and therefore needs to be restored. Looking at populist traditions across Europe and the United States, the paper emphasizes the significance of ‘producerist’ frames in economic populism. This is illustrated through an empirical analysis of differences and similarities in the economic policies and discourses of three established right-wing populist parties based in Europe (FN, SVP and UKIP), and the Tea Party and Donald Trump in the United States. We find that economic populist frames are common to all of the parties under scrutiny, albeit subject, however, to different interpretations of the producerist antagonism and groups. Our findings confirm that the intersection between economic populism and producerism provides a new – and fruitful – perspective on right-wing populism, while simultaneously demonstrating the relevance of a transatlantic approach to the study of the populist phenomenon.*

Keywords: right-wing populism, economic populism, producerism

Right-wing populist parties (RPPs) and entrepreneurs around the world are increasingly connected through global communication and social media, as recently demonstrated by the attempt of Stephen Bannon – chief executive officer of the Trump Presidential campaign and a leading figure of the U.S. ‘alt’ right-wing – to foster co-operation with and among European right-wing parties. While contingent upon national contextual opportunities, the widespread political success of RPPs in Western Europe and North America represents a growing challenge for populism scholars. As suggested by Finchelstein and Urbinati, the history of populism “crisscrosses the global south and the global north, presenting important experiential distinctions but also marking important zones of confluence”<sup>1</sup> (p. 8). We clearly need to adopt analytical perspectives that help to better comprehend the diversity of populist discourses and strategies across both time and space. However, it is also crucial that these perspectives be embedded in broader conceptual frameworks for the analysis of the populist phenomenon ‘as a whole’.

In line with the latter research goal, the general aim of this contribution is to provide new insights into the rise of RPPs in a transatlantic perspective. Our starting place is the economic dimension of right-wing populist mobilization by West-European RPPs. While the recent European literature on RPPs has directed attention to the significance of economic issues for those parties,<sup>2</sup> there still is a dearth of research into the relationship between those parties’ economic orientations and cultural values. The current literature on populism is somewhat split between competing approaches of economics versus culture, emphasizing the nativist dimension of the ‘thick’ ideology that underlies right-wing populist beliefs.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the relevance of ‘work ethic’ has been emphasized in the literature, yet without producing a satisfactory definition of this term, which continues to be used in a relatively vague manner. We argue in this paper that a cultural perspective should be taken more seriously in order to elucidate and clarify how right-wing populism articulates intertwined economic and cultural values that inform its construction of the ‘true’ people as an economic community of hardworking people who share a common destiny, and whose well-being is in decline and at risk, and needs to be restored. To highlight those dimensions, we take the concept of *producerism*, which has

---

<sup>1</sup> Finchelstein, F. and N. Urbinati “On Populism and Democracy” *Populism* 1 (2018) 1-23, see p.8.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Zaslove, A. “Exclusion, Community and a Populist Political Economy: The Radical Right as an Anti-globalization Movement”, *Comparative European Politics* 6(2) (2008), 169-189; Van der Waal, J. and W. de Koster, “Populism and Support for Protectionism: The Relevance of Opposition to Trade Openness for Leftist and Rightist Populist Voting in The Netherlands”, *Political Studies*, advanced online (2017): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321717723505>; Otjes, S., G. Ivaldi, A. Ravik Jupskås and O. Mazzoleni, “It’s not Economic Interventionism, Stupid! Reassessing the Political Economy of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties”, *Swiss Political Science Review* 24(3) (2018), 270–290.

<sup>3</sup> Eatwell, R. and M. Goodwin, *National Populism. The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (London: Penguin Books, 2018).

been widely discussed in relation to right-wing populism in the United States, and which is, we believe, of particular significance to the transatlantic approach developed in this paper.<sup>4</sup>

Our contribution is organized as follows: first, we formulate our conceptual framework, discussing the concept of producerism in relation to those of populism and nativism. In the second part, we provide empirical evidence to illustrate how producerism is part of the political economy of three prominent Western European RPPs (FN, SVP and UKIP) and how these share similarities with right-wing populist economic strategies and discourses in the U.S., as proposed in particular by the Tea Party and Donald Trump. We then discuss the relevance of our findings and finally suggest some general conclusions as regards our understanding of right-wing populism as a transatlantic –and increasingly global– phenomenon.

### **Between cultural and economic dimensions of populism**

Over the past decade, RPPs have made significant gains in elections across Europe and America. Research suggests that cultural and economic grievances are major driving forces behind the rise of right-wing populism. These parties mobilize on fears of immigration and feelings of economic insecurity arising from globalization and rapid change in post-industrial societies.<sup>5</sup> As Inglehart and Norris suggest, “although the proximate cause of the populist vote is cultural backlash, its high present level reflects the declining economic security and rising economic inequality that many writers have emphasized”.<sup>6</sup> According to Gest et al., populism manipulates a sense of ‘nostalgic deprivation’, that is a perceived drop in status, which “may be understood in economic terms (inequality), political terms (disempowerment), or social terms –a perceived shift to the periphery of society”.<sup>7</sup>

Cultural and economic issues seem to have somehow been approached from different theoretical grounds in the literature on right-wing populism, thus missing a more unified perspective. As Eatwell and Goodwin note in their recent book, economic and cultural factors are too often approached as

---

<sup>4</sup> C. Berlet and M.N. Lyons, *Right-wing Populism in America. Too Close for Comfort* (New York, The Guilford Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Funke, M and M. Schularick and C. Trebesch, “Going to the extremes: Politics after financial crises, 1870-2014”, *European Economic Review* 88, (2016), 227-260; Hawkins, K. R. Dudley and J. W. Tan, “Made in USA: Populism Beyond Europe”, in Martinelli, A. (ed.), *Beyond Trump. Populism on the Rise* (Novi Ligure: Edizioni Epoké-ISPI, 2016), 93-110; Bonikowski, B. “Three Lessons of Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States”, *The Brown Journal of World Affairs* 23(1) (2017), 9-24; Rodrik, D. “Populism and the Economics of Globalization”, *Journal of International Business Policy* 1(1-2) (2018), 12-33.

<sup>6</sup> Inglehart, R. and P. Norris. “Trump and the Populist Authoritarian Parties: The Silent Revolution in Reverse”, *Perspectives on Politics* 15(2) (2017), 447.

<sup>7</sup> Gest, J., Reny, T., & Mayer, J. “Roots of the Radical Right: Nostalgic Deprivation in the United States and Britain” *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(13) (2018), 1694–1719, see p.1696.

competing explanations of right-wing populist success, while they actually “need to be analyzed together”.<sup>8</sup> Earlier studies primarily emphasized nativism and welfare chauvinism as the main economic response by right-wing populist parties.<sup>9</sup> A large body of research deals with the cultural dimension of European right-wing populist politics, emphasizing issues of immigration, national identity and Islam.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, the literature finds a significant spread of left-right economic formulas among those parties.<sup>11</sup> It is only recently that the relation between cultural and economic values has been examined more systematically by scholars of right-wing populism, articulating the economic positions of those parties, not only with their nativist agenda, but also with their populism and authoritarianism.<sup>12</sup>

While we agree that the political economy of right-wing populism is best approached in connection with the cultural agenda of those parties, we believe that the relation between populism, nativism and economic insecurity should be further explored. We are still in need of overarching perspectives to grasp right-wing populism as a whole, thus reconciling different theories that put different emphases on economic and/or cultural issues.<sup>13</sup> In this paper, we propose to examine the economic policies of right-wing populist parties through the lenses of ‘economic populism’ and ‘producerism’ in relation to their predominantly nativist and anti-immigration message. The theoretical basis for this approach is laid down in the following sections.

