

D4.2: Theoretical Model of Causes of Populism

WP4 – Causal, Policy and Future Analysis



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822337.





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Due date	November 30, 2020
	2020
	Research Results
	Report, Public
Keywords	causes of populism in Europe, theoretical model

Document history

Version	Date	Description	Reason for change	Distribution	Authors
V 0.1	Oct 16 2020	Request for PLUS input for D4.2 – study micro-level factors of populist vote for 16 cases of populist parties in Europe		Reinhard Heinisch (PLUS) Martin Dolezal (PLUS) Marco Fölsch (PLUS)	Ruzha Smilova (CLS) Daniel Smilov (CLS)
V 0.2	Oct 30 2020	PLUS input for D4.2 – analysis of micro-level factors of populist vote for 15 cases of populist parties in Europe		Ruzha Smilova (CLS) Daniel Smilov (CLS)	Reinhard Heinisch (PLUS) Martin Dolezal (PLUS) Marco Fölsch (PLUS)
V0.3	Nov 10 2020	Discussion: - results from the analysis of micro-level factors for populist vote - the proposed theoretical model		Reinhard Heinisch (PLUS) Martin Dolezal (PLUS) Marco Fölsch (PLUS)	Ruzha Smilova (CLS) Daniel Smilov (CLS)
V0.4	Nov 17 2020	Presentation of the main arguments and the structure of D4.2		To all partners	Ruzha Smilova (CLS) Daniel Smilov (CLS)
V1.0	Nov 23 2020	First draft		To all partners	Ruzha Smilova (CLS) Daniel Smilov (CLS)
V1.1	Nov 23 2020	Edits		To Ruzha Smilova (CLS)	Roxana Cziker (RVK)
V 1.2	Nov 27 2020	Edits		To Ruzha Smilova (CLS)	Matthew Hall (TRI)
V 1.3	Nov 28	Comments		To Ruzha Smilova (CLS)	Marco Fölsch (PLUS) Martin Dolezal (PLUS)
V 2.0	Nov 29 2020	Final Draft		To Bruce Edmonds (MMU) Roxana Cziker (RVK)	Ruzha Smilova (CLS) Daniel Smilov (CLS)
V 2.1	Nov 30 2020	Edits tables, figures		To Ruzha Smilova (CLS) and Bruce Edmonds (MMU)	Roxana Cziker (RVK)



Information in this report that may influence other PaCE tasks

The information contributes to WP1 (Historical and comparative analysis of populism in Europe), WP2 (Simulation), WP4 (Causal, policy and futures analysis) and WP5 (Dissemination and Engagement).

Abstract

This deliverable presents the final results of the work on causes of populism, within WP4 (Causal, Policy and Futures Analysis), focusing specifically on developing a theoretical model of causes of populism.

The report proceeds in four parts and a concluding section. The theoretical model of causes of populism starts with the circumstances of the rise of contemporary populism in Europe. Then the notion of ‘crisis of representation’ is explored and linked to three types of factors - economic, cultural and political. On the basis of this analysis the model then outlines two types of voters - ideological and strategic. While the ideological voters are motivated more by economic and cultural grievances, strategic voters are politically frustrated by the cartelized and consensus-oriented politics in a consolidated democracy. Charismatic populist leaders with their radicalism cater for both strategic and ideological voters. To the ideological group they promise to radically transform liberal democracy; to the strategic group they are a useful instrument to obtain greater concessions. Charismatic populist leaders are also skilful operators of public emotions, capable of transforming background anxieties into intense anger. The combination between crises, specific types of voters and the actions of the populist leaders ultimately leads to a successful populist project.

Disclaimer

The project PaCE has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the grant agreement No 822337.

The opinions expressed in this document reflect only the authors’ view and reflect in no way the European Commission’s opinions.



