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# Populist Voting in the 2019 European Elections

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## Abstract

Der Beitrag analysiert die Wahlergebnisse der populistischen Parteien bei den Europawahlen 2019 und geht der Frage nach den Hauptfaktoren der populistischen Stimmabgabe nach. Zum einen zeigt sich, dass die populistischen Wähler nicht durchgängig dem Modell der „Globalisierungsverlierer“ entsprechen. Zweitens erscheint die populistische Wahl in ein breiteres Gefüge politisch-sozialer Konflikte und Identitäten eingebettet, das bei verschiedenen Trägern des Populismus stark variiert. Opposition gegen die europäische Integration, eine kritische Betrachtung der EU-Demokratie und eine geringe Unterstützung für demokratische Institutionen sind nichtsdestoweniger Gemeinsamkeiten der populistischen Wahlmotivation, unabhängig von der jeweiligen parteipolitischen Verortung.

## I. Introduction

The rise of populism is one of the most significant phenomena in today's political world.<sup>1</sup> In Europe, populism enjoys widespread popularity. The crises that have hit the EU since 2008 – especially the financial and refugee crises – have deeply fractured the European political system and created a propitious context for populist actors, helping fuel their electoral success. In 2016, the Brexit vote in the UK was interpreted as a populist backlash against Europe. In the wake of

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1 Cf. Cas Mudde/Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective. Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda*. In: *Comparative Political Studies*, 51 (2018) 13, pp. 1667–1693.

the EU's 'polycrisis',<sup>2</sup> the 2019 European parliamentary elections were therefore seen as a real-life test of the electoral strengths of populist parties across the continent.

This paper examines the electoral performances of populist parties in the 2019 European elections and asks what the drivers of the populist vote are. In the current European political landscape, populism manifests itself in a variety of parties across the political spectrum, from left to right. In Eastern Europe, elements of the populist ideology may also be found across a range of 'centrist' anti-establishment parties which are located both inside and outside the mainstream.

The 2019 EP election thus provides us with the opportunity to comparatively examine the main drivers of the populist vote across a large number of European countries and actors, under different competitive sets. Using data from the early release of the 2019 EES Voter Study,<sup>3</sup> the focus in this paper is on the demand-side of populist mobilization, looking at similarities and differences in the socio-demographic as well as the attitudinal profile of populist voters in the 2019 EP elections.

Different varieties of populism may operate on different types of grievances and issues, across the economic and cultural dimensions of electoral competition.<sup>4</sup> However, recent research shows commonalities between different manifestations of the populist phenomenon, suggesting that the distinction, in particular between left and right-wing populism, should be more nuanced. It is therefore important that we explore not only populism's diversity, but also its commonalities. Moreover, we should examine the link between populism and attitudes towards Europe. Populist parties across the board mobilize conflicts associated with European integration and this may produce more similarities in terms of populist voter attitudes and preferences.

This paper is organized as follows: the first section provides an overview of the various strands of populism in the current European context, and briefly looks at their performances in the 2019 EP elections. The second section identifies the main research questions in relation to conflicts and issues that drive populist voting. The data and methods are explained in the next section. The paper then turns to the empirical analysis of survey data. It finds that populist voters have relatively distinct socio-demographic characteristics and that not all populist voters in Europe fit the 'globalization losers' profile. Meanwhile, most

2 Jonathan Zeitlin/Francesco Nicoli/Brigid Laffan, Introduction: the European Union Beyond the Polycrisis? Integration and Politicization in an Age of Shifting Cleavages. In: *Journal of European Public Policy*, 26 (2019) 7, pp. 963–976.

3 Cf. Hermann Schmitt/Sara B. Hobolt/Wouter van der Brug/Sebastian A. Popa, European Parliament Election Study 2019, Voter Study (2019) (<http://europeanelection-studies.net/european-election-studies/ees-2019-study/voter-study-2019>; 12.1.2020).

4 Cf. Steven M. van Hauwaert/Stijn van Kessel, Beyond Protest and Discontent. A Cross-national Analysis of the Effect of Populist Attitudes and Issue Positions on Populist Party Support. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 57 (2018) 1, pp. 68–92.

populist voters show significant support for left-leaning, pro-redistribution policies and they tend to see themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic scale, which may possibly reflect subjective feelings of relative deprivation. Ideologically, the empirical analysis in this paper confirms that the populist vote is embedded in broader sets of socio-political conflicts and identities. Populist voters differ in terms of their principal voting motivations and left-right ideology. They show more things in common, on the other hand, with regards to their opposition to European integration and satisfaction with the workings of democracy in the EU, as well as in terms of their relative lack of support for democracy. These findings are discussed in the last section.

## II. Varieties of European Populism

Mudde defines populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ which “considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people”.<sup>5</sup> As a thin ideology, populism must attach itself to other, more substantial sets of ideas which give it its full meaning.

In the European context, populism is predominantly found in the populist radical left (PRL) and populist radical right (PRR).<sup>6</sup> As recent literature suggests, elements of the populist ideology may also be found amongst Eastern European anti-establishment actors, which have also been referred to as Centrist populists (CP).<sup>7</sup>

Within the radical right, populism is typically combined with exclusionary nativism and authoritarianism, whereby the people and the elite are primarily defined along cultural lines.<sup>8</sup> Alongside traditional actors such as the French RN, Italian Lega, and Austrian FPÖ, the nativist and authoritarian features of the

5 Cas Mudde, *The Populist Zeitgeist*. In: *Government and Opposition*, 39 (2004) 4, pp. 541–563, here 543.

6 Cf. Matthijs Rooduijn/Tjitske Akkerman, *Flank Attacks. Populism and Left-right Radicalism in Western Europe*. In: *Party Politics*, 23 (2017) 3, pp. 193–204; Gilles Ivaldi/Maria Elisabetta Lanzone/Dwayne Woods, *Varieties of Populism across a Left-Right Spectrum. The Case of the Front National, the Northern League, Podemos and Five Star Movement*. In: *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23 (2017), pp. 354–376; Laurent Bernhard/Hanspeter Kriesi, *Populism in Election Times: a Comparative Analysis of 11 Countries in Western Europe*. In: *West European Politics*, 42 (2019) 6, pp. 1188–1208.

7 Cf. Peter Učeň, *Parties, Populism, and Anti-Establishment Politics in East Central Europe*. In: *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 27 (2007) 1, pp. 49–62; Sean Hanley/Allan Sikk, *Economy, Corruption or Floating Voters? Explaining the Breakthroughs of Anti-Establishment Reform Parties in Eastern Europe*. In: *Party Politics*, 22 (2016) 4, pp. 522–533; Ben Stanley, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*. In: Cristobal Rovira Kaltwasser/Paul Taggart/Paulina Ochoa Espejo/Pierre Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on Populism*, Oxford 2017, pp. 140–160.

8 Cf. Cas Mudde, *The Populist Radical Right in Europe*, Cambridge 2007.

PRR are found in 'radicalized' governing conservative parties such as Poland's Law and Justice (PiS) and Hungary's FIDESZ, which have recently turned to a populist radical right strategy.<sup>9</sup>

The populist radical left presents, on the other hand, a universalistic profile embracing a more socially inclusive notion of the people, who are essentially pitted against the economic elites.<sup>10</sup> March and Mudde argue that the European radical left has been increasingly turning to a new ideological approach in the form of social-populism.<sup>11</sup> This shift has been accentuated by the 2008 global economic crisis. According to Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro and Plaza-Colodro, economic issues, bailouts, and austerity programs were the main driving forces behind a transformation of the radical left emphasizing distributive issues in Eurosceptic populist directions.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, in Central and Eastern Europe, populism manifests itself in the form of 'centrist' anti-establishment parties.<sup>13</sup> These CP parties operate in the more volatile party system of the former Communist bloc, where political instability is a long-term phenomenon. They focus on challenging the existing political elite and fighting corruption. The empirical analysis by Engler et al. suggests that anti-establishment parties can be found across the entire political spectrum, and that they may also be located within the ideological mainstream.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, such parties show variation in their populist ideology, in particular in regards to core populist features such as people-centrism and the expression of the general will. The authors find, for instance, that populist elements are more pronounced in parties such as the Slovak Ordinary People and Independents (OL'aNO), the Czech Republic's Dawn of Direct Democracy Tomio Okamura (previously Usvit, now SPD), and the movement of Paweł Kukiz (Kukiz'15) in Poland.<sup>15</sup>

9 Cf. Lena Bušíková, *The Radical Right in Eastern Europe*. In: Jens Rydgren (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Radical Right*, Oxford 2017, pp. 565–581, here 575.

10 Cf. Mudde/Kaltwasser, *Studying Populism*; Marco Lisi/Iván Llamazares/Myrto Tsakatika, *Economic Crisis and the Variety of Populist Response. Evidence from Greece, Portugal and Spain*. In: *West European Politics*, 42 (2019) 6, pp. 1284–1309.