## Economic populism

Drawing on the seminal contributions by Mény & Surel and Canovan,<sup>14</sup> the concept of economic populism refers to the idea that the economic well-being of the ‘people’ is ignored or betrayed by the

---

<sup>8</sup> Eatwell R. and M. Goodwin. *National Populism*, op. cit., p. xxiv.

<sup>9</sup> Betz, H.-G. and S. Immerfall (eds.). *The New Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998); Mudde, C. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Betz, H.-G. “Nativism Across Time and Space”, *Swiss Political Science Review* 23(4) (2017), 335-353; Marzouki, N., D. McDonnell and O. Roy (eds.). *Saving the People. How Populists Hijack Religion* (Oxford, OUP, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Kitschelt, H. and A.J. McGann. *Radical Right in Western Europe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Kriesi, H.-P., E. Grande, R. Lachat, M. Dolezal, S. Bornschiefer and T. Frey, *West European Politics in the Age of Globalization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Eger, M.A. and S. Valdez. “Neo-Nationalism in Western Europe.” *European Sociological Review* 31(1) (2015): 151-130; W. Van der Brug and J. Van Spanje, “Immigration, Europe and the ‘New’ Cultural Dimension”, *European Journal of Political Research* 48(3) (2009): 309-334; Lefkofridi, Z. and E. Michel. “The Electoral Politics of Solidarity. The Welfare State Agendas of Radical Right”, in Banting K. and W. Kymlicka (eds.). *The Strains of Commitment. The Political Sources of Solidarity in Diverse Societies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 233-267.

<sup>12</sup> Otjes, S., G. Ivaldi, A. Ravik Jupskås and O. Mazzoleni, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Inglehart, R. and P. Norris. “Trump, Brexit, and the rise of populism: Economic have-nots and cultural backlash”, *Working paper RWP16-026* (2016).

<sup>14</sup> Mény, Y. and Y. Surel. *Par le Peuple, Pour le Peuple. Le Populisme et la Démocratie* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); M. Canovan, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005).

‘elite’ and that it should be re-established, notably by means of restoring the nation’s economic sovereignty. This idea forms the basis of a common mobilization frame that identifies a problematic economic condition – the decline of the people’s well-being – and makes attributions regarding who is to blame – the elites.

The antagonism between the elite and the people in the economic populist frame has a strong moral and cultural connotation. The ‘true’ people are defined as a ‘virtuous’ community, which is counterposed with a ‘corrupt’ elite at the top of society. Moreover, economic populism implicitly conveys a message of ‘nostalgia’ for the good ‘old times’,<sup>15</sup> by referring to an idealized period when ‘real’ values, identity and economic well-being were predominant.

While a useful analytical tool, the concept of economic populism can be further developed and refined. Two important aspects in particular should be addressed. First, we need a better understanding of how right-wing populists construct their concept of the ‘people’ in socio-economic as well as cultural terms, and of the values, interests and identity that are attached to the ‘people’. Second, while economic populism primarily expresses the ‘vertical’ dualism between the ‘people’ at the bottom of society and the ‘elite’ at its top, we also need to conceptually integrate the ‘horizontal’ division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which characterizes the defining nativist feature of RPPs and their mobilization of fears of ethnic and economic competition.

### **Enter right-wing producerism**

To enhance the clarity of economic populism and better define its content and boundaries, we propose to borrow the concept of *producerism*. Historically, producerist narratives have their roots in different ideological traditions in Europe and America. In the European context, producerism is linked with a variety of movements and ideologies such as physiocracy, Republican Jacobinism, Proudhonian socialism and Sorelian syndicalism.<sup>16</sup> In the United States, a first attempt to deploy producerist themes and discourses is found in Jeffersonian Republicanism. While a substantial number of American right-wing populist movements and parties from the nineteenth century onwards have been described as being strongly influenced by producerism, the latter remains a relatively undertheorized

---

<sup>15</sup> Betz, H. G. and C. Johnson. “Against the current – stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical populist right”, *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3) (2004), 324.

<sup>16</sup> Abromeit, J. “Transformations of Producerist Populism in Western Europe”, in Abromeit, J., B.M. Chesterton and Y. Norman (eds.). *Transformations of Populism in Europe and Americas. History and Recent Tendencies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 231-264.

concept<sup>17</sup> and is seldom integrated in broader frameworks. Meanwhile, we find very few references to producerism in the European literature on right-wing populism.<sup>18</sup>

Essentially, producerism refers to the idea that “the ‘producers’ of the nation’s wealth should enjoy the economic fruits of their own labors”.<sup>19</sup> Individuals and groups driven by work are seen as superior, both economically and culturally. According to producerism, producers contribute to economic prosperity, but they also embody virtue and morality, as opposed to ‘parasites’ at the top and bottom of society. Depending on context, ‘parasitic’ elements may refer to aristocrats, bankers, Native Americans, the undeserving poor, and immigrants. In its U.S. right-wing variant, producerism has a clear nativist orientation, opposing cultural and racial diversity.<sup>20</sup>

Our main argument is that producerism may fruitfully complement the concept of economic populism in right-wing populist discourse, by providing a clearer definition of who the ‘true’ economic people are – the ‘producers’ – while simultaneously making it possible to express the idea of a ‘dual squeezing’ of the people’s well-being. Thus, combining producerism with the core ideas of economic populism and nativism, we suggest that the master frame of *right-wing populist producerism*, as an analytical tool, has the following four main features:

#### *The producers*

First, producerism postulates a ‘true’ community of hardworking producers who share common values, interests and identity, as well as a common economic destiny. The producers are a coalition of productive and deserving people, who are seen as being the backbone of economic prosperity, and defenders of moral values, such as work ethics and honesty. As such, it is argued, they should be the sole recipients of the economic wealth of the community.

#### *The uncertainty of the people’s economic well-being*

Second, producerism conveys a sense of uncertainty over the people’s economic well-being. Producerist claims fit the economic populist rhetoric of a fragility, stagnation or decline in the economic well-being of the community, thus addressing the anxieties and fears of economic decline,

---

<sup>17</sup> Shantz, J., “Producerism”, in A. Kindell and E. S. Demers (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Populism in America* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 561.

<sup>18</sup> Some scholars have analyzed right-wing Flanders parties (e.g. New-Flemish Alliance) and European separatist parties and adopted the concept of producerism or “welfare producerism (Jâmin, J. “The Producerist Narrative in Right-Wing Flanders”, in De Wever, B. (ed.). *Right-Wing Flanders, Left-Wing Wallonia? Is this so? If so, why? And is it a Problem?, Re-Bel e-book 12* (2011), 25-35; Dalle Mulle, E., *The Nationalism of the Rich. Discourses and Strategies of Separatist Parties in Catalonia, Flanders, Northern Italy and Scotland* (London: Routledge, 2018). However, these works do not connect these concepts with populism.

<sup>19</sup> Breitzer, R., “Cooperative Commonwealth”, in Kindell, A. and E. S. Demers (eds.). *Encyclopedia of Populism*, op. cit., 145).

<sup>20</sup> Berlet & Lyons, op. cit.

pessimism, and a sense of loss of status, dignity and values among voters who feel socially and culturally marginalized by the dominant liberal culture.<sup>21</sup> As suggested by Gidron and Hall, support for right-wing populism is “rooted in both economic and cultural developments, including economic changes that have depressed the income or job security of some segments of the population and shifts in the cultural frameworks that people use to interpret society and their place within it”.<sup>22</sup>

#### *A dual threat to the people’s well-being*

Third, producerism typically argues that the community of producers is squeezed by unproductive forces from both above and below. Producerism operates on a basic division between ‘makers’ and ‘takers’, that is to say, between those who produce and those who do not. This division is both vertical and horizontal. Vertically, producers are pitted against a class of ‘non-productive’ elites, such as international institutions, government bureaucrats, corrupt politicians, and ‘verbalist’ and cosmopolitan elites. This antagonism is often expressed in conspiracist terms, speculating about global powers and elites.