Table of content

Document history	3
Information in this report that may influence other PaCE tasks	4
Abstract	4
Introduction	7
1. The state of nature: consolidated liberal democracies after 1989	10
1.1. Liberal democracy as “the only game in town”	11
1.2. Populism affects both new and old democracies	12
1.3. Quality of democracy matters for the type of populism	12
1.4. The EU factor	12
2. Crises of representation: situational mechanisms	13
2.1 Economic factors behind the crisis of representation	13
2.2 Cultural factors behind the crisis of representation	19
2.3 Political factors behind the crisis of representation	21
3. Populist voters: demand-side analysis	24
3.1 Two types of populist voters: ideological and strategic voters	24
3.1.1 The ‘squeezed middle class’ logic	25
3.1.2 The ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic	26
3.1.3 The two types of voters: ideological and strategic	30
3.2 Activation mechanisms: the role of emotions	31
4. Transformational Mechanisms and Populist Leaders: supply-side analysis	33
4.1 The sense of belonging and the sense of being a victim	33
4.2 Catering for ideological and strategic voters	35
5. Conclusions and future research directions	37
<i>Appendix</i>	<i>39</i>
Studying four drivers for populist/nativist voting	39
References	42



Table of Figures

Figure 1. Populism's Causal Chain (Source: Pappas 2019a, Pappas 2020:56)	8
Figure 2. "Coleman's Boat" Model of Causal Mechanisms for Populism (Source PaCE D 4.1)	8
Figure 3. Situational mechanisms of populist vote	24
Figure 4. Action-formation mechanisms of populist vote	31
Figure 5. Transformational mechanisms of populist vote	33
Figure 6. Theoretical model of causes of populist/nativist vote	37

Tables

Table 1. Crises of representation: economic factors	18
Table 2. Crises of Representation: Cultural Factors	21
Table 3. Cases: Country, Party & Party Type (Pappas/PaCE)	39
Table 4. Operationalization of concepts	40
Table 5. Attitudes of Populist Party Voters (mean values)	40
Table 6a. Explaining Populist Party Choice	41
Table 6b. Explaining Populist Party Choice	41



Introduction

In this report we present a theoretical model of causes for the success of populist parties in Europe. In PaCE project - and in this report - we distinguish between populist parties (narrowly defined) and nativist parties. The distinction draws on Takis Pappas' work (Pappas 2016, 2019a), where he defines populist parties through their two core properties: they are both democratic (have allegiance to democracy and are committed to electoral contestation) and illiberal (do not accept societal pluralism, seek polarization rather than moderation and consensus and are majoritarian/are sceptical of rule of law and minority rights) (Pappas 2019a: 33-39). These two core properties set them apart from liberal-democratic parties on the one hand, and from anti-democratic (which contest elections yet have weak allegiance to democracy) and openly authoritarian parties (openly hostile to democracy and electoral contestation), on the other extreme. Nativist parties, as an ideal type, do not challenge liberal democracy per se, but instead aim to serve the interests of the native populations only: such parties "thrive on typically liberal, albeit often ultra-conservative agendas for native populations to the exclusion of alien ones" (Pappas 2019a: 65). In reality, however, the ideal types do not always form clear-cut groups of parties: it is possible for some nativist parties to develop at various moments anti-liberal agenda as well. Because of that nativist parties in Western Europe have often been classified as "populist" - radical right populist parties, more precisely. Populist parties (in the narrow sense) are more geographically spread in Europe and appear both in Southern Europe and are the dominant type of populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).¹