11 Cf. Luc March/Cas Mudde, *What's Left of the Radical Left? The European Radical Left after 1989, Decline and Mutation*. In: *Comparative European Politics*, 3 (2005) 1, pp. 23–49.

12 Cf. Margarita Gómez-Reino Cachafeiro/Carolina Plaza-Colodro, *Populist Euroscepticism in Iberian Party Systems*. In: *Politics*, 38 (2018) 3, pp. 344–360.

13 Cf. Hanley/Sikk, *Economy*; Stanley, *Populism*.

14 Cf. Sarah Engler/Bartek Pytlas/Kevin Deegan-Krause, *Assessing the Diversity of Anti-Establishment and Populist Politics in Central and Eastern Europe*. In: *West European Politics*, 42 (2019) 6, pp. 1310–1336.

15 Looking more specifically at the Czech Republic, Havlík sees the rise of the Action of Dissatisfied Citizens 2011 (ANO 2011) as a case of 'centrist technocratic populism' based on a denial of political pluralism, anti-partyism, resistance to constitutionalism, and the embrace of majoritarianism. Cf. Vlastimil Havlík, *Technocratic Populism and Political Illiberalism in Central Europe*. In: *Problems of Post-Communism*, 66 (2019) 6, pp. 369–384.

In Western Europe, the Italian M5S may be seen as an example of such ‘centrist populism’. The recent study by Mosca and Tronconi suggests that the M5S represents a case of ‘eclectic’ populism, combining a strong anti-establishment appeal with moderate social and economic policies.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Pirro and Van Kessel see the M5S as an ‘ideologically hybrid organization’.<sup>17</sup>

### III. Populist Voting in the 2019 EP Elections

The 2019 EP elections took place amidst turbulent political times in the context of Brexit, the Trump presidency, and the growing populist challenge in many nations of Europe. The election produced an even more fragmented European Parliament. The once dominant groups of the centre-right European People’s Party (EPP) and centre-left Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) lost their majority for the first time since 1979, securing 182 and 154 seats, respectively. Voters dissatisfied with Europe’s ruling grand coalition turned to the Greens and Liberals. The Greens won a total of 74 seats, making significant gains in western European countries such as Germany, France, Ireland, and the UK. Pro-EU liberals secured 108 seats, which made Renew Europe the third largest group in the European Parliament.

Overall, the predicted surge in support for populism did not fully materialize in the 2019 EP elections. In the wake of the 2008 Great Recession, populist forces had made significant electoral gains – particularly on the left of the spectrum in the countries hardest hit by the crisis, such as Greece, Spain, Ireland, and France. In 2019, despite a slowdown of economic activity, the economic context was somewhat less favourable to populist mobilization, as unemployment and inflation remained relatively low across much of Europe. Meanwhile, the impact of the EU migration crisis that had fuelled support for right-wing nationalist populists seemed to wane: economic issues dominated the 2019 European election agenda, together with climate change and promoting human rights and democracy, while immigration ranked fifth.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, in a context of high political uncertainty, polls showed strong support for the EU across member states. In the Spring 2019 Eurobarometer survey, 61 % of EU citizens said that EU membership was good for their country, a figure at its highest since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, while another 68 % believed that their country had benefited from being part of the EU. Only a minority of 14 % would support an exit from the EU should a referendum be held, while

16 Cf. Lorenzo Mosca/Filippo Tronconi, *Beyond Left and Right. The Eclectic Populism of the Five Star Movement*. In: *West European Politics*, 42 (2019) 6, pp. 1258–1283.

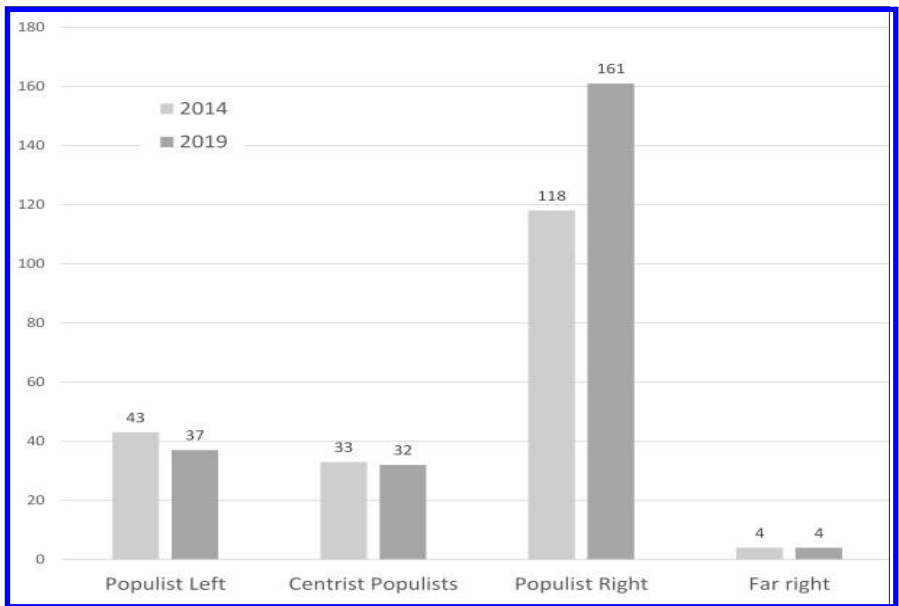
17 Cf. Andrea L. Pirro/Stijn van Kessel, *Populist Eurosceptic Trajectories in Italy and the Netherlands During the European Crises*. In: *Politics*, 38 (2018) 3, pp. 327–343, here 339.

18 Eurobarometer Post-Election Survey 91.5 of the European Parliament.

another two thirds (68 %) of Europeans would vote to remain.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, interest in the election was much higher than in 2014 and voter turnout increased in 20 of the 28 EU member states, most substantially in countries such as Poland (+22 %), Romania (+19 %), Spain (+17 %), and Austria (+15 %). Favourable views of the EU appear to have made a positive impact and were the key reasons for voting: turnout was driven by a rise in the number of young and first-time voters, who are generally more supportive of the EU.<sup>20</sup> Most importantly, the anticipated surge in support for populist parties was an important issue for EU citizens: a few weeks ahead of the 2019 elections, a clear plurality (61 %) of Europeans believed that “the rise of political protest parties was a matter of concern”.<sup>21</sup>

While not the main factor behind populist performances across EU member states, government participation was generally detrimental to populist parties. Negative incumbency effects affected populists in power, and such effects were most visible in countries such as Greece, Slovakia, Estonia, and the Czech Republic. On average, across all EU member states where they were in government, populist forces lost 3 % compared with previous national elections.

Figure 1: Populist Parties’ Seats in the European Parliament in 2014 and 2019



Source: European Parliament, author's calculations.

19 Eurobarometer Survey 91.1 of the European Parliament, Spring 2019.

20 Cf. Eurobarometer Post-Election Survey 91.5.

21 Eurobarometer Survey 91.1.



Results showed mixed performances for populist party families across EU member states (see Figure 1). While there was no populist wave, the outcome attested first and foremost to the electoral consolidation of the PRR: together, parties of the populist right won 161 seats in 2019 – their best result ever –, compared with 118 seats five years earlier. In contrast, there was a significant drop in support for the populist left, from 43 seats in 2014 down to 37 in the 2019 election, while centrist populist parties secured 32 of their previous 33 seats. Finally, the far right will still be represented in the next European parliament where it will hold 4 seats.

### 1. A Consolidated Populist Radical Right

To the right of the European political spectrum, populist parties won, on average, 2 % more compared with their performances in 2014. PRR parties made significant gains in Italy, Germany, Spain, Estonia, Sweden, and Belgium, and they dominated the polls in countries such as France and the UK. In Italy, Matteo Salvini's Lega was the big winner of the election, with 34.3 % of the vote compared with only 6.2 % in 2014. Other PRR parties increased their support in the 2019 elections. This was the case for the Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE) (+8.7 %), Belgium's Vlaams Belang (+8 %), Sweden's Democrats (+5.6 %), Vox in Spain (+4.6 %), and the AfD in Germany (+4 %).

In France, the National Rally (RN, formerly FN) topped the polls with 23.3 % of the vote, while President Macron's centrist pro-European came second at 22.4 %. In the UK, Nigel Farage's Brexit Party made an impressive breakthrough at 30.5 % of the vote, mostly taking over UKIP's former role as main Euro-sceptic party. In Eastern Europe, ruling conservative parties that have recently shifted to a PRR strategy consolidated electorally in May 2019: in Poland, Law and Justice (PiS) won 45.4 % of the vote, increasing its previous support by 13.6 %; in Hungary, Viktor Orbán's FIDESZ dominated the polls with no less than 52.6 %.

Reflecting national political agendas, other PRR parties however lost ground in Austria, Denmark, and Hungary. In Austria, the 'Ibizagate' political scandal cost the FPÖ some of its former support from the 2017 legislative elections, down to 17.2 % of the vote. In Denmark, the Danish People's Party (DF) suffered heavy losses, down to 10.8 % from 26.6 % five years earlier. In Hungary, Jobbik lost half of its previous electoral support (-8.4 %), in an increasing competition against Viktor Orbán's 'radicalized' conservative FIDESZ.