Horizontally, the main unproductive classes to which producers are opposed include lower classes and subordinate groups, such as, for example, immigrants, or the undeserving poor, who do not possess a work ethic and are accused of undermining the prosperity of the community. Here, right-wing populist producerism intersects with nativism which is crucial to how RPPs define their ‘true’ community of the people.<sup>23</sup> These parties operate on an exclusionist and ethno-nationalist conception of the people. In right-wing populist producerism, the denigrated subaltern is typically a foreign ‘other’, or an indigenous racialized ‘parasite’. These are undeserving by default of their ethnic background or immigrant status, and therefore cannot redeem themselves by becoming producers. Let us note here that this exclusionary definition of the ‘people’ sets right-wing populism apart from other manifestations of the populist phenomenon, in particular to the left of the ideological spectrum where populism is associated with a more inclusionary meaning of the ‘people’.<sup>24</sup>

#### *Necessity for change and the promise to restore the producers’ well-being*

Finally, producerism embraces the nostalgic, economic-populist recreation of an ‘idealized’ past and a lost era of ‘real’ community values as a response to current uncertainty, while promising to re-establish the economic well-being of the community shaped by traditional values and hierarchies of

---

<sup>21</sup> A.R. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York, The New Press, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> N. Gidron et P.A. Hall, “The politics of social status: economic and cultural roots of the populist right”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 68/S1, 2017, S57-84, see p.S58.

<sup>23</sup> Betz, H.-G. op.cit

<sup>24</sup> C. Mudde and C. Rovira Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America” *Government and Opposition*, 48(2) (2012), 147–174.

social prestige and esteem. Right-wing populism typically taps into perceived threats to the status of the cultural majority and traditional social hierarchies<sup>25</sup>. As Berlet argues, producerism uses “frames and narratives built around heroic myths of national rebirth”,<sup>26</sup> as exemplified by Trump’s campaign claim to “make America great *again*” (our emphasis). Such claims are based on the idea of returning to pre-established social hierarchies that ensure dominance of the ethnically and economically defined community of the ‘true’ people, which is in danger of losing its power status.

These features form the core of the producerist frame and we postulate that they should be shared by all right-wing populist actors and parties. However, one might also expect diversity regarding the manner in which producerist narratives are deployed according to different ideological traditions, as well as contextual opportunities for populist mobilization. As is the case with the ‘people’ and the ‘elite’ in populism, for instance, the classes of ‘producers’ and ‘non-producers’ may be seen as essentially “empty signifiers”<sup>27</sup> that acquire substance through their interpretation by populist actors. The symbolic and political boundaries of the groups of ‘producers’ and ‘non-producers’, as well as the nature of the threats and forms of change that producerism postulates, may therefore vary across parties, actors and contexts.

Variation may be found in terms of the parties’ free-market and/or protectionist agenda. In the U.S., the ‘minimum government’ argument is widespread, while there is more diversity amongst Western European RPPs in terms of their economic strategies.<sup>28</sup> Historically, the producerist community typically refers to “industrial or more skilled workers, small-scale businesspeople, and individual entrepreneurs. From below, the middle-class workers would be threatened by the poor, unemployed, and those who receive social welfare”.<sup>29</sup> However, depending on which electoral constituency is the target of producerists – for example, if the party operates in a rural rather than an industrial context – the definition of who the producers and non-producers are may vary, with a strong focus on ‘working class’ voters in an industrial context, for instance. European right-wing populism is increasingly described as a mostly ‘working class’ phenomenon,<sup>30</sup> whereas in North America it is seen both as a backlash of the white middle-class and the declining working-class.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, in constituencies

---

<sup>25</sup> D.C. Mutz, “Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 115/19, 2018; J.C. Williams, *White Working Class: Overcoming White Cluelessness in America*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Berlet, C. “When Alienation Turns Right: Populist Conspiracism, the Apocalyptic Style, and Neo-Fascist Movements”, in Langman, L. and D. Kalekin-Fishman (eds.). *The Evolution of Alienation. Trauma, Promise, and the Millennium* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 124.

<sup>27</sup> Laclau, E. *On Populist Reason* (London: Polity, 2005).

<sup>28</sup> Otjes, S. et al., op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Shantz, J. op. cit., 560.

<sup>30</sup> For example, Rydgren, J. (ed.). *Class Politics and the Radical Right* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> S. Parker (ed.), *The Squeezed Middle: The Pressure on Ordinary Workers in America and Britain* (Bristol, Policy Press, 2013); Gest, J. *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality* (Oxford: OUP,

where the unemployment rate is high – because of strong deindustrialisation, for example – substantial shares of native jobless people are likely to support populist parties, thus making it strategically more difficult for their leaders to include the unemployed among the ‘parasitic’ elements of the class of ‘non-producers’.

Similarly, the definition of the economic antagonism and the non-productive elite may vary according to the size and relevance of the financial sector in the national economy, giving economic populism different connotations and meanings according to context. Historically, producerism has been critical of large multinational corporations, speculative capital and cosmopolitan economic elites.<sup>32</sup> This ‘classic’ version of producerism, which originated in the cooperative commonwealth of the nineteenth century, opposes manual workers to capitalists. It differs from the more recent version of right-wing producerism embodied, for instance, by the Tea Party.<sup>33</sup> We may further explore how Western European RPPs frame their concept of the elite and whether it includes economic and financial powers. Finally, we must look at how nativist features are embedded in the broader producerist framework of RPPs to perform the exclusion of ethnic ‘others’. While immigrants are typically excluded from the community of the ‘people’, producerist discourses and practices may be more amenable to ethnic minorities in contexts such as the United States where immigration and cultural diversity have traditionally been seen more positively.

To summarize, our main hypothesis contends that while relevant right-wing populist actors in the U.S. and Western Europe may share similar producerist narratives, they show variation in their interpretation of the producerist antagonism, identities and groups, both across and within the two continents.

### **Case selection and methodology**

To test our conceptual framework and hypothesis, we propose a comparative qualitative analysis of right-wing producerist narratives in five populist parties/actors in Western Europe and the United States. We exploit the variation in the commonalities and differences to draw inferences from those five case studies. As Gerring suggests, a case study refers to “an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena”.<sup>34</sup> While our analysis provides important insight into the link between right-wing

---

2016); J.C. Williams, *White Working Class: Overcoming White Chuelessness in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Abromeit, J. op. cit.

<sup>33</sup> Berlet, C. “Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement,” in L. Rosenthal and C. Trost (eds.), *Steep. The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Gerring, J. “What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?,” *The American Political Science Review* 98(2) (2004), 341.

populism and producerism in a transatlantic perspective, it is primarily descriptive in orientation, as it does not seek to identify causal mechanisms that may account for the electoral success or failure of populist actors in those contexts.

To illuminate producerist features, we look at the two main instances of right-wing populism in North America, namely Donald Trump and the Tea Party movement. According to Berlet, among others, the Tea Party advances a typical right-wing populist agenda.<sup>35</sup> The Tea Party emerged as a populist eruption within the Republican party –hence its evocation of RINOs i.e. Republicans in Name Only–, while also vilipending liberal elites and Democrats in government. Similarly, scholars have identified typical populist ideas and themes in Trump’s 2016 presidential campaign.<sup>36</sup> Trump began his campaign as political outsider opposing the GOP establishment<sup>37</sup> while challenging Republican doctrine across a number of principles, staking out distinctive positions on immigration and trade<sup>38</sup>, eventually forcing the party to seemingly surrender to his agenda after his election.