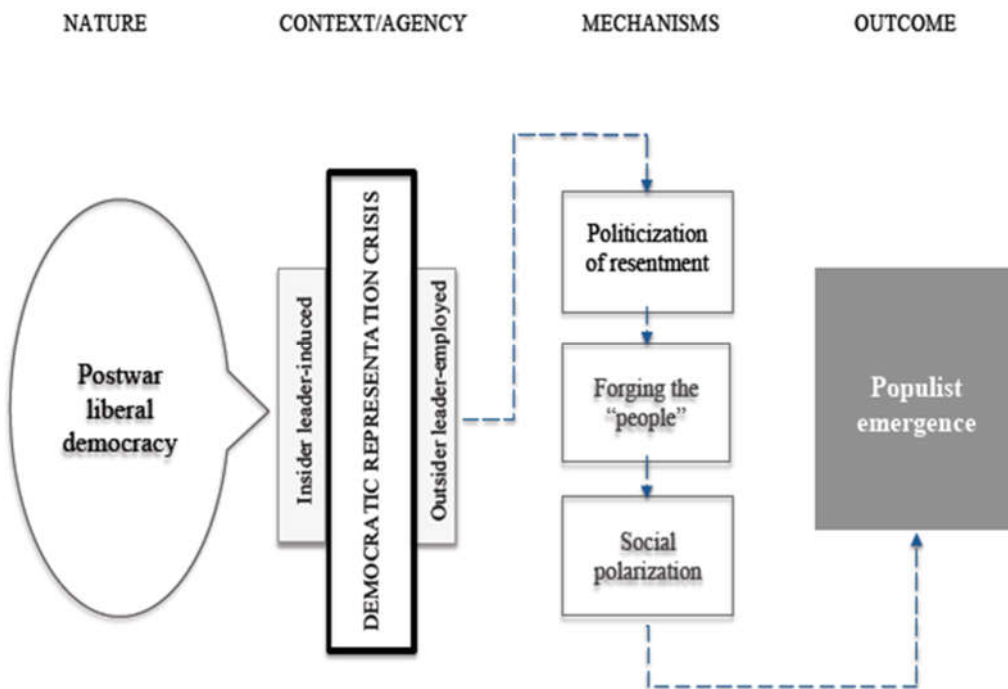
The theoretical model details the causes for voters to turn to populist parties widely defined: i.e. in the model we include causes for both populist and nativist voting. Further, though our main focus is on the causes for *voting* for populist parties widely defined, our theoretical model will also include the supply side causes for the success of populist parties in Europe. Our understanding is that there is no single cause nor is there a single causal mechanism leading to populist voting. There is a variety of factors that may prompt political actors on the supply side to offer such a choice to the voters and also a variety of factors that may bring voters to opt for a populist party. And the mix of these factors is different under different structural conditions - including different political settings. Thus, in developing a theoretical model of causes of populism, we try to reflect in it "the heterogeneous drivers of heterogeneous populisms" (Colantone & Stanig 2019a). Our model will be consistent with the position of Kotwas and Kubik (2019: 13), who argue that "the rising political influence of populism is the result of what Myrdal called a circular cumulative causation in which economic, political and cultural factors interact with each other."

We develop this model based on the research for D 4.1, which described a plethora of causes and causal mechanisms of populism, and checked some of the hypothesized causal mechanisms both against case studies of populist and nativist parties, selected for the PaCE project, and through a pilot study (prepared by the PLUS team of PaCE) of voting for populist and nativist parties in Austria, Bulgaria and Hungary. For this report, the evidence collected for the pilot study has been extended to now cover 15 cases of populist and nativist parties in Europe (For a list of the cases, the data and the variables studied, see the *Appendix* to this Report.)

The point of departure for PaCE's theoretical model of causes of populism, developed in this report, is Takis Pappas' theoretical model of causes of populism (Pappas 2019a, 2020), see Figure 1.

¹ For further details on the difference between populism and nativism, as well as for a classification of political parties as populist and nativist, see the infographic prepared by Takis Pappas for PaCE project (available at http://popandce.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/PaCE_Populism-vs.-Nativism_Infographic.pdf).