Finally, the far-right made gains in Greece and Slovakia. The Greek Golden Dawn retained 2 of its previous 4 seats, with 4.9 % of the vote. In Slovakia, the People's Party Our Slovakia (ĽSNS), a neo-nazi party headed by Marian Kotleba, won 12.2 % of the vote and 2 seats. In Cyprus, the National Popular Front (ELAM) increased its support to 8.3 % (+5.6 %), yet failed to secure one of the island's 6 seats in the European Parliament.



## 2. The Populist Left in Crisis

In contrast, the 2019 EP elections saw a significant drop in support for parties of the populist radical left across most EU member states. PRL parties had made substantial gains during the 2008 Great Recession, particularly in countries such as Greece and Spain where the political and economic crisis had created a perfect mix for populist mobilization against elites.<sup>22</sup>

In 2019, amidst a context of timid economic recovery and lower unemployment, parties of the PRL lost, on average, 3.5 % compared with previous legislative elections, and about 2 % compared to 2014.

The election was particularly bad for the governing Syriza in Greece, which polled 23.8 % and lost about 12 % compared to its results in the 2015 legislative elections. In Slovakia, Robert Fico's ruling left-wing populist SMER fell by 12.6 % compared to the 2016 national elections. In Spain, the coalition of Podemos and the United Left (IU) garnered 10.1 % of the vote, as opposed to 18 % for the two parties in the 2014 elections. In France, Jean-Luc Mélenchon's Unbowed France (LFI) received 6.3 % of the vote, returning to its level of 2014 and down 4.7 % compared with the 2017 French legislative elections. In Germany, the Left (Die Linke) polled 5.5 %, marking a 3.7 % drop from its previous showing in the 2017 national elections.

In the Netherlands, a divided Socialist Party (SP) lost 5.7 % compared to the 2017 legislative elections. In Ireland, Sinn Féin received 11.7 % of the vote, which is a drop of about 8 % compared to the 2014 EP elections where Mary Lou McDonald's party had benefitted from voter discontent with austerity. A similar decline in support for left-wing populism was seen across much of Northern Europe. The Danish Red-Green Alliance (Enh., Ø), the Left Alliance (VAS) in Finland, and the Swedish Left Party (V) all performed poorly and attained net losses in comparison with their respective previous national elections.

Overall, the 2019 elections confirmed that the wave of left-wing populism in Europe, which had been fuelled by the 2008 economic crisis, may be over. Moreover, the elections confirmed that left-wing populism was predominantly a Western European phenomenon. In the former Communist states of Eastern and Central Europe, the populist left remained a marginal force. In the Czech Republic, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) received 6.9 % of the vote. In Slovenia, the Left (Levica) received 6.3 % as opposed to over 9 % in the 2018 legislative elections.

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22 Cf. Hanspeter Kriesi/Takis S. Pappas (Eds.), *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*, Colchester 2015, p. 23.

### 3. Decline of Centrist Populism

Finally, there was a decline, albeit less markedly, in support for Eastern and Central European anti-establishment CP parties in the 2019 EP elections. This was most evident in Latvia where Who Owns the State? (KPV) collapsed to less than 1 % of the vote, as opposed to their 14.3 % showing in the last national elections of 2018. In Estonia, the Estonian Centre Party (EK) fell by 8.6 % compared to its results in the legislative elections of March 2019, reflecting discontent amongst moderate voters with the coalition formed with the populist radical right EKRE. In the Czech Republic, the governing ANO, and its highly controversial leader, Andrej Babiš, lost 8.4 %, dropping to 21.2 % of the vote. In Bulgaria, electoral support for the ruling GERB fell by 2 %, although Boiko Borissov's party remained the strongest force in Bulgarian politics with 30.9 % of the European election vote.

Centrist populists lost momentum in other countries of the former Communist bloc. In Slovakia, the two CP parties fared badly and lost ground compared to the 2016 legislative election where all populist actors had made significant gains. In the 2019 EP elections, Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OL'aNO) received 5.3 %, down 6.1 %, while Richard Sulík's Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) fell by 2.6 %. In Poland, Kukiz'15 won a mere 3.7 % of the vote as opposed to 8.8 % in the 2015 legislatures where Paweł Kukiz's party had made its electoral breakthrough. In Lithuania, Order and Justice (TT) failed to mobilize against the ruling centre-right coalition and lost 2.7 % compared with the 2016 legislative elections. This decline in support for TT in Lithuania may have fuelled the rise of the Labour Party (DP) founded by Russian millionaire Viktor Uspaskich, which totalled 9 % of the vote (+4.2 %). Finally, in Croatia, the two small centrist populist parties, Bandić Milan 365 – Labour and Solidarity Party (BM 365) and Human Shield (ZZ), saw a drop in support compared to the 2016 national elections. Milan Bandić's party lost 2 % while the ZZ fell only marginally to 5.7 % of the voter share.

In Western Europe, the Five Star Movement (M5S) was the biggest loser of the 2019 Italian EP election. Reflecting a deep political identity crisis, organizational weakness, and the fragmentation of its populist constituency, Luigi Di Maio's party fell by 15.6 % compared to its result in the 2018 national elections where it had topped the polls. The M5S debacle came after a series of electoral setbacks in regional elections in Abruzzo and in the movement's former stronghold of Sardinia, all of which attested to voter discontent with the failure by the party to deliver on its election promises and to make its mark in a government increasingly dominated by Matteo Salvini's populist radical right Lega.

## IV. What Drives the Populist Vote?

### 1. Data and Methods

This paper uses data from the early release of the 2019 EES Voter Study,<sup>23</sup> which taps into a wide range of socio-economic, cultural, and political attitudes in relation to voting behaviour in the EP elections. These data are taken from representative national samples of population, aged 18 years and above, throughout all 28 EU member states. The survey was carried out between June 14 and July 11, 2019, and data were collected online from national samples stratified by gender, age, region, and type of locality.

The dependent variable is reported vote choice in the 2019 election: “Which party did you vote for in the European Parliament elections?”, based on the list of national parties that were running in each member state, thus covering all relevant populist and non-populist parties. Populist parties were identified based on the PopuList study which classifies European parties according to their position on the populist, Euro-sceptic, and radical spectrum.<sup>24</sup> For mainstream parties, the paper used the party-family classification provided by the Comparative Manifesto Project.<sup>25</sup>

In a number of EU member states, populist parties compete against one another, possibly across overlapping voter segments. The diversity of populist party competition is illustrated in Table 1. PRR parties competed in the 2019 EP elections in 20 member states, PRL parties were present in 12, and CP parties in 9 countries. Furthermore, there were nine countries with a simultaneous presence of left-wing and right-wing populists, while another seven countries had both right-wing and centrist populist parties. Across the EU, only three Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Slovakia) were host to all three types of populist parties simultaneously.

In addition, we should account for possible differences across regions, as the issues that drive the populist vote may differ in the Eastern and Western parts of the EU. This is particularly true of the populist radical right which is spread across both regions. In contrast, populist radical left voting essentially clusters in Western Europe – with the exception of small parties in the Czech Republic and Slovenia, and of the ruling SMER in Slovakia – while centrist populism remains a predominantly East-European phenomenon – with the notable exception, however, of Italy’s M5S.

23 Schmitt et al., European Parliament Election Study 2019.

24 Cf. Matthijs Rooduijn/Stijn van Kessel/Caterina Froio/Andrea Pirro/Sarah de Lange/Daphne Halikiopoulou/Paul Lewis/Cas Mudde/Paul Taggart, *The PopuList: An Overview of Populist, Far Right, Far Left and Eurosceptic Parties in Europe* (2019) (<http://www.popu-list.org>; 13.1.2020).

25 Cf. Werner Krause/Pola Lehmann/Jirka Lewandowski/Theres Matthieß/Nicolas Merz/Sven Regel/Annika Werner, *Manifesto Corpus*. Version: 2019b, WZB, Berlin 2019.