However, populist actors in America differ significantly from their European counterparts in terms of their organization and status in the political system. This is true in particular of the Tea Party, which is a network of activists, local groups and conservative think tanks, rather than a formal political party. The Tea Party primarily operates as an insurgent movement within the Republican party<sup>39</sup>. It is not a coherent party in the European sense of the word, and as such it has a different status from our European cases. As demonstrated by Trump’s success in the Republican nomination, primary elections provide opportunities for presidential aspirants to turn political conditions, party structures and exogenous events to their favor<sup>40</sup>. Both Trump and the Tea Party illustrate the relative permeability of American political parties compared with their European counterparts, and how populism may also find its way within mainstream politics.

For our European cases, we focus on three established right-wing populist parties, namely the French Front National (FN – now Rassemblement National, RN), the Swiss People’s Party (SVP) and the UK Independence Party (UKIP). These parties are commonly brought together under the umbrella of

---

<sup>35</sup> Berlet, C. “Reframing Populist Resentments in the Tea Party Movement”, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Oliver, J.E. and W.M. Rahn, “Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election”, *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667(1) (2016), 189-206; Kazin, M. “Trump and American Populism. Old Whine, New Bottles”, *Foreign Affairs* (October 2016). Available at:

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-06/trump-and-american-populism>; Pearce, J. “A Politics of the People: Comparing the Use of Populist Discourse in the 2016 US Presidential Election”, *LSE Undergraduate Political Review* 1 (2018), 22-57.

<sup>37</sup> Donovan, T. and S. Bowler, “Donald trump’s challenge to the study of elections, public opinion and parties”, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 28(2) (2018), 125-134.

<sup>38</sup> Gelman, A and J. Azari “19 Things We Learned from the 2016 Election” *Statistics and Public Policy*, 4(1) (2017), 1-10

<sup>39</sup> Blum, R. “The Tea Party: A Party within a Party,” Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Government, Georgetown University (2016).

<sup>40</sup> Brown, L. M., *Jockeying for the American Presidency: The Political Opportunism of Aspirants*, Amherst, NY: Cambria Press (2010)

the “populist radical right” which combines populism with nativism and anti-immigrant stances.<sup>41</sup> While we recognize that this selection does not cover the whole range of RPPs in Western Europe, it provides enough variance on other important aspects of right-wing populist politics to illustrate our conceptual framework and test both commonalities and dissimilarities in those parties’ populist and producerist frames. These parties have different economic backgrounds and traditions – agrarian conservatism for the SVP, Euroscepticism for UKIP, and far-right extremism for the French FN – which may explain their economic positions and manifestations of producerism. They also are often placed at different locations on the economic dimension, with the SVP and UKIP showing a more market-liberal orientation and the French FN being situated more to the left on the left-right economic dimension.<sup>42</sup> Finally, these parties offer variance on government participation, as the SVP is traditionally a member of Federal government in Switzerland, while both the FN and UKIP have been excluded from national power. RPPs in government may adopt a less radical economic agenda and may also be more willing to comply with international rules and institutions, toning down their populist rhetoric.

The empirical focus of our paper is on the socio-economic policies and discourses of our parties of interest. Our data are drawn from a purposive sample of manifestos, key speeches, and published statements of party leaders/candidates, which were deemed the sources most relevant to our analysis. For each populist case, we predominantly focused on party manifestos in the two most recent national elections, as an illustration of both the salience and persistence of populist and producerist themes in our parties of interest. In the case of Donald Trump, we looked at the 2016 presidential campaign, using Trump’s book *Great Again*, his *Contract with the American Voter*, his campaign commercials as well as some of his speeches –such as his Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in June 2015– as our primary sources. Finally, in the case of the Tea Party, we mostly used secondary literature as it was more difficult to identify unified programmatic documents across the myriad of small groups and organizations that make up the Tea Party movement. The list of party manifestos by election year considered in the analysis is presented in the Appendix and all manifestos are referenced in the main text (see references between brackets). Additional sources such as interviews and speeches are indicated as footnotes.

The variety of empirical sources and the mix of parties considered in this study make it possible to investigate similarities and differences in the economic populist and producerist mobilization in Europe and America. To account for the commonality and variability across our four cases, we look at the four main features of the right-wing populist producerist frame, namely the community of

---

<sup>41</sup> Mudde, C., op. cit. See also Ford, R. and M.J. Goodwin. *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>42</sup> Otjes et al., op. cit.

producers, the uncertainty of the people's economic well-being, the dual threat, and the promise to restore the people's well-being.

### **Right-wing populist producerism in the United States: Tea Party and Donald Trump**

Producerist narratives shape the discourse and ideology of the Tea (Taxed Enough Already) Party, which was founded in 2009. The Tea Party is not a typical party organization, but a loose coalition of business associations, media, and grassroots activists avoiding any central decision-making structure.<sup>43</sup> Despite internal ideological diversity, which characterizes the movement (in which social conservatism, libertarianism, and nativism are at stake), the Tea partiers share a strong criticism of the Obama presidency and its outcomes, but also, more generally, some core values, such as limited government, a strong claim for national sovereignty, and constitutional originalism.<sup>44</sup> One of the most relevant representatives of the Tea Party, Sarah Palin, clearly underlines her own idea of the true U.S. People: "I believe in a humbler, less self-involved America. I believe in that simple, commonsense wisdom that has come down to us through the ages: Everything that is worthwhile comes through effort".<sup>45</sup>

The emergence of the Tea Party has been seen as a reaction to the "dismantling of American middle-class life", as a response "to the feeling that prosperity is being taken away from" the American middle-class.<sup>46</sup> An important think tank of the Tea Party, Americans for Prosperity, argues that "our federal government is swimming in debt, and too many state capitals are facing growing fiscal liabilities. This is not because taxes are too low, it is because politicians spend too much. Too often, our tax code kills jobs, harms small businesses, and threatens the prosperity of current and future generations... Prosperity and opportunity come from the ingenuity and hard work of individuals and entrepreneurs, not from government [...]. Controlling government spending is key to unleashing the private sector's ability to lift people from poverty, strengthen the middle class, and create prosperity and well-being".<sup>47</sup> According to Theda Skocpol and her colleagues, deservingness represents a key discriminator: "Tea Party activists [...] define themselves as 'workers', in opposition to categories of 'non-workers' they perceive as undeserving of government assistance".<sup>48</sup> Moreover, in line with

---

<sup>43</sup> Rosenthal L. and C. Trost (eds.), *Steep. The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Van Dyke, N. and S. D. Meyereds, *Understanding the Tea Party Movement* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Foley, E.P., *The Tea Party. Three Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>45</sup> Palin, S. *America by Heart. Reflections on Family, Faith, and Flag* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 171.

<sup>46</sup> Rosenthal and Trost, op. cit., 277.