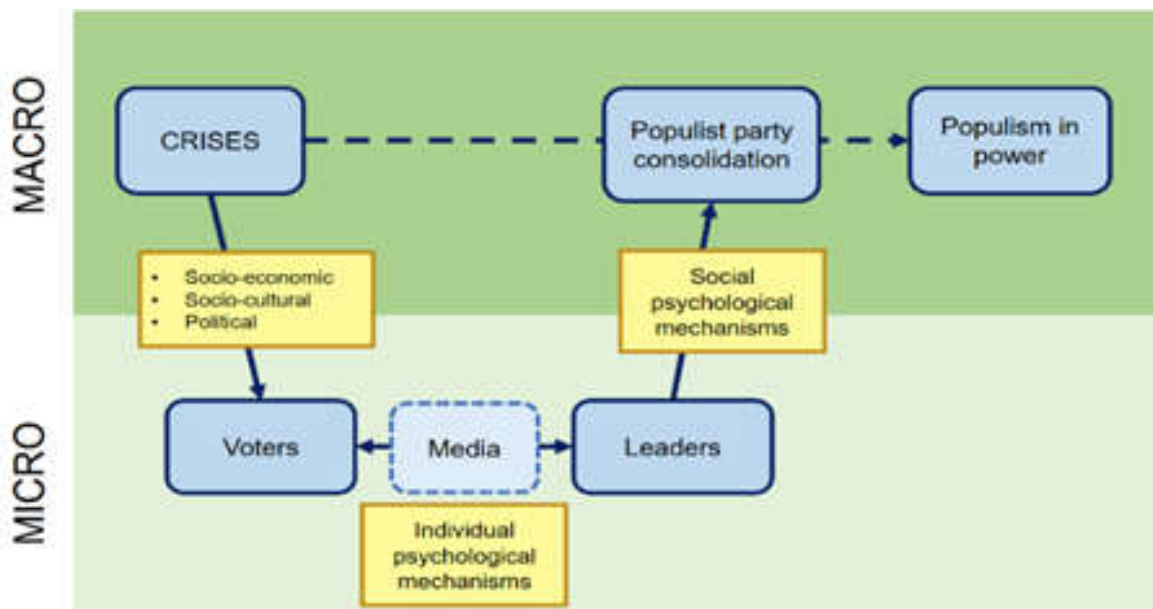
Figure 1. Populism's Causal Chain (Source: Pappas 2019a, Pappas 2020:56)



We also build here on the explanatory model for the causal mechanisms, explaining the rise and success of populism developed in PaCE D4.1 (see Figure 2). The aim is to flesh out in some more detail the complex dynamics in the different nodes in Pappas’ model, as well as to account for the transitions between them.

The added value of the model of causal mechanisms for populism developed for PaCE (the “Coleman’s boat model”) is that it describes the mechanisms that translate changes in the macro structure (multiple types of crises there) into changes in the micro level (changes in voters’ attitudes), which under certain conditions (activation by political actors acting as populist agents) may lead to populist party emergence and success.

Figure 2. "Coleman's Boat" Model of Causal Mechanisms for Populism (Source PaCE D 4.1 Causal mechanisms of populism)



To do this, the model distinguishes between three types of causal mechanisms: a) *situational mechanisms* (macro-to-micro/structure-to-agency transition) describe how a certain macro phenomenon (crisis) leads to micro action (change in individual attitudes). Several types of crises - socio-economic, social-cultural, demographic, political - were discussed as possible triggers for a surge in populist attitudes in D 4.1. These sorts of crises are what many people think of when they talk about “causes of populism”. Yet, these crises do not always and necessarily lead to populist voting and to the emergence of populist parties. Hence, we looked into the intermediate steps that may help turn these crises into populist voting. This led us to study b) *action formation mechanisms*, working at the micro level and explaining how a specific combination of individual desires, beliefs, and action opportunities generate a specific action (on this level, individual and social-psychological mechanisms interact). These mechanisms detail the interplay between the two main actors on the populist script: the voters and populist leaders. With regard to the voters, the central questions studied were how the populist attitudes (often widespread) are activated to lead to action (vote for a populist party). Here we focused on the oft neglected role of affect: what are the precise feelings/emotions spurred by crises and how do these lead to the action. We hypothesized that anger, which is linked to moral evaluation/blame attribution (central elements of the Manichean worldview characteristic of populism) is crucial for triggering populist action - i.e. voting for populist parties. Several hypotheses on how anger is activated through the complex combination of the above feelings were explored. All of these hypotheses attribute a leading role in the activation process (of certain attitudes leading to readiness to act) to the figure of the populist leader: charismatic (Eatwell 2005), opportunistic (Weyland 2001, Heinisch 2008), performative - “performance of a crisis as an internal core feature of populism” (Moffitt 2015). The role of the media in “performing” crises (Moffitt 2015) needs to be further analyzed to detail the mechanisms through which resonance between voters’ and populist discursive frames (Bonikowski 2017) is achieved. c) The *transformational mechanisms* account for the emergence of a new structure (a successful populist party) through the agency of a populist leader forging new collective identity to mobilize support for an emerging populist party. This is achieved through the strategic employment of populist discursive frames (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2017), whose message is amplified by scandal-hungry media, who thereby reinforce populist attitudes and activate them for action. Opportunity structures: the electoral system, the political/policy space, the media environment, the populist party organization (flexibility secured via leader-controlled, centralized party organization) all play a role in the emergence of a successful populist party. The new structure that is thus emerging - populist parties in power - aims to establish an illiberal order that displays four characteristics: reliance on charismatic leadership, incessant pursuit of political polarization, colonization of the state by loyalists, accompanied by the undermining of liberal institutions (Pappas 2019b).