Table 1: Summary of Populist Parties in the 2019 European Election Voter Study

Country	Right-Wing Populist	Left-Wing Populist	Centrist Populist
<i>Eastern Europe</i>			
Bulgaria	NFSB (4) Ataka (9) Volya (52)		GERB (151)
Czech Rep.	SPD (58)	KSČM (46)	ANO 2011 (157)
Estonia	EKRE (98)		EK (84)
Croatia			ZZ (72)
			Bandić Milan 365 (7)
Hungary	FIDESZ (224) Jobbik (67)		
Lithuania			TT (19) DP (43)
Latvia	NA/LNNK (86)		
Poland	PiS (240)		Kukiz'15 (70)
Romania			
Slovenia	SNS (40)	Levica (38)	List of Marjan Sarec (116)
Slovakia	SNS (26) Sme Rodina (39)	SMER (72)	SaS (57) OL'aNO (36)
<i>Western Europe</i>			
Austria	FPÖ (171)		
Belgium	Vlaams Belang (102) FN (4)		
Denmark	DF (101)		
Finland	Blue Reform (8) Finns (126)	VAS (50)	
France	DLF (25) RN (141) Patriotes (9)	LFI (50)	
Germany	AfD (101)	Die Linke (54)	

Country	Right-Wing Populist	Left-Wing Populist	Centrist Populist
Greece		KKE (40) Syriza (175) Popular Unity (9)	
Ireland		Sinn Féin (74)	
Italy	Lega (243) Fdi (40)		M5S (156)
Luxemburg	ADR (22)		
Netherlands	PVV (49) FvD (115)	SP (49)	
Portugal		CDU (33) BE (92)	
Spain	Vox (56)	Podemos/ IU (122)	
Sweden	SD (142)	V (69)	
United Kingdom	Brexit Party (190) UKIP (17)		
<i>Total Populist Voters in survey</i>	2 615	986	1 004
<i>N countries</i>	20	12	9

Number of voters in EES 2019 survey between brackets.

In order to take into account the contextual complexity of populist electoral politics throughout Europe, the analysis provides various sets of binary logistic regressions. We begin with separate models for countries where each type of populist party was competing, and contrast the populist vote with those for the mainstream, excluding other populist voters where present. The focus in this first set of analyses is on the competition between populist parties and their other non-populist competitors. This gives us the three models of right-wing (N=20 countries), left-wing (N=12 countries), and centrist populist voting (N=9 countries). In the case of the populist radical right, we provide separate models for Western and Eastern Europe, as we suspect that some drivers of the PRR vote may vary across the two regions.

We then turn to two additional models contrasting left and right populist voters (N=9 countries), on the one hand, and right and centrist populist ones, on the other hand (N=7 countries). In this second set of models, we are primarily interested in how populist parties effectively compete with one another and what may unite/divide the supporters of different populist organizations in such contexts.

All models include standard socio-demographics (gender, age, education, religion, as well as a subjective measure of the household's standard of living), a 'root' political affiliation (left-right ideology) and a set of attitudinal predictors such as support for economic redistribution, attitudes towards immigration, same-sex marriage, and the environment. These tap into both the economic and cultural dimensions of competition, and they are relevant to the study of left and right-wing populism.

In addition, the models include a measure of economic voting based on the respondent's sociotropic evaluation of the nation's economy. Research suggests that voters who believe that their national economy has become worse, may be more prone to blame ruling elites and vote for populist parties.<sup>26</sup> Attitudes towards the EU are taken from support for European integration. As the early release of the EES 2019 survey does not provide any indicator of voter populism, we take 'trust in the national parliament' as our measure for political distrust. Finally, the models take into account a respondent's attitude towards democratic government. The details of all variables and their descriptive statistics are summarized in Table 2. Non-voters and non-responses are excluded from the models. We specify country-fixed effects in order to control for country specifics, therefore helping to reduce unobserved heterogeneity bias.

Table 2: Attitudinal Indicators in the Models and Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Description	Scale	Mean	s.d.
Trust in national parliament	Trust the national parliament	1-5	2.74	1.21
Left-right ideology	Self-placement on left-right scale	0-10	5.22	2.59
Redistribution	In favour of redistribution from the rich to the poor	0-10	5.64	2.98
Same-sex marriage	In favour of same sex marriage	0-10	5.44	4.00
Restrict immigration	In favour of a restrictive policy on immigration	0-10	5.60	3.27
Environment	Environmental protection should take priority even at the cost of economic growth	0-10	6.73	2.75
Support for democracy	How important to live in a country that is governed democratically	0-10	8.60	2.09
EU integration	European unification has gone too far/ should be pushed further	0-10	5.38	3.09
Economy worse	Think that the general economic situation is better/worse	1-5	3.05	1.04
Satisfaction with EU democracy	Satisfied with the way democracy works in the European Union	1-4	2.32	0.81

26 Cf. Guillem Rico/Eva Anduiza, *Economic Correlates of Populist Attitudes. An Analysis of Nine European Countries in the Aftermath of the Great Recession*. In: *Acta Politica*, 54 (2019), pp. 371–397.

## 2. Hypotheses

The current literature on populism suggests that there is variation in the socio-demographic make-up of the populist constituency, and that the individual attitudinal drivers of the populist vote also vary according to left and right location in the party system.<sup>27</sup>

First, as regards the socio-demographic profile of populist voters, the prevalent account in the global media that populist parties draw most of their support from the so-called ‘globalization losers’, needs to be investigated further as it may not apply to all populist voters. The populist radical right typically gains support from voters who feel threatened by international economic competition. Over time, there has been a ‘proletarianization’ of the radical right’s electorate, which has posed a challenge to parties of the left for their traditional working-class constituency.<sup>28</sup> Populist radical left voters, on the other hand, do not necessarily fit the ‘globalization loser’ profile. Studies find that the young and urban dwellers are more prone to support left-wing populist parties. However, they find no significant effect on voting for such parties when considering education levels, manual labour occupations, or the suffering of economic difficulties.<sup>29</sup>

With respect to the ‘core’ ideological features of populism, empirical research shows that populist voters across the spectrum share similar populist attitudes and mistrust of political elites, parties, and institutions. Supporters of populist parties show stronger populist attitudes, which sets them apart from voters in the mainstream.<sup>30</sup>

On the other hand, populist voters diverge when it comes to the host ideologies to which their populism is attached. Essentially, the literature differentiates between left and right-wing manifestations of the populist phenomenon, indicating different types of grievances and issues, and across both economic and cul-

27 For a review see Gilles Ivaldi, *Electoral Basis of Populist Parties*. In: Reinhard C. Heinisch/Christina Holtz-Bacha/Oscar Mazzoleni (Eds.), *Political Populism. A Handbook*, Baden-Baden 2017, pp. 157–168.

28 Cf. Daniel Oesch/Lina Rennwald, *Electoral Competition in Europe’s New Tripolar Political Space. Class Voting for the Left, Centre-right and Radical Right*. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 57 (2018) 4, pp. 783–807.

29 Cf. Luis Ramiro, *Support for Radical Left Parties in Western Europe. Social Background, Ideology and Political Orientations*. In: *European Political Science Review*, 8 (2016), pp. 1–23; Andrés Santana/José Rama, *Electoral Support for Left Wing Populist Parties in Europe. Addressing the Globalization Cleavage*. In: *European Politics and Society*, 19 (2018) 5, pp. 558–576.

30 Cf. Agnes Akkerman/Cas Mudde/Andrej Zaslove, *How Populist are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters*. In: *Comparative Political Studies*, 47 (2014) 9, pp. 1324–1353; Steven M. van Hauwaert/Christian H. Schimpf/Flávio Azevedo, *The Measurement of Populist Attitudes. Testing Cross-national Scales Using Item Response Theory*. In: *Politics*, 2019, online first, doi:10.1177/0263395719859306; Bruno Castanho Silva/Sebastian Jungkuntz/Marc Helbling/Levente Littvay, *An Empirical Comparison of Seven Populist Attitudes Scales*. In: *Political Research Quarterly*, 2019, online first, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912919833176>.



tural conflict dimensions.<sup>31</sup> Populist radical right voters are primarily concerned with cultural issues of immigration and law-and-order, and show stronger nativist and authoritarian attitudes. Voters in the populist radical left tend to embrace more egalitarian and universalistic values, while often supporting a libertarian agenda on social issues. Finally, centrist populist voters exhibit strong anti-establishment attitudes and are primarily characterized by protest voting.<sup>32</sup> These voters exhibit a higher level of inconsistency as regards their policy preferences which may combine left-wing and right-wing policies, placing them closer to the median voter.<sup>33</sup>

While such differences are important, we should also explore further commonalities and similarities amongst the different variants of populism. The 2019 Europe-wide elections provide the opportunity to look at populist voting across different competitive sets where populist parties may compete against mainstream parties, as well as against one another. In countries such as Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Slovakia for instance, the simultaneous presence of left and right wing populist parties creates new mobilization opportunities for populist entrepreneurs, which may reshape the competitive dynamics of the party system. Additionally, it is important to look at variation across regions, as the populist vote may be motivated by different sets of issues and grievances when comparing Western and Eastern Europe.

All this may produce significant variation in voter issue positions and may be reflected in the ideological bases of populist voting across Europe. Areas where the distinction between left and right-wing populism may be nuanced concern both the socio-economic and cultural dimensions of competition.

On economic issues, recent research suggests that both the radical left and radical right are economically populist.<sup>34</sup> They may therefore increasingly appeal to the same pool of pro-welfare voters who oppose market liberalization and free trade. Schumacher and Van Kersbergen show that the anti-immigrant positions of the populist radical right may be associated with leftist economic positions.<sup>35</sup> As recently illustrated by Krause and Giebler, a significant proportion of radical right supporters in Europe hold left-wing, pro-welfare state and pro-redistribution economic attitudes which set them apart from traditional right-wing voters.<sup>36</sup>

31 Cf. Rooduijn/Akerman, Flank Attacks; van Hauwaert/van Kessel, Beyond Protest.

32 Cf. Učeň, Parties; see also Grigore Pop-Eleches, Throwing out the Bums. Protest Voting and Unorthodox Parties After Communism. In: *World Politics*, 62 (2010) 2, pp. 221–260.