<sup>47</sup> Americans for Prosperity, *Issues*, <https://americansforprosperity.org/the-issues/#limited-government> (retrieved on 25 October 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Williamson, V., T. Skocpol and J. Coggin, "The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism", *Perspectives on Politics* 9(1) (2011), 32.

classic right-wing discourse, “the Tea Party dichotomy of the ‘freeloader’ versus the ‘hardworking taxpayer’ has racial undertones”,<sup>49</sup> notably assuming that socioeconomic deprivation among African-Americans is explained by sociocultural factors and a lack of work ethic.<sup>50</sup>

Unlike U.S. progressive populism, however, the Tea party’s producerism does not attack finance and bankers as parasitic. Bankers are not represented as part of the ‘corrupt’ elite, but as contributors to the American dream.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, even before Trump’s presidential campaign in 2016, Tea partiers already showed some ambivalence over economic protectionism: candidates and representatives of the Tea Party openly expressed their skepticism about free trade, a negative attitude, which, according to surveys, was shared by a majority of the movement’s rank and file.<sup>52</sup>

Internal tensions within the Tea Party seem to have grown during the period of Trump’s political ascension, reflecting contradicting views. On the one hand, Trump shares the traditional isolationist views of the Tea Party, embracing American exceptionalism and disengagement from multilateralism in foreign policy. On the other hand, Trump may appear to contradict the Tea Party’s agenda of free trade and small government, by endorsing economic protectionism while advocating public expenditure and ambitious projects for rebuilding the country’s “crumbling infrastructure” (Trump 2016a). Greater convergence can be seen on cultural issues.<sup>53</sup> Matters of race and national identity motivate Tea Partiers and exclusionary claims dominate their rhetoric,<sup>54</sup> which suggests “a racially motivated authoritarianism and destructiveness”.<sup>55</sup> Racial hostility and social conservative values have become more prominent in the Tea Party. This has fostered the growth of ‘reactionary Republicanism’ which has paved the way for Trump’s nativist and authoritarian campaign.<sup>56</sup>

Like the Tea Party, Donald Trump defends a typical producerist vision in which people are unified by their work, identity and values. His economic people is defined as a hardworking productive community, celebrating the ‘great work ethic’ of Americans while claiming to “give our country back to the millions of people who have labored so hard for so little”, advocating a ‘tax relief’ and a cut in ‘red tape’ bureaucracy to “unburden hardworking middle class Americans” (Trump 2016a). Trump

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>50</sup> Skocpol, T. and V. Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: OUP, 2012), 68-69. On the relevance of racial dimensions in the Tea Party, see also Parker, S. C. and M. A. Barreto. *Change they Can’t Believe In. The Tea Party and the Reactionary Politics in America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>51</sup> Trost, C. and L. Rosenthal, “Introduction. The Rise of the Tea Party”, in Rosenthal, L. and C. Trost (eds.), *Steep. The Precipitous Rise of the Tea Party* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2012), 33.

<sup>52</sup> Griswold, D. “Where Do Tea Party Members Stand on Free Trade?” *Manzella Report* (1 January 2011) (accessed from: <http://www.manzellareport.com/index.php/politics/264-where-do-tea-party-members-stand-on-free-trade>).

<sup>53</sup> C. Mudde, *The far right in America* (London, Routledge, 2018).

<sup>54</sup> L. Zeskind, “A Nation Dispossessed: The Tea Party Movement and Race” *Critical Sociology*, 38(4) (2012) 495-509.

<sup>55</sup> G. Lundskow, “Authoritarianism and Destructiveness in the Tea Party Movement” *Critical Sociology*, 38(4) (2012) 529-547.

<sup>56</sup> B.T. Gervais et I.L. Morris, *Reactionary Republicanism. How the Tea Party in the House Paved the Way for Trumps Victory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2018).

pledges to give the “people” back their voice, to “speak to their hearts” and “stand up for their interests”. His primary class is the typical producerist alliance of entrepreneurs and middle-class voters who are seen as the defenders of moral values of work ethics and honesty, the “bedrock” of America and “true engine” of the economy (Trump 2016a).

Trump’s discourses cultivate strong anti-elite and anti-establishment attitudes, claiming that “Washington does not work” (Trump 2016a) and promising to “drain the swamp” (Trump 2016b). The elite is accused of “not telling the truth” (Trump 2016a) and living parasitically by usurping the wealth produced by virtuous American workers. As Trump explained: “Politicians, the big donors and the special interests have bled this country dry and stripped our middle class and stripped our companies of its jobs and its wealth”.<sup>57</sup>

Nativism and nationalist mobilization of economic and cultural frustrations among American voters are a strong feature of Trump’s rhetoric. Trump’s anti-immigration arguments clearly resemble those manipulated by nativist politicians in Europe, playing on economic and cultural fears<sup>58</sup>, while also associating Syrian refugees with Islamic terrorism. Trump’s *Contract with the American Voter* contained stringent measures to restrict immigration to the US, advocating widespread deportations and building a wall on the border with Mexico. In his programme, Trump also pledged to reform visa rules to enhance penalties for overstaying and to ensure open “jobs are offered to American workers first” (Trump 2016b). In his book, he also advocated “ending the so-called birthright citizenship” and questioned “whether illegal immigrants should be receiving the same benefits” (Trump 2016a).

While showing the core features of right-wing producerism, Trump’s discourses and rhetoric also show some heterogeneity. This first concerns the economic identity of his coalition of producers. While consistently referring to the “middle class” and “hardworking Americans”, Trump, unlike traditional American right-wing producerists, shows more ambivalent positions vis-à-vis the lower social classes and subordinate groups that are traditionally portrayed as the ‘enemy’ from below. As Berezin suggests, Trump emphasized his working-class background during the campaign<sup>59</sup>. In his book, Trump showed compassion for “the poor”, while claiming to “provide a social safety net for those who fall off the economic chart” (Trump 2016a). In his programme, Trump adopted state interventionism, increases in public infrastructure and expansionist fiscal policies, while simultaneously endorsing universal social-benefit programs, such as Social Security and Medicaid, advocating ‘affordable childcare and eldercare’ (Trump 2016b).

---

<sup>57</sup> Trump, D.J. “Remarks at the Central Florida Fairgrounds in Orlando, Florida”, 2 November 2016. Online by Peters, G. and J.T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=123513>.

<sup>58</sup> T. Donovan and D. Redlawsk. “Donald Trump and Right-Wing Populists in Comparative Perspective” *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 28/2 (2018), 190-207.

<sup>59</sup> Berezin, M. “On the construction sites of history: Where did Donald Trump come from? *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 5 (2017), 322–337, see p.324.

Trump's narratives also are more amenable to ethnic minorities, making a distinction between current and previous waves of immigration to the US, while also reflecting the more positive acceptance of cultural diversity in America. On the one hand, Trump made bombastic comments against illegal immigrants during the campaign, claiming that the US had become a "dumping ground" for Mexican criminals: "They're bringing drugs, Trump said. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people".<sup>60</sup> On the other hand, he clearly tried to reach out to Latino and African American communities. "What's happened with the inner cities of our country, the African-American community, the Hispanic community, is very, very unfair, Trump claimed during the campaign. We're going to take care of it. The crime is horrible, the education is terrible, and you can't get a job. We're going to fix the inner cities."<sup>61</sup>

Moreover, we find some ambivalence regarding economic elites. Despite his background as business magnate, Trump strategically endorsed economic populism, constructing the 'elite' as a broad coalition of business interests in collusion with political elites and "dishonest media". In his book, Trump pledged to "eliminate tax loopholes available to special interests and the very rich" (Trump 2016a). On the campaign trail, he played on popular anger and resentment against finance and global corporations, slamming Wall Street and claiming independence from its power, embracing conspiracist narratives, vibrantly demonizing what he described as a "corrupt machine" and "a global power structure" dominated by "a handful of large corporations and political entities" (Trump 2016c). Trump's producerist discourse consistently emphasizes the ideas of economic decline and failure by political elites. As Trump stated: "A failed political establishment has delivered nothing but poverty, nothing but problems, nothing but losses".<sup>62</sup> Nostalgia for an idealized time of economic prosperity and booming industry is another important feature of his producerism and discourse of "reinvigorating the American dream". While constantly referring to a 'crippled country', Trump's rhetoric celebrates the producerist myth of national rebirth, a promise to restore the country's greatness and "global dominance", as illustrated in his claim to "make America great again": "we'll take inspiration from the heroism of our past, but we're only going to charge ahead now" (Trump 2016a).