The starting point is that populism is *democratic illiberalism*: it is a political ideology and movement within liberal democracy, which threatens its constitutional, liberal foundations. As such populism has an anti-systemic agenda or at least creates a credible threat of being able to change important elements of liberal democracy.

For this purpose, populism is essentially linked to radical leadership. Radicalism in this context is understood not as a recourse to physical force, but as a rejection of self-restraint, moderation and compromise in politics. Populist strategies are highly partisan and self-serving: the opposition often becomes the enemy, which could be legitimately destroyed through the instruments of power. Thus, populism results in aggressive majoritarianism: it puts a lot of pressure on independent bodies (the judiciary, independent regulators, the media, etc.) and is skeptical of minority rights.

There have always been illiberal political parties competing in the electoral process of liberal democracies. For the most part of the post-war period, especially in established liberal democracies, they have been marginalised, attracting around and even less than 10% of the vote. Of course, there have been examples of successful populist movements in Europe in the 1980s, as PASOK in Greece, which had become dominant in the country after its democratic transition. But contemporary European populism started in earnest after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when liberal democracy truly became the “only game in town” for most of the countries in Europe. Probably Forza Italia of Silvio Berlusconi was the first example of the contemporary populist type of political player, able to attract not only the typical vote of radical right parties, but decisively moving to the political centre. Admittedly, the illiberal element of Forza Italia was not as pronounced as the illiberalism of its successors, but even in these initial, milder forms it was clear that populism portrays itself and is understood by the people as a credible threat to major features of the constitutional order. The confrontational style, the instrumentalisation of social polarisation, the lack of moderation and self-restraint, as well as the personalistic way of exercising political power set the tone of what was about to become a big populist wave a decade later in Europe.

The puzzle, which the presented causal model attempts to explain is the following: how populists, who by definition create credible threats to the system of liberal democracy, have become able to attract more and more centrist votes, allowing them to form governing majorities or to win referendums, as the case with Brexit suggests.

The causal model has the following four elements:

- State of nature: consolidated European liberal democracies after the fall of the Berlin wall;
- Crises of representation and voter activation (demand-side analysis)
- Mechanisms of political mobilization by populists (supply-side analysis)
- Additional enabling/disabling conditions affecting the dynamics of populist voting.

1. The state of nature: consolidated liberal democracies after 1989

The rise of contemporary populism took place after a big wave of democratisation, which started in 1989 and culminated in the transition of Eastern European countries from state socialism to liberal democratic regimes and free market economies. Liberal democracy became “the only game in town” for much of the European continent. The accession of ten Eastern European countries in the EU marked the consolidation of their democracies, a fact acknowledged by observers and scholars (Dawisha and Parrot 1997, Zielonka and Pravda 2001, Merkel 2011). Yet, exactly at the moment of accession, the rise of populist players started to affect the region. It has been already mentioned that populism in the 1990s had a breakthrough in Italy with Forza Italia. A similar breakthrough happened in Austria with the nativist populist FPÖ. Eastern European countries – Hungary, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Poland – followed similar pathways. In the middle of the first decade of the new century this development was described as “democratic backsliding” – a deterioration of the quality of new democracies in Eastern Europe. The surge in popularity and rapid rise to power of a new type of strong political players (‘populists’) grabbed the attention of scholars and policy advisers: in 2007 the *Journal of Democracy* devoted a whole issue to the region’s “democratic backsliding” at the hands of political leaders openly challenging hard won democratic achievements. Some hoped that it was just a temporary backlash, narrowly directed at the transition elites, responsible for the painful transition reforms in these countries, and that the populist revolt would more likely reinvigorate than bring