33 See for instance Mosca/Tronconi, Beyond Left and right, p. 16.

34 Cf. Bernhard/Kriesi, Populism, p. 15.

35 Cf. Gijs Schumacher/Kees van Kersbergen, Do Mainstream Parties Adapt to the Welfare Chauvinism of Populist Parties? In: *Party Politics*, 22 (2016) 3, pp. 300–312.

36 Cf. Werner Krause/Heiko Giebler, Shifting Welfare Policy Positions. The Impact of Radical Right Populist Party Success Beyond Migration Politics. In: *Representation*, 2019, doi: 10.1080/00344893.2019.1661871.

A significant variation may also be observed in the impact of cultural issues. Santana and Rama show that voters with anti-immigration feelings are more prone to support left-wing populist parties than their mainstream counterparts.<sup>37</sup> In another study, these authors find that left-wing and right-wing populist voters are similar in their attitudes towards immigration.<sup>38</sup> As regards the radical right, Lancaster shows that, contrary to previous literature, radical right voters are not necessarily more conservative and traditionalist on issues of gender, sexuality, and morality.<sup>39</sup> This is corroborated by Backlund and Jungar who find that while populist radical right parties are congruent with their voters' preferences on immigration and the EU, they are, on the other hand, "less representative in terms of their conservative positions on gay rights and civil liberties".<sup>40</sup>

Second, the simple distinction between 'left' and 'right' populism may conceal other areas of convergence. In particular, it is important that we further examine the link between populism and European integration. Euro-scepticism has become a common feature of many populist parties, independent of their left-right location.<sup>41</sup> While populists may differ in the frames they use to justify their opposition to the EU, and while the intensity of such opposition may also vary,<sup>42</sup> we may nevertheless expect more similarities among populist voters in terms of their attitudes towards Europe.

Based on her analysis of the Dutch case, De Vries suggests that left and right populism tends to align with what the author describes as a 'parochial divide'. The latter, she argues, refers to positions regarding European integration, immigration, and national control, and it is largely independent of the economic left-right dimension.<sup>43</sup> In their recent empirical analysis of electoral competition between the populist left and right in six European countries, Rama and Santana find that left-wing and right-wing populist voters are similar in their attitudes towards the European Union and share a similar distrust of the EU.<sup>44</sup>

37 Cf. Santana/Rama, Electoral Support.

38 Cf. José Rama/Andrés Santana, In the Name of the People. Left Populists Versus Right Populists. In: European Politics and Society, 2019, doi: 10.1080/23745118.2019.1596583.

39 Cf. Caroline M. Lancaster, Not So Radical After All. Ideological Diversity Among Radical Right Supporters and Its Implications. In: Political Studies, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719870468>.

40 Cf. Anders Backlund/Ann-Cathrine Jungar, Populist Radical Right Party-Voter Policy Representation in Western Europe. In: Representation, 55 (2019) 4, pp. 393–413, here 404.

41 Cf. Rooduijn/Akkerman, Flank Attacks; Pirro/van Kessel, Populist Eurosceptic Trajectories.

42 Cf. Sofia Vasilopoulou, Far Right Parties and Euroscepticism. Patterns of Opposition, London 2018.

43 Cf. Catherine E. De Vries, The Cosmopolitan-parochial divide. Changing Patterns of Party and Electoral Competition in the Netherlands and Beyond. In: Journal of European Public Policy, 25 (2018) 11, pp. 1541–1565.

44 Cf. Rama/Santana, In the Name of the People.

### 3. Results

Table 3 below shows summary results for models of voting for the PRR (models 1a and 1b), the PRL (model 2) and centrist populists (model 3) in the 2019 EP elections, all contrasted with mainstream parties supporters and excluding other populists where applicable. The table provides regression coefficients and standard errors (in brackets) for PRR, PRL and CP voting models. In the populist radical right, the analysis is broken down further by region to account for differences between Eastern (model 1a) and Western (model 1b) EU member states. We then add two models of populist voting contrasting PRR with PRL voters (model 4), on the one hand, and PRR with CP voters (model 5), on the other hand.

Table 3: Binary Logistic Models of Populist Voting in the 2019 EP Elections

	PRR vs mainstream (East) (Model 1a)	PRR vs mainstream (West) (Model 1b)	PRL vs mainstream (Model 2)	CP vs main- stream (Model 3)	PRR vs PRL (Model 4)	PRR vs CP (Model 5)
Female (ref=male)	-0.05 (0.13)	-0.41 (0.10)***	-0.07 (0.11)	0.08 (0.10)	-0.36 (0.23)	-0.15 (0.14)
Age (cont.)	-0.01 (0.005)**	-0.01 (0.003)*	-0.004 (0.004)	-0.01 (0.004)*	-0.01 (0.01)	0.004 (0.01)
Education Medium (ref=Low)	0.37 (0.46)	-0.25 (0.19)	0.33 (0.29)	-0.27 (0.30)	-0.05 (0.59)	-0.22 (0.35)
Education High	0.20 (0.46)	-0.54 (0.19)**	-0.41 (0.28)	-0.56 (0.30)	0.001 (0.60)	-0.20 (0.36)
Still studying	-0.10 (0.56)	-0.85 (0.31)**	-0.47 (0.36)	-0.66 (0.38)	0.46 (0.81)	0.31 (0.53)
Religiosity (scale)	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.02)*	-0.08 (0.03)**	-0.07 (0.03)**	-0.002 (0.06)	0.04 (0.04)
Subjective standard of living (scale)	-0.14 (0.06)*	-0.14 (0.04)***	-0.14 (0.05)**	-0.02 (0.05)	0.002 (0.09)	-0.05 (0.07)
Trust nation- al parlia- ment	0.39 (0.06)***	-0.29 (0.05)***	0.03 (0.05)	0.09 (0.05)	-0.14 (0.11)	-0.001 (0.07)
Left-right ideology	0.24 (0.03)***	0.38 (0.02)***	-0.40 (0.03)***	0.06 (0.02)**	0.68 (0.06)***	0.17 (0.03)***
Redistrib- ution	0.11 (0.02)***	0.03 (0.02)	0.07 (0.02)**	0.04 (0.02)*	0.02 (0.05)	0.03 (0.03)
Same sex marriage	0.15 (0.02)***	-0.03 (0.01)	0.04 (0.02)*	-0.04 (0.01)**	-0.08 (0.03)*	-0.11 (0.02)***

	PRR vs mainstream (East) (Model 1a)	PRR vs mainstream (West) (Model 1b)	PRL vs mainstream (Model 2)	CP vs main- stream (Model 3)	PRR vs PRL (Model 4)	PRR vs CP (Model 5)
Restrict im- migration	0.10 (0.02)***	0.09 (0.02)***	-0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)	0.18 (0.03)***	0.10 (0.02)***
Environment	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.09 (0.02)***	-0.05 (0.02)*	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.04)	-0.06 (0.03)*
Support democratic regime	-0.13 (0.03)***	-0.08 (0.03)**	-0.10 (0.03)***	-0.08 (0.03)**	-0.03 (0.06)	-0.11 (0.04)**
EU integra- tion	-0.13 (0.02)***	-0.25 (0.02)***	-0.08 (0.02)***	-0.08 (0.02)***	-0.18 (0.04)***	0.03 (0.02)
Economy worse	-0.46 (0.07)***	0.01 (0.05)	-0.21 (0.06)***	-0.36 (0.05)***	0.32 (0.13)*	0.15 (0.08)
Intercept	0.37 (0.77)	1.17 (0.48)*	3.13 (0.62)***	2.11 (0.57)***	-2.29 (1.16)*	-1.32 (0.78)
Likelihood ratio (LR) test	905,41	1542	753,97	273,56	527,25	313,32
dl	23	27	27	24	24	22
Prob.Chi <sup>2</sup>	< 0,001	< 0,001	< 0,001	< 0,001	< 0,001	< 0,001
Observa- tions	2137	4316	3763	2558	813	1138
Log like- lihood	-834.00	-1530.00	-1239.00	-1299.00	-269.00	-630.00

Notes: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Recalled vote in the 2019 EP election

Std errors between brackets

European Election Voter Study 2019

Note: Binary logistic regressions. Country fixed effects (coefficients not shown).

### 3.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Populist Voters in the 2019 EP Elections

The socio-demographic models for populist voting show substantial variation across regions and populist families. A significant gender gap is only found for PRR voting in Western Europe where women are much less likely to support such parties. No gender differences are observed, however, in the other populist electorates. This is in line with research reporting that men are not more likely than women to support radical left views.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, the educational divide concerns exclusively PRR parties of the West where lower and medium levels of education are strongly associated with voting for such parties, while people with a university degree and those still in education are much less likely to support the populist radical right. Education does not have any significant effect for other populist voters to the left and centre of the spectrum, nor does it drive the PRR vote in Eastern Europe. As regards the populist radical left, these findings are in line with those of Beaudonnet and Gomez who examine radical left voting in the 2009 and 2014 European elections, and find no clear effect of education on the likelihood to support such parties.