Finally, Trump adopts a distinctively protectionist agenda. In his rhetoric, free trade and so-called "globalism" are seen as the main drivers behind the nation's economic decline and the plan should be to "put America First" (Trump 2016c). Trump's *Contract with the American Voter* advocated

---

<sup>60</sup> Trump, D.J. "Remarks Announcing Candidacy for President in New York City", 16 June 2015. Online by G. Peters and J.T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=110306>.

<sup>61</sup> Trump, D. J. "Remarks at the Bayfront Park Amphitheater in Miami, Florida", 2 November 2016. Online by G. Peters and J. T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=123514>.

<sup>62</sup> Trump, D. J. "Remarks at J.S. Dorton Arena in Raleigh, North Carolina", 7 November 2016. Online by Peters, G. and J.T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=122536>.

protectionist policies against “job-killing free-trade agreements”, “foreign product dumping” and “currency manipulation”. In particular, Trump pledged to “renegotiate NAFTA or withdraw from the deal”, to “announce withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership” and to “establish tariffs to discourage companies from laying off their workers in order to relocate in other countries” (Trump 2016b).

### **Western European right-wing economic populism: FN, SVP, UKIP**

#### *The Front national (FN)*

The populism of the FN constructs a community of hardworking and productive people who share a common economic destiny, and whose power has been confiscated by elites. The FN pledges to ‘give the people a voice’ (FN 2017). Its idealized economic people refers to a broad coalition of socio-economic groups at the ‘bottom of society’ (*La France d’en-bas*), a “silent majority” (*majorité silencieuse*) made of all the “left behind”, “invisible” and “forgotten ones who have been abandoned by political elites”, and who embody a “generous and hardworking France”.<sup>63</sup>

According to the FN, the well-being of the class of producers is in decline and under threat from immigrants, cosmopolitan elites and international bodies. The populism of the FN endorses the producerist idea that ‘parasitic’ economic and political elites usurp the wealth produced by hardworking producers. According to Le Pen, elites are motivated by “selfishness and greed”, defending their own interests rather than those of the people: “The big ones get everything and it’s always less for the little people and the middle classes”.<sup>64</sup> Conspiracism is a fundamental element of the FN’s populist rhetoric. Political, economic and cultural elites are seen as part of a “globalist and multiculturalist ideology” against which the FN pits itself as the only authentic “patriotic” force (FN 2017). News media, journalists and intellectuals are also accused of being complicit with the political establishment. Additionally, the FN strongly criticizes international institutions such as the IMF, NATO and WTO, opposing free-trade agreements and embracing economic protectionism (FN 2012 & 2017).

Nativism is a crucial feature of the FN which essentially sees immigration as a burden for the country. The party calls for “national priority” for the French in jobs, housing and welfare, while advocating a drastic reduction in immigration (FN 2012 & 2017). During the 2017 campaign, Le Pen called for

---

<sup>63</sup> Ivaldi, G. “Populism in France”, in Stockemer, D. (ed.), *Populism Around the World: A Comparative Perspective* (Cham: Springer, 2018), 29.

<sup>64</sup> Le Pen, M. “Speech Châteauroux”, 11 March 2017. Retrieved from: <https://www.rassemblementnational.fr/videos/discours-de-marine-le-pen-a-chateauroux/>

a ‘moratorium’, promising to end all legal immigration into the country.<sup>65</sup> The FN’s ‘outsiders’ also include the undeserving poor, such as “benefit fraudsters” who should be excluded from welfare and punished (FN 2012 & 2017). As explained by Le Pen: “the French middle classes are systematically the victims of the policy choices that are made. More and more people are getting social benefits, but it is always the same people who get welfare, and the same people who have to pay for it”.<sup>66</sup>

FN policies are directed at economic groups that are seen as the backbones of economic prosperity, especially small businesses and entrepreneurs. The FN embraces a typical right-wing agenda of tax reduction and easing the bureaucratic burden on small businesses (FN 2012 & 2017). Other ‘virtuous’ producers include farmers who are seen as the typical possessors of traditional values of honesty, entrenchment and work ethics. However, the FN under Marine Le Pen has adopted a left-leaning Keynesian economic agenda, advocating redistribution, state intervention and public services expansion, while opposing flexibility in the job market and successive pension reforms by the government (FN 2012 & 2017), thus addressing the demands and interests of the lower social strata that form the bulk of the FN’s electoral constituency.

Finally, the FN embraces the myth of national rebirth. As explained by Le Pen, France must restore its past grandeur and let its “great people” take back power: “Under circumstances where the so-called elites have failed and too often betrayed, the only recourse is the people. It is its will that will save us from the forces of decline”.<sup>67</sup>

### *The Swiss people’s party (SVP)*

The SVP, the largest electoral party at national level in Switzerland since the 2000s,<sup>68</sup> has often presented itself as the defender of “values such as modesty, punctuality, thrift and hard work” that “traditionally characterize the Swiss people” of the middle-class who “create jobs and prosperity” (SVP 2011 & 2015). As the main leader and founder of the SVP Christoph Blocher said: “The true elite of our country are citizens who, according to their abilities and skills each in their own place, faithfully carry out their daily work and contribute to collective prosperity. And that can lead to many amazing performances in daily life. Men and women who, despite conditions that are sometimes highly precarious and hostile, take up challenges and do everything possible. I’m thinking of the many

<sup>65</sup> A. Nossiter, “Marine Le Pen Leads Far-Right Fight to Make France ‘More French’”, *The New York Times*, April 20, 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Cited in De Boni, M. “Marine Le Pen dit aussi ‘réfléchir’ au revenu universel”, *Le Figaro*, 19 April 2016 (retrieved from: <http://www.lefigaro.fr/politique/le-scan/citations/2016/04/19/25002-20160419ARTFIG00277-marine-le-pen-dit-aussi-reflechir-au-revenu-universel.php>).

<sup>67</sup> Le Pen, M. “Assises présidentielles de Lyon: Discours de Marine Le Pen”, 5 February 2017 (Retrieved from: <http://www.frontnational.com/videos/assises-presidentielles-de-lyon-discours-de-marine-le-pen/>).

<sup>68</sup> Mazzoleni, O. “Political Achievements, Party System Changes and Government Participation: the Case of the ‘New’ Swiss People’s Party”, in Zaslove, A. and S. Wolinetz (eds.). *Absorbing the Blow. Populist Parties and their Impact on Parties and Party Systems*, 83-102 (Colchester: ECPR Press, 2018).

fathers or mothers who take care of their children courageously... but also of entrepreneurs, craftsmen, farmers and employees of all kinds who, in all discretion and with perseverance, have built up astonishing positions.”<sup>69</sup>

According to the SVP, the prosperity of Switzerland is, however, under threat. The freedom and welfare of the middle-class are undermined because of the growth of social expenditure and tax levies: “The victim is the middle class, which has to pay for everything”, the 2015 national election platform claimed (SVP 2015). “Citizens themselves know best as to where and how they want to responsibly use their money. If this principle is further undermined, this will lead to socialism, under which the state confiscates the property of its citizens for the purposes defined by it” (SVP 2015). As underlined by Thomas Aeschi, the head of the SVP’s national MPs, during a meeting of the party in June 2018, the “Swiss middle-class” is under pressure and “in decline”, “avoided and betrayed by the political class, which “prefers spending billions for minorities and marginal groups”.<sup>70</sup>

For the SVP, the danger for Swiss freedom and welfare comes from different threats ‘from above’. First of all, “with the exception of the SVP, all the other parties are [...] undermining and destroying” the pillars of Swiss prosperity (SVP 2015). The second threat is said to come from the left-wing parties: “Anyone who works and has set some money aside, and later wants to enjoy the benefit of their savings, has every reason to oppose left-wing policies, since most of their moves are aimed at extracting more money from others, depriving people of their property and redistributing it” (SVP 2015). Thirdly, the SVP criticizes the rising number of ‘unproductive’ civil servants, who are in charge of an increasingly prescriptive and restrictive state regulation: “The large number of new public-sector jobs burden not just taxpayers, but also the economy. More civil servants automatically leads to even more government bureaucracy and activity for activity’s sake, because all of the civil servants want something to do” (SVP 2015).