about the demise of the young democracies (Schmitter 2006, quoted in Krastev 2007). “It is not a crisis of democracy but a profound transformation of democratic regimes as a result of the end of the transition”, “an antagonism toward the politics of the transition period...rather than toward liberal ideology that is driving the current revolt against liberalism in the region” (Krastev 2007: 60).

However, the subsequent developments did not prove the hypothesis that the rise of populism is just a temporary deviation from the norms in new democracies. Instead, populist parties and movements became successful in established democracies as well. Some of these democracies were in distress due to the severity of the economic crisis – like Greece, Italy and Spain. In other countries, populism emerged even without an obvious economic trigger (Germany, Austria and the United Kingdom).

From the point of causal analysis, the following factors of this “state of nature” are important:

1.1. Liberal democracy as “the only game in town”

Although the rise of populism has affected the quality of European democracies, it has taken place against a background of (still) consolidated democracies.

Nevertheless, fears of liberal democracy’s erosion - weakening its liberal aspects in particular - have haunted democracy advocates for some time. It was already at the height of the ‘liberal triumph’ of the third wave of democratization in the 90s that journalist Fareed Zakaria (1997) coined a special term to diagnose what he perceived already then to be an imminent threat: ‘illiberal democracy’. Within 20 years the illiberal growth industry has spread to consolidated democracies in the economically rich West. Signs of deconsolidation can be traced in value surveys even in the most advanced democratic states (Foa and Mounk 2016, Foa et al. 2020). Riding the wave of popular disaffection with liberal democracy, political entrepreneurs venture to experiment with new political regimes. Confirming Zakaria’s hypothesis that “Western liberal democracy might not be the final destination on the democratic road, but just one of the many possible exits” (Zakaria 1997: 24), the Hungarian prime minister Viktor Orbán boastfully embraced ‘non-liberal state’ as the model for democracy he is building (Orbán 2014). More recently, Orbán has further defined his illiberal political project as a Christian democracy (Orbán 2018).

Yet, in none of the considered countries within PaCE (with the possible but questionable exception of Hungary), there has been (so far) a collapse of liberal democracy as an institutional or ideological order. In short, democratic illiberalism takes place within liberal democracy, which has been fairly consolidated. This has important implications for the attitudes of voters: large groups of the electorate do not trust parliaments and political parties², but at the same time there is no alternative to elections, parties and the defence of rights, which the same majorities would support. The attempts of Viktor Orbán to install an illiberal democracy in Hungary are still in limbo: he does have an autocratic style of government, but Hungary is part of the EU and the Council of Europe, which in general do not allow members, which are not constitutional democracies (liberal democracies).

² Recent data show that trust in political parties in EU 28 is “very much a minority view” - only 18% among the nationals of EU28 declared in 2017 to trust them (and 77% - to distrust them) – the lowest scoring institution measured by the Standard EB88/Autumn 2017. The next least trusted institution are national parliaments, lagging behind by a wide margin - 35% trust.

1.2. Populism affects both new and old democracies

Populism is not confined to new, transitional democracies. It is not the effect of incomplete consolidation. On the contrary, it affects exemplary, established democracies as well. It is true that (apart from Italy) populists were first able to gather ruling majorities in Eastern Europe. But the experience of countries like Great Britain (Brexit) and the US suggest that long standing democratic and liberal traditions do not guarantee immunity against populism.