Support for populist parties in the East is stronger amongst the younger voters. In Eastern Europe, the probability of turning to the PRR and CP parties significantly decreases with age. An alternative quadratic specification shows that a squared term for age is not statistically significant, which indicates that this effect is mostly linear. The models, however, find no such effect for PRL parties and find only a moderate negative correlation for PRR parties in Western Europe, suggesting that those parties may appeal to a wider range of voters across age bands.

The results show more commonalities as regards subjective socio-economic status. Voters who see their household as 'poor' tend to be over-represented among populist voters, as revealed in the negative correlation between populist voting and subjective standard of living – with the notable exception of CP voters who are found across all subjective classes of income. To test whether such effect may be curvilinear, we run an alternative specification adding a squared term for subjective standard of living and find no significant effect for the quadratic term.

Finally, religiosity negatively correlates with PRL and PRR voting in the West and CP voting in Eastern Europe: more religious voters – who also tend to be older and would place themselves to the right of the spectrum – are less inclined to support those parties. Religious affiliation on the other hand has no substantial effect on the propensity to support PRR parties in Eastern EU member states, despite the salience of religious issues in the political discourse of parties such as Law and Justice (PiS) in Poland and FIDESZ in Hungary.

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45 Cf. Laurie Beaudonnet/Raul Gomez, Red Europe versus no Europe? The Impact of Attitudes Towards the EU and the Economic Crisis on Radical-left Voting. In: *West European Politics*, 40 (2016) 2, pp. 316–335, here 325.

### 3.2 Attitudinal Drivers of the Populist Vote

The results in Table 3 show that populist voting is strongly influenced by general ideological orientations and that the issues and preferences that motivate populist voters may also vary across different types of populism.

Unsurprisingly, support for different variants of populism correlates significantly with voters' left-right ideology. A PRR vote is primarily associated with a right-wing ideology, while PRL voting is strongly correlated with a respondent's self-placement to the left of the political axis. As regards CP voters, the models suggest that these tend to be more right-wing than the mainstream although the increase in probability to support a CP party according to left-right ideology is much smaller in this case.

That populist voters tend to cluster at the two extremes of the left-right continuum is consistent with the findings by Rooduijn and Akkerman that most populist parties in Western Europe are also radical parties and that they are predominantly located to the far left and far right of the political spectrum.<sup>46</sup> The results in Table 3 attest to the political radicalism of populist supporters across the board, including CP voters. Attitudes towards democracy are strong predictors of the populist vote: support for a democratic government significantly decreases the likelihood to vote for a populist party, and this is true of all populist voters, independent of their left-right or centrist orientation.

Trust in the national parliament has a significant effect for PRR electorates, which varies however across regions. Political distrust is a strong driver of the PRR vote in Western Europe, as indicated by the negative sign of the coefficient. In the Eastern part of Europe, however, trust in national parliament is positively associated with the PRR vote. No such effect is visible in PRL and CP parties. This may in part be explained by the high level of support that such parties enjoy in some European countries such as Hungary, Poland, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria, and the Czech Republic, where they are in government.

As would be anticipated, PRR voting is strongly motivated by immigration attitudes. Such parties attract voters who support more restrictive immigration policies and this holds both in Western and Eastern Europe. In the East, this may reflect the increase in the salience of immigration issues in the wake of the 2015 refugee crisis and the politicization of immigration by ruling conservative parties such as Hungary's FIDESZ and Poland's PiS. Anti-immigration attitudes are not significantly correlated with the CP vote in Eastern Europe, however. Unlike radical right parties in the region, which combine their populism with nationalism, xenophobia, and authoritarianism, CP parties are generally less prone to appeal to nationalistic values and to manipulate immigration issues. As noted by Učeň in his original account of the new centrist populist phenomenon in the region: "East European new populism is largely free from nationalist mobilization; what matters more is the anti-establishment appeal".<sup>47</sup>

46 Cf. Rooduijn/Akkerman, *Flank Attacks*.

47 Cf. Učeň, *Parties*, p. 55.

In Eastern Europe, the correlation between a right-wing ideology and PRR and CP voting is reflected in social attitudes. Both PRR and CP voters in the region tend to be more socially conservative, and oppose same-sex marriage. PRR in the West, on the other hand, do not exhibit socially conservative values, which corroborates recent research suggesting that radical right voters are not necessarily more traditionalist on issues of gender, sexuality, and gay rights. To the left of the spectrum, PRL voters are not dissimilar from those in the mainstream and they do not show more tolerant attitudes vis-à-vis immigration, while being slightly more supportive of same-sex marriage. PRL voters do not show more pro-environment attitudes when contrasted with all mainstream party supporters.

The results confirm that support for redistribution is an important correlate of populism. PRL voters are more supportive of economic redistribution when contrasted to mainstream voters, and this effect holds when taking the mainstream left as the main contrast in the model (not shown here). Economic attitudes generally play a lesser role in explaining support for right-wing populism. A positive correlation is found nevertheless for PRR and CP voters in Eastern Europe which corroborates the literature suggesting that some radical right voters may hold left-leaning pro-welfare state and pro-redistribution economic attitudes.<sup>48</sup>

The effect of redistribution is not significant for PRR parties of the West. This indicates that supporters of those parties are similar to those in the mainstream, and that they do not necessarily endorse more right-wing economic preferences. However, this may partially conceal the more heterogeneous class make-up of the PRR constituency. As evidenced in the literature, the PRR in Western Europe appeals to occupational groups with opposite economic preferences, i.e. small business owners traditionally leaning towards the economic right and working class voters who generally tend to favour left-wing pro-redistribution policies.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, while retaining its petty-bourgeois support, the PRR is increasingly challenging the left over its historical working-class stronghold, which may result in greater similarities in terms of their voters' characteristics and social attitudes.<sup>50</sup>

To investigate further, we ran two additional models of PRR voting in Western Europe, contrasting radical right-wing populist voters with those of the mainstream right – i.e. liberal, Christian-Democratic, and Conservative parties –, on the one hand, and of the mainstream left – Social Democratic parties –, on the other hand (see Table 4). We find that PRR voters are not statistically different from those of the moderate left as regards economic redistribution (model 7).

48 See for instance Jason E. Kehrberg, *The Demand Side of Support for Radical Right Parties*. In: *Comparative European Politics*, 13 (2015) 5, pp. 553–576.

49 Cf. Elisabeth Ivarsflaten, *The Vulnerable Populist Right Parties. No Economic Realignment Fueling Their Electoral Success*. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 44 (2005) 3, pp. 465–492.

50 Cf. Oesch/Rennwald, *Electoral Competition*.



They differ, however, from mainstream right voters who are significantly less supportive of redistribution (model 6), thus suggesting that PRR voters in Western Europe may be increasingly leaning towards the economic left.

Table 4: Additional Models of West-European Right-wing Populist Voting in the 2019 EP Elections

	PRR vs mainstream Right (Model 6)	PRR vs mainstream Left (Model 7)
Female (ref=male)	-0.42 (0.11)***	-0.41 (0.15)**
Age (cont.)	-0.01 (0.004)***	0.004 (0.01)
Education Medium (ref=Low)	-0.15 (0.21)	-0.61 (0.31)
Education High	-0.53 (0.21)*	-0.79 (0.31)*
Still studying	-0.84 (0.35)*	-1.02 (0.47)*
Religiosity (scale)	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)
Subjective standard of living (scale)	-0.16 (0.05)***	-0.15 (0.06)*
Trust national parliament	-0.40 (0.05)***	-0.31 (0.07)***
Left-right ideology	0.23 (0.03)***	0.67 (0.04)***
Redistribution	0.06 (0.02)**	-0.01 (0.03)
Same sex marriage	0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Restrict immigration	0.07 (0.02)***	0.16 (0.02)***
Environment	-0.07 (0.02)**	-0.08 (0.03)**
Support democratic regime	-0.10 (0.03)**	-0.09 (0.04)*
EU integration	-0.24 (0.02)***	-0.33 (0.03)***
Economy worse	0.04 (0.06)	0.02 (0.08)
Intercept	3.07 (0.55)***	0.73 (0.77)
Likelihood ratio (LR) test	1000,1	1328,9
dl	27	27
Prob.Chi <sup>2</sup>	< 0,001	< 0,001
Observations	2467	1873
Log Likelihood	-1154.00	-633.00

Notes: \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01; \*\*\*p<0.001

Recalled vote in the 2019 EP election

Std errors between brackets

European Election Voter Study 2019

Note: Binary logistic regressions. Fixed country effects (coefficients not shown).