The SVP provides several targets in the form of non-producers ‘from below’ that it considers responsible for undermining Swiss prosperity. First, those unemployed people who are unwilling to work must be excluded from the welfare state: “Anyone who refuses to integrate or look for work should be refused assistance” (SVP 2011 & 2015). Secondly, in Switzerland, which traditionally has high immigration rates, the SVP accepts only immigrants able to contribute to national prosperity: “Anyone who comes to Switzerland is required to obey the local laws, integrate and earn their own living” (SVP 2011 & 2015). There should be a reduction in the number of asylum seekers and the “social benefits” they receive, thereby giving recognized refugees a greater incentive to work.

---

<sup>69</sup> Blocher, C. *Viens gamin et regarde ton p'tit pays! A propos de vraies et fausses élites*. Speech at Albisgüetli, Meeting of the Zurich SVP, 13 January 2002, 17.

<sup>70</sup> Aeschi, T. *Wie die Schweizer Mittelstand ausgepresst und von der Politik verraten wird*, Delegiertenversammlung, 23 June 2018.

Regarding the naturalization of foreigners, “people with a criminal history or those who are dependent on the state should not be able to become naturalized”. More generally, criminals should also contribute to prosperity: “The SVP demands a rethinking of how sentences are enforced: less therapy, more work and a greater contribution to the costs incurred” (SVP 2015). In sum, for the SVP and Blocher in particular, the opposition between ‘true citizens’ and ‘parasites’ represents a crucial issue in their ideological supply.<sup>71</sup>

Thus, for maintaining and enhancing the prosperity of Switzerland, which was “one of the most successful and prosperous countries of the world”, the SVP argues it is necessary to defend the “pillars” of Swiss peculiarity, “independence, direct democracy, neutrality and federalism” (SVP 2015)<sup>72</sup> and “focus once more on our heritage of liberty: on hard work and individual responsibility, competition and open markets, free prices and stable monetary policy, and private property” (SVP 2011).

#### *The UK Independence Party (UKIP)*

UKIP primarily defines its economic people as a community of workers. These are seen as possessors of strong moral values and work ethics: “UKIP believes the key to creating a successful, dynamic economy and a fair society lies in harnessing the ingenuity, resourcefulness and appetite for hard work of the British people” (UKIP 2015). UKIP pledges to slash the tax burden for low and middle-income households to boost the British economy (UKIP 2015 & 2017). Moreover, UKIP’s vision of the producerist community emphasizes the role of “small businessmen” as one important economic “backbone of the country” and “lifeblood” of the economy, promising to “cut business rates for the smallest businesses” (UKIP 2015 & 2017).

UKIP typically embraces the producerist narratives of economic decline. As explained by Nigel Farage: “living standards have fallen and life has become a lot tougher for so many in our country [...] The well-being of those living and working in our country matters to me more than GDP figures”.<sup>73</sup> According to UKIP, economic decline calls for change: “our country needs radical social, economic, and democratic change [...] It will take a political party like UKIP to stand up to the tyranny of the status quo, if we are really to pull Britain Together” (UKIP 2017).

---

<sup>71</sup> Hildebrand, M. *Rechtspopulismus und Hegemonie: Der Aufstieg der SVP und die diskursive Transformation der politischen Schweiz* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017), 181-182.

<sup>72</sup> See also, Blocher, C. *La Suisse sur la voie vers la dictature*, Speech at Albisgüetli, Meeting of the Zurich SVP, 15 January 2016.

<sup>73</sup> Farage, N. “Why we must vote LEAVE in the EU referendum”, *Express*, 21 June 2016 (retrieved from <https://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/681776/nigel-farage-eu-referendum-brexit-vote-leave-independence-ukip>).

In UKIP discourse, the true community of producers is opposed to non-productive elites at the top of society, represented both by the political establishment embodied by “Westminster”, and economic powers. UKIP claims to “rebalance power from large corporations and big government institutions and put it back into the hands of the people of this country” (UKIP 2015). Large corporations are seen as the unworthy beneficiaries of national wealth: “it is grossly unfair that a few multi-national corporations have been able to access all the benefits of our thriving British consumer market without making a proper contribution to the costs of British society” (UKIP 2015). “UKIP is not in the pockets of big businesses and we will make them pay their way” (UKIP 2017). Unlike some of our other RPPs, however, UKIP’s producerism is embedded in globalization, free trade and Atlanticism. The party seeks “to create a more global Britain, fully able to pursue her own interests” by negotiating her own free-trade agreements and advancing her own trade interests, with particular emphasis on ties with the “Anglosphere” and NATO membership (UKIP 2015), and “swift free trade agreement” with the Trump administration (UKIP 2017).

At the bottom of society, the class of ‘non-producers’ includes parasitic elements such as immigrants and those living off social welfare. Anti-immigration and nativist policies are central to UKIP’s programme. UKIP sees the “unprecedented influx of immigrants” as “pushing public services to breaking point”, while “uncontrolled mass immigration” is accused of “driving down wages” (UKIP 2015). The 2015 manifesto claimed to “put the ‘national’ back into our national health service”, including a range of nativist policies such as “limiting access to NHS and welfare for new migrants”, “prioritising people with strong local connections when making housing allocations”, and “allowing British businesses to choose to employ British citizens first” (UKIP 2015). The 2017 manifesto claimed that “British jobs should be offered first to British workers” (UKIP 2017).

UKIP also establishes a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The party claims to “look after our older people and others who are vulnerable in society” and being “fully committed to protecting the rights of disabled people”, while simultaneously strongly opposing the “benefits lifestyle” and pledging to “crack down on benefit fraud and abuse” (UKIP 2015). UKIP shows a mixed economic agenda, supporting small businesses, low taxation and increasing spending on vital services such as the NHS and education, while claiming to fight tax dodging by multi-national corporations (UKIP 2015 & 2017).

## **Discussion**

The empirical analysis in this paper confirms that the core features of producerism are found across all the right-wing populist parties and actors in our case studies. This is illustrated in the summary

table below (see Table 1). All our parties define a community of ‘producers’ who embody the ‘true’ people and whose economic well-being is in decline or in a fragile situation and should therefore be restored or consolidated. Narratives of national rebirth and economic restoration are paramount. They all portray hardworking and deserving producers as the backbones of economic prosperity and typical possessors of moral values – such as work ethics and honesty. They all share the idea of a ‘dual squeezing’ of the productive classes by a two-headed enemy that looms from both above and from below. At the top, the political establishment and bureaucrats typically represent a class of ‘non-productive’ elites accused of betraying the people, their interests and their well-being. At the bottom, subordinate groups such as immigrants and welfare abusers are vilified as parasitic elements that threaten the economic prosperity of producers. Nativism is a strong common denominator of our parties which operate on an exclusionist and ethno-nationalist conception of the people.