1.3. Quality of democracy matters for the type of populism

In order to present themselves as a credible threat to liberal democracy, populists in new, transitional democracies have to go further down the road of radicalisation than populists in established democracies. Both in Eastern Europe and in the West populism has been associated with aggressive majoritarianism, assaults against political correctness, instrumentalization of social polarisation, pressure on independent bodies and the media. Yet, it has been in Eastern Europe where these developments have resulted in more tangible changes in the institutional infrastructure of liberal democracy (a new constitution in Hungary, and abortion bans and stacking the courts in Poland). It is no surprise that only against these two countries there has been a formal procedure started for violation of the basic norms of the EU (under article 7 of the TEU).

In some democracies, which are not in the focus of our study – Turkey, for example – the rise of populism (along with other factors) has led to the subversion of the liberal democratic order. The democracies we are analysing have not reached such a stage. In Western Europe (and the US), the chance of such developments is negligible. In Eastern Europe such chances are noticeably higher.

1.4. The EU factor

The last contextual factor of the “state of nature” is the different impact of the EU in the East and the West of Europe. Eastern European countries, which joined the EU in 2004 and 2007, benefited tremendously for the consolidation of their democracies from the Union. It served as an external guarantor of democratic processes through conditionality (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004), and as a model of inspiration (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2005), transplantation of norms and practices (Sadurski 2004, Sadurski et al. 2006, Smilov 2006), and imitation (Krastev and Holmes 2019). With the accession to the EU a certain weakening of this role became noticeable. The rise of populism has further eroded trust in the EU. Yet, still trust in the EU in Eastern Europe is higher than in the West. In most of these states, majorities trust the EU and trust it more than national governments³. Thus, liberal democracy has a supranational stabilizer in the case of the new Eastern European democracies, which partly compensates for the lack of long-standing democratic traditions and practices.

The general picture of the “state of nature”, which emerges, is that there are growing frustrations within liberal democracy, without there being any obvious and tangible illiberal democratic alternative. This is an important characteristic of the circumstances of contemporary populism, which sets it aside from populisms of the 1940-1950s (Peron in Argentina) or even before 1989. The Cold War period has been marked by the existence of

³ According to data from EB88 citizens of all MS from CEE (with the exception of Estonia), trust EU considerably more than their national government, with only Hungarians having roughly equal trust in both (49% trust in EU and 48% - in Hungarian government). Trust in EU is roughly two times higher in BG, LV, LT, SL, SK, and in some MS, it is more than twice higher than that in national governments - 51% v 21% in RO and 39% to 15% in HR.

influential radical alternatives to liberal democracy (the Soviet bloc and different authoritarianisms). China at present is arguably a successful alternative to liberal democracy, at least in terms of economic performance. But it is a fact that few populist voters (and fewer leaders) in Europe are inspired by the Chinese model.

2. Crises of representation: situational mechanisms

The second part of the model is its central one. As Takis Pappas has argued (Pappas 2019a), the best predictor for the rise of populist parties is a crisis of representation, which may take the form of collapse of the party system, compensatory form of mobilisation due to the fact of former exclusion of parts of the electorate, or could be induced by charismatic populist leaders.

These are no doubt helpful indicators, which are revealing for possibilities for the emergence of populist players. In the presented model we suggest to augment and further develop Pappas' causal analysis by including different types of factors, which may themselves cause a crisis of representation. These factors explain the motivation of voters to defect from voting for and to abandon mainstream parties.

The drivers of voter behaviour are divided in three groups: economic, cultural and political. Here we draw on the findings and analysis of the report on the causal mechanisms of populism (PaCE D 4.1), as well as on the PaCE's study of determinants of nativist and populist vote in 15 cases of populist and nativist parties in Europe conducted by the PLUS team within PaCE on the request of CLS.

2.1 Economic factors behind the crisis of representation

A vast and growing literature argues that populism is caused by diverse economic grievances of the voters.