As regards sociotropic economic evaluations, the main models of populist voting in Table 3 show rather counter-intuitive results, for there is a negative correlation between the perception of a worsening of the national economy and the propensity to vote for populist parties as opposed to their non-populist counterparts (see models 1a, 1b, 2 and 3). This clearly needs to be investigated further, but it would suggest that voters who perceive a worsening of the economic situation may be less prone to turn to populists and would prefer more established mainstream parties with higher economic credibility.

Finally, as regards EU-related attitudes, the results in Table 3 confirm that opposition to European integration is an important driver of the populist vote across Europe. This corroborates the vast literature that suggests that Euro-scepticism is a unifying feature of all successful populist parties<sup>51</sup> and that left-wing and right-wing populist voters share similar distrust of the EU.<sup>52</sup> Figure 2 shows the predicted probability to vote for a populist party as opposed to a party of the mainstream for the different levels of support to European integration. The effect of the EU variable is substantial across all categories of populist voters, independent of their left-right affiliation. It is particularly notable for PRR parties in Western Europe, reflecting the 'harder' Euro-sceptic and anti-Euro stances of parties such as the French RN, the Austrian FPÖ, and the Italian Lega.

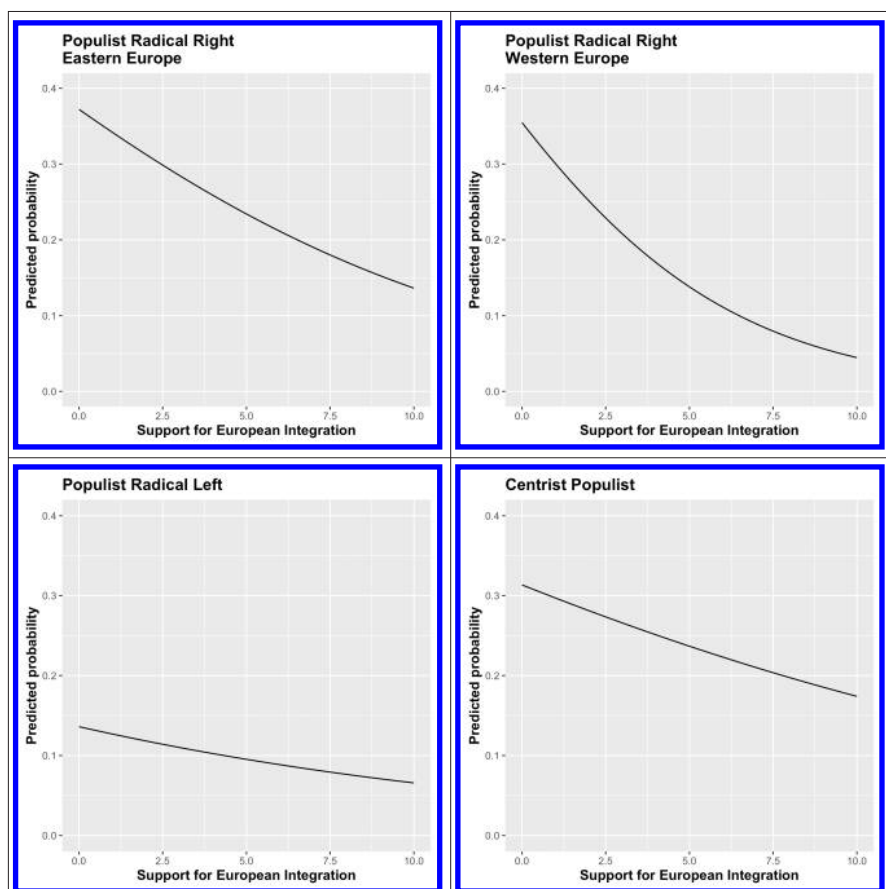
Let us note here that, together with their opposition to European integration, most populist voters also express dissatisfaction with the way in which democracy works in the EU. Adding this variable to our models has a strong impact on the likelihood of voting for populist parties, while support for the EU continues to exert its effect. As can be seen from Figure 3 below, voter satisfaction with the workings of democracy in the EU significantly decreases the predicted probability to support such parties. This effect is substantially important across all populist electorates and regions, most markedly for PRR voters and, to a lesser extent, CP voters in Eastern Europe.

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51 Cf. Marianne Kneuer, *The Tandem of Populism and Euroscepticism. A Comparative Perspective in the Light of the European Crises*. In: *Contemporary Social Science*, 14 (2019) 1, pp. 26–42.

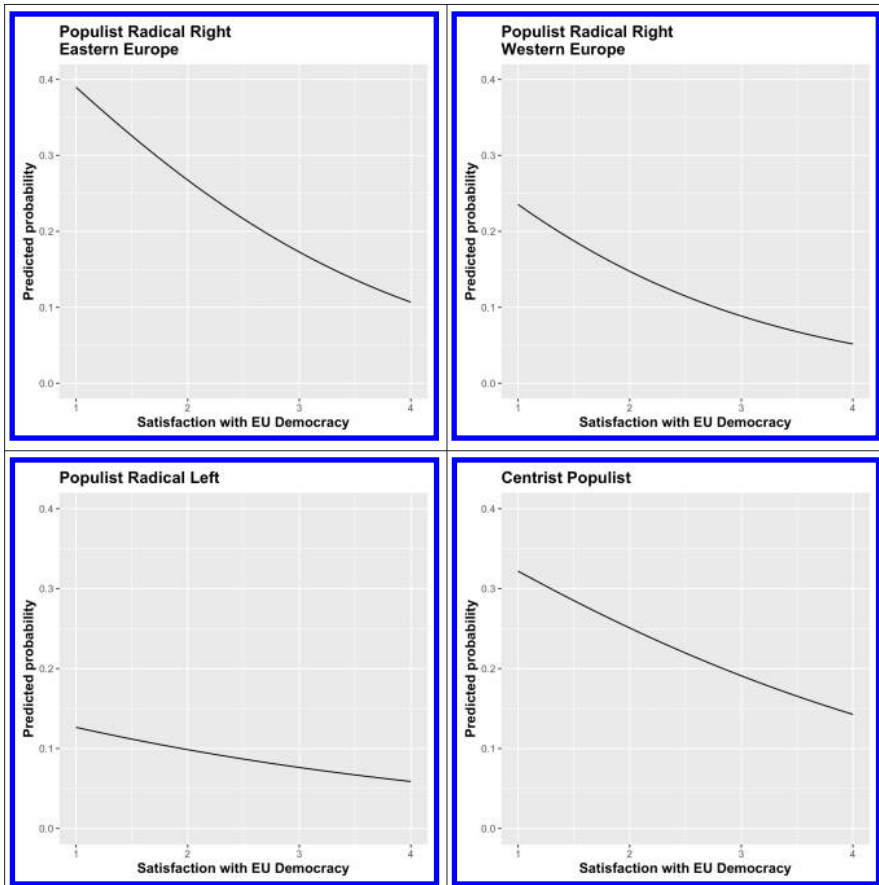
52 Cf. Rama/Santana, *In the Name of the People*.

Figure 2: Effect of Pro-European Integration Attitudes on Populist Voting in Europe



Note: Predicted probability to vote for PRR parties in Eastern and Western Europe, PRL parties and CP parties for different levels of support for EU integration. Calculations are based on models in Table 3.

Figure 3: Effect of Satisfaction with the Workings of EU Democracy on Populist Voting



Note: Predicted probability to vote for PRR parties in Eastern and Western Europe, PRL parties and CP parties for different levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU. Calculations are based on models in Table 3 adding 'satisfaction with EU democracy' (models not shown here).

### 3.3 Populist Radical Right versus Populist Radical Left

Turning to the nine countries with a simultaneous presence of left-wing and right-wing populists, Model 4 in Table 3 looks at socio-demographic and attitudinal differences between radical left (PRL) and radical right (PRR) populist electorates, excluding mainstream voters, thus emphasizing the similarities and differences between populists.

The model finds no significant differences in the socio-demographic make-up of PRL and PRR constituencies. Ideologically however, PRL and PRR voters are clearly opposed to each other on the two extremes of the left-right axis. Such polarization is reflected in the more social conservative views of PRR voters as regards same-sex marriage and their greater propensity to support more restrictive immigration policies, which clearly sets them apart from supporters of PRL parties, and which is consistent with the main left and right ideologies to which their populism is attached.

PRL and PRR voters, however, tend to resemble each other more in their attitudes towards redistribution, the environment, distrust of national parliaments, and support for a democratic regime, where the model finds no significant differences between the two groups of populist supporters. Similarities of PRL and PRR voters in terms of their common pro-redistribution attitudes is particularly noteworthy as it illustrates the importance of economic issues across the populist spectrum. Consistent with our previous findings, we find that Euro-sceptic attitudes are more pronounced amongst PRR voters compared with their PRL counterparts. Finally, voters who perceive a worsening of the national economy are more prone to turn to PRR parties. This corroborates the socio-demographic profile of those voters compared with those of the populist left, as PRR supporters are primarily found amongst less educated voters who may be more exposed to economic hardship and feelings of economic insecurity.