In line with our initial expectations, however, we find variation across our parties of interest in their interpretation of the producerist antagonism and groups. Producerism and the symbolic boundaries it postulates vary according to different ideological traditions and party legacies, as well as the contextual opportunities for populist mobilization. First, the definition of the class of producers has a stronger discursive focus on the alliance between small businesses and a broader coalition of the lower-middle and working classes, in the case of the FN, UKIP and Trump, while mostly referring to the middle class and individual entrepreneurs in the case of both the Tea Party and the SVP. Second, there is variation in the definition of the subordinate groups that producerism typically opposes to the community of producers. Departing from traditional producerist ideology, native jobless people and the poor do not seem to be explicitly included in the class of ‘parasitic’ elements in the case of the FN, UKIP and Trump, which all strongly emphasize the threat of immigrants. In contrast, the stigmatization of the undeserving poor and the unemployed is more pronounced in the SVP and Tea Party. Finally, we find variation in the construction by our parties of the elite. While all parties share a similar distrust of the political establishment and bureaucrats, the FN, UKIP and Trump – at least rhetorically in the case of Trump – embrace the classic producerist critique of economic elites, large corporations and financial powers. In the FN, with Trump and, albeit less markedly, with the Tea Party, the critique of economic powers is also embedded in conspiracist narratives, demonizing a ‘globalist’ ideology and project.

These differences are reflected in our parties’ economic agendas. A typical free-market and small-government platform is found in the American Tea Party and the Swiss SVP. In contrast, the FN, Trump and UKIP show a mixed economic platform combining social welfare, healthcare and more expansionist fiscal policies. UKIP and the SVP embrace a clear free-trade agenda, while both Trump and the French FN strongly emphasize economic protectionism with regard to international free trade.

Overall, our analysis suggests that our parties may fall within two distinct categories of producerist right-wing populism. On the one hand, the Swiss SVP and the Tea Party, dominantly, seem to embody a classic variant of right-wing neoliberal populism, adopting free-market, minimum government and free-trade policies. On the other hand, we find a different version of right-wing producerist populism in the FN, Trump and UKIP, where producerist narratives are associated with more socially oriented, expansionist and economically protectionist policies and themes.

**Table 1. Summary of core producerist features in the Tea Party, Donald Trump, FN, SVP and UKIP**

	Tea Party	Trump	FN	SVP	UKIP
Producers	‘Ordinary Americans’, entrepreneurs, middle and working classes	‘Ordinary Americans’, entrepreneurs, middle and working classes	‘Hardworking France’, lower and middle classes, small businesses	Middle class, small businesses	‘Ordinary British workers’, low and middle-income voters, small businesses
Non-productive elites	Big government, bureaucrats, Obama’s administration, foreign powers	Washington, a rigged and corrupt system, crooked Hillary, bureaucrats, big donors, special interests, Wall Street	Political establishment, bureaucrats, large multinational corporations, financial powers	Parties, civil servants, bureaucrats	Political establishment, Westminster, large multinational corporations
Conspiracism	Globalism, corruption, global powers	Globalism, corrupt machine, global power-structure	Globalist and multiculturalist ideology, dark project	—	—
Subordinate groups	Immigrants, the poor, the unemployed	Immigrants, Syrian refugees	Immigrants, social-welfare fraudsters	Immigrants, asylum seekers, unemployed unwilling to work	Immigrants, social-welfare abusers, ‘benefit lifestyle’
Economic policies	Free market, small government, free trade	Mixed, economic protectionism	Expansionist, Keynesian, economic protectionism	Free market, free trade	Mixed domestic agenda, free trade

## Conclusion

Populist mobilization is increasingly a transnational and global phenomenon, and we need new perspectives that make it possible to grasp both the variety of populist manifestations and their commonalities. While the literature on right-wing populism predominantly focuses on cultural issues, we suggest in this paper that the economic dimension of populism should be given further consideration. We focus on the concept of ‘economic populism’ and suggest that it should be studied in articulation with the concept of ‘producerism’ that has predominantly been used by scholars of right-wing populism in the United States.

The connection between economic populism and producerism provides a new – and fruitful – perspective from which to study right-wing populism across different contexts and deepen our general understanding of the populist phenomenon as a whole.

First, our framework helps identify factors that link together cultural and economic grievances and how these may interact in populist mobilization. RPPs’ rhetoric of ‘nationals first’ and discourses against ‘mass’ immigration are multifaceted issues, tapping into cultural identities and economic interests, and at the same time, along with economic protectionist claims, calling for a country that is more secure and better protected against external threats. As our paper suggests, claims of security and protection are not only a response to criminality and terrorism, but they also concern growing socio-economic uncertainty and feelings of economic insecurity among voters.

Second, our framework allows a clearer distinction between the ‘true’ people, on the one hand, and their opponents, on the other. While populism generally remains vague about who the ‘true’ people are, the producerist frames deployed by populist actors identify specific socio-economic groups –i.e. entrepreneurs, middle and/or working-class – which form the community of producers and the core of the populist electoral constituency. Moreover, producerism provides a clearer definition of the ‘parasitic’ groups in society – the unproductive elites, the subordinate lower social strata and ethnically-based social categories– which threaten the well-being and prosperity of this community of producers.

Third, producerism can be seen as the way in which economic populism seeks to respond to the limitations of both right-wing economic liberalism and left-wing solidaritarianism. While pro-market liberalism mainly emphasizes individual freedom, private property and entrepreneurship, producerism has a stronger focus on community interests and social justice. However, unlike left-wing solidarity, which is traditionally embedded in universalist claims, producerism emphasizes the nationalist, particularistic and exclusionist form of solidarity that is at the core of the nativist ideology. In this, populist producerism clearly operates beyond the traditional boundaries of the economic left

and right, providing an alternative model of particularistic redistribution of wealth and resources restricted to the community of producers.

The connection between economic populism and producerism helps to further deepen our understanding of populism as a global phenomenon. Since, historically, producerism has its ideational roots in both the U.S. and Europe – in France in particular – and since these legacies are persistent across both regions, producerism may be seen as a common ideological bond between right-wing populist movements and actors across both sides of the Atlantic. Future research should consider how populist producerist frames are deployed by other right-wing populist movements in Europe and beyond. RPPs such as the Austrian FPÖ, Italian *Lega* and Hungarian Fidesz for instance show resemblance with the cases under scrutiny in this paper. Moreover, the current spread of populism across Asia –e.g. Narendra Modi in India and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines–, the Middle-East –e.g. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey– and Latin America –for instance Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil–, where it has roots in different political cultures and contexts, calls for further investigation of how producerist themes and ideas may be articulated with different manifestations of the populist phenomenon.

Finally, while this paper exclusively concerns the political ‘supply’ of populist producerism by right-wing parties and leaders, we should also explore how populist producerist ideas resonate with voters.

### Appendix: List of Manifestos Considered in the Analysis

<b>Party/Candidate</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Manifesto</b>
Front National	2012	FN (2012) <i>Mon Projet pour la France et les Français. Marine Le Pen, la Voix du Peuple, l'Esprit de la France.</i>
	2017	FN (2017). <i>144 Engagements présidentiels, Marine 2017.</i>
SVP	2011	SVP (2011). <i>SVP – The Party for Switzerland. Party Programme of the Swiss People's Party 2011 – 2015.</i> Bern
	2015	SVP (2015). <i>SVP – The Party for Switzerland. Party Programme of the Swiss People's Party 2015 – 2019.</i> Bern.
UKIP	2015	UKIP (2015) <i>Believe in Britain. UKIP 2017 Manifesto.</i>
	2017	UKIP (2017) <i>Britain together. UKIP 2017 Manifesto.</i>
Donald Trump	2016	Trump (2016a) <i>Great Again. How to Fix Our Crippled America.</i> NY: Threshold Editions
		Trump (2016b) <i>Donald Trump's Contract with the American Voter</i> ( <a href="https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/_landings/contract/O-TRU-102316-Contractv02.pdf">https://assets.donaldjtrump.com/_landings/contract/O-TRU-102316-Contractv02.pdf</a> )
		Trump (2016c) Donald Trump's Argument For America, Campaign Commercial, 4 November, <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vST61W4bGm8">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vST61W4bGm8</a>