Economic hardship and inequality

Our analysis has indicated that the oft-advanced explanation for the increasing success of populist parties and politicians - that they tap into public complaints about the economic situation and respond to economic grievances (Eichengreen 2018) – are not a straightforward and uniform predictor of populist voting. The evidence on the link between objective deterioration of the economic situation (rising unemployment, increased poverty, growing inequality) is inconclusive.⁴

⁴ For example, research on rising unemployment as a driver for populist voting is rich, though somewhat inconclusive, as some authors find strong correlation between rising unemployment and voting for populist parties (Anderson, 1996; Arzheimer, 2009; Givens, 2005; Jackman and Volpert, 1996), while other studies find no significant association (Lubbers et al., 2002; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2002; Swank & Betz, 2003) or even a weak negative correlation (Arzheimer & Carter, 2006; Knigge, 1998). Thus one may argue that populist voting is associated with growing precariousness of employment (Dörre et al. 2006), not necessarily with increased poverty or growing inequality. Relatedly, there are contradictory findings linking deteriorating economic situation with voting populist: while some hypothesize that “people are in competition over scarce resources, which may result in intergroup conflicts” (Lubbers and Scheepers, 2002), others show that under economic hardship “people may turn back to the more established and experienced mainstream parties” (Arzheimer and Carter 2006) rather than opt for the easy fixes of their populist competitors.

The role of the economic crisis as an immediate cause - or trigger - for populist vote is supported primarily by the emergence of (mostly left) populist parties in Southern Europe - Greece, Spain and Italy in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. Similarly, right wing populists in CEE - Fidesz in Hungary, PiS in Poland and GERB in Bulgaria - came to power after the crisis started. In Iceland, the issue of populism was also brought to the public arena by the same economic crisis. One may doubt the strength of this causal explanation - especially at the level of potential voters for populist parties, however. At least in the Eastern European cases, the populist parties had already emerged as formidable political forces well before the economic crises. This applies to both the rise and the success of Forza Italia of Silvio Berlusconi (triggered by a political crisis) as well. In Eastern Europe, the rise of populism coincided with the accession of ten Eastern European countries to the EU between 2004 and 2007 - a period characterised by impressive economic growth and increase of foreign direct investment. It was exactly in this period when Fidesz and PiS, although not in government, became very strong political players and were able to seriously contend for the government. The Polish case is particularly revealing in this respect (Markowski 2016), as Poland was the only economy in Europe, which did not experience economic recession after 2008. Yet, despite this performance, the government of the liberal Civic Platform was ousted and PiS came to power.

At the individual level, evidence from a study of voting for radical right populist parties (nativist in PaCE's vocabulary) also suggests that the most deprived have lower chance of voting for them, compared to those economically better off, who nevertheless still have a chance to lose out (Kurer 2020). The probability of "former routine workers ... to vote [nativist]...., declines substantially once they lose their job and are unable to find another one" (Kurer 2020: 20). "Contrary to what is often assumed, absolute economic hardship does not appear as a driver of support for socially conservative or right-wing parties. Effectively dropping into unemployment increases the probability to vote for pro-welfare parties or, even more likely, to abstain from the ballot box altogether (Ibid.: 23), concludes the author of the study. People in severe hardship - below the poverty line - often abstain from voting or vote for parties with redistributive policies, which are rarely on the policy menu of the nativist parties. They rarely vote for right-wing populist or nativist parties - though they may opt to vote for left populists.⁵

Rising inequality has also been advanced as a source of economic grievance that may cause voters to turn to populist parties for their representation. In their book *National Populism*, for example, Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) argue that the rising inequality over the last decades is one of the causes of the sense of deprivation, which affects populist voting. They point out that in the western developed democracies inequality has risen significantly in this period, especially in the US and UK. A similar argument has been made by Przeworski (2019), who stressed the growing disparity between productivity and average wage. Przeworski does not claim that a robust causal link

⁵ This conclusion is supported by the case studies findings within PaCE.

1) Voters for populist parties in CEE – especially centre-right ones like Fidesz, GERB, and PiS - are rarely unemployed or members of marginalized minorities. The most marginalized group in Eastern Europe – the Roma – are not voters for either populist or nativist parties. In Eastern Europe, in Hungary and Bulgaria the voters for populist parties are slightly