### 3.4 Populist Radical Right versus Centrist Populism

Model 5 in Table 3 contrasts CP and PRR voters in the seven countries where both types of parties are present. Let us recall that, with the exception of Italy, all these are Eastern European countries (i.e. Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Slovenia, and Slovakia).

As was the case earlier, the model shows no significant differences across socio-demographic predictors. Nevertheless, CP and PRR voters tend to diverge on a number of attitudinal aspects. Overall, supporters of PRR parties appear to be more radical. They place themselves significantly more to the right of the ideological spectrum, which is consistent with existing accounts of the ideological location of the radical right and of centrist anti-establishment actors in Eastern Europe. PRR voters are also more socially conservative as regards same-sex marriage and they support more restrictive immigration policies. They are, however, less prone to support environmental policies or to endorse democratic values when compared with their CP counterparts.

CP and PRR voters show similarities in terms of their attitudes towards political trust, economic redistribution, and the EU. We find no significant difference in trust in national parliament, in the perception of the national economic situation, nor in support for European integration. Nor is there any difference as regards support for economic distribution, which suggests that CP and PRR voters in Eastern Europe may share similar concerns about inequalities, thus

reinforcing the previous findings that support for redistribution may increasingly become a common feature of populists with diverse ideological orientations. Let us note here that running the same model for Italy alone by contrasting M5S with Lega voters yields similar results – including same-sex marriage where there is no difference between the two groups of populist voters –, which suggests that resemblances between CP and PRR voters may also be found both within and outside Eastern Europe.

#### 4. Discussion

Populist parties are an established feature of the European party system. The 2019 European parliamentary elections have confirmed that such parties are part of the political landscape of most EU member states, and that they are increasingly moving away from their status as fringe parties and entering the political mainstream.

In the current European context, populist actors are scattered across the entire political spectrum, from left to right, and some elements of the populist ideology are also to be found in the ‘centrist’, anti-establishment parties that, for most of them, have developed in the eastern part of Europe. Consequently, populist parties may appeal to different groups of voters across various locations of the party system.

Looking at the demand-side of populist politics in the 2019 EP elections, this paper has set out to explore the similarities and differences between various manifestations of populism in Europe. Empirically, the data from the early release of the 2019 EES Voter Study has allowed cross-national comparison of the main drivers of the populist vote across all EU member states, emphasizing areas where the distinction between different types of populism may be nuanced in terms of voter socio-demographic characteristics and attitudinal profile.

Overall, the findings in this paper corroborate the finding that populist voters may have relatively distinct socio-demographic characteristics. The analysis has provided some empirical evidence to indicate that populism should not be taken as just a symptom of older voters’ nostalgia for an idealized past. We should therefore exert caution when looking at the generational effects behind populism. In Eastern Europe, populism is found in younger age groups, while in the West, populist parties seem to draw their support from voters across all age brackets, and not necessarily amongst older ones, as has often been assumed.

Similarly, and more importantly, not all populist voters fit the profile of ‘globalization losers’. Consistent with previous research, the findings in this paper, in particular with regards to the educational divide, confirm that such a profile essentially concerns the PRR in the West. Voting for such parties is predominantly found amongst voters with lower and medium education, reflecting the ‘proletarianization’ of the radical right. The ‘globalization loser’ profile appears to be much less relevant to other manifestations of the populist phenomenon in Europe, as those parties may enjoy wider, cross-class electoral support.

Populist voters across the board show more common traits in terms of their perceived socio-economic position in society, however. When contrasted with other non-populist voters, supporters of populist parties are predominantly found amongst individuals who place themselves at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. This linear effect of subjective standard of living holds true for most populist electorates, with the exception of CP parties in Eastern Europe, which seem to have a broader appeal.

Subjective socio-economic status emerges from the analysis as a potentially important predictor of populism above such objective indicators as education. It also corroborates the vast literature that contends that populist parties mobilize feelings of economic insecurity arising from globalization and rapid change in post-industrial societies. While the indicators available from the EES 2019 survey do not allow a more thorough investigation, our findings echo the literature which emphasizes that feelings of relative deprivation may be strong drivers of populism.<sup>53</sup>

As our findings further suggest, these voters may be more likely to demand compensation for a perceived loss of status or feelings of economic deprivation, via redistribution. The analysis in this paper finds that populists across the board tend to support economic redistribution. This is particularly true of PRL, but the effect is visible in PRR and CP voters in Eastern Europe. In the West, the occupational groups that make up the electoral constituency of the PRR tend to disagree over economic policies. However, while they diverge from mainstream right voters, Western European PRR supporters are more similar to those of the mainstream left in terms of their pro-redistribution preferences, attesting somewhat to the ‘proletarianization’ of the PRR which has occurred since the mid-1990s.

Corroborating previous research, this paper has found that the populist vote is embedded in broader sets of socio-political conflicts and identities. Overall, populist voters differ in terms of their principal voting motivations and core ideologies. Unsurprisingly, immigration attitudes remain strong predictors of PRR voting, while redistribution matters more for PRL voters. Moreover, populist voting is influenced by general ideological orientations and it correlates significantly with a left-right ideology, which suggests that the new conflicts that populism politicizes – immigration, European integration, and international trade – may not yet have entirely replaced the traditional left-right divide in European politics.

Next, the empirical analysis of the 2019 EES data contributes to a better understanding of the issues and preferences that may foster current support for CP parties in Eastern Europe. Stanley notes that “the centrism of these parties might derive from ideological inconsistency rather than intentional moderation, with aggregate policy stances comprising a mixture of apparently contradictory

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53 Cf. Matthijs Rooduijn/Brian Burgoon, *The Paradox of Well-being. Do Unfavorable Socioeconomic and Sociocultural Contexts Deepen or Dampen Radical Left and Right Voting Among the Less Well-Off?* In: *Comparative Political Studies*, 51 (2018) 13, pp. 1720–1753.



proposals (such as left-wing and right-wing economic policies)".<sup>54</sup> Our findings corroborate Stanley's observation, showing, however, that CP voters may be increasingly leaning towards the cultural right, as revealed in their placement on the left-right axis, as well as in their more conservative attitudes to same-sex marriage. Moreover, the analysis for the Italian case, where CP and PRR are both represented – by the M5S and the Lega, respectively –, suggests that such similarities may also be found in Western Europe.

Finally, this paper has looked at the relationship between populism and political values, on the one hand, and EU-related issues, on the other hand. Reflecting variation in status of populist actors across EU member states, distrust in national parliament had a significant, albeit different effect, across populist electorates, fostering the PRR vote in the West while decreasing the propensity to support other PRL and CP parties elsewhere – possibly reflecting those parties' status as office holders in countries such as Hungary, Poland, Greece, Italy, Bulgaria and the Czech Republic.

A lack of support for democratic values was strongly associated with the populist vote across the board, attesting to their political radicalism. These findings shed light on recent research dealing with populism's democratic impetus and promise of democratic renewal. While populists are often critical of how democracy functions, they may not necessarily endorse democratic values or support direct representation.<sup>55</sup> As the analysis in this paper suggests, we need to investigate further whether populists are true supporters of democracy or not.

Opposition to European integration emerged as an important predictor of the populist vote. It indicated a significant increase in the propensity to vote for populist parties across Europe, independent of their party-system location and core ideology. All populist voters in the 2019 EES survey appear to share similar distrust of the EU, and this sets them apart from voters in the mainstream. Opposition to European integration is most evident among PRR voters in Western Europe, which is in line with the general literature on the Euro-scepticism of the populist radical right. Parties such as the French RN, the Italian Lega under Salvini, and the Austrian FPÖ, strongly oppose the EU and the Euro, which contrasts with the 'softer' tone adopted by other populist actors in Europe, particularly in the historically more pro-European eastern member states.

Meanwhile, voter dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in the EU was found to be another driving factor of the populist vote, alongside opposition to the European project itself. In Europe, populism is seen as a backlash against the European Union. The multiple crises that Europe has experienced in the last decade – for instance, the debt crisis and refugee crisis – have fuelled support for the Euro-sceptic rhetoric of populist parties, old and new. The findings in

54 Cf. Ben Stanley, *Populism in Central and Eastern Europe*. In: Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on Populism*, p. 144.

55 Cf. Shaun Bowler/David Denemark/Todd Donovan/Duncan McDonnell, *Right-wing Populist Party Supporters. Dissatisfied but not Direct Democrats*. In: *European Journal of Political Research*, 56 (2017) 1, pp. 70–91.

this paper suggest that, in spite of a less favourable context, populist parties may still have been able to seize the opportunity offered by the 2019 EP election to mobilize distrustful protest voters who are most critical of the functioning of the EU and wary of further European integration. While populist actors remain strongly divided within the new European parliament, the persistence of populism across much of Europe is a matter of concern for the EU and its member states. Populist forces are essentially antagonistic to the values and goals of the EU, which raises fears about the prospects for the future of European integration and co-operation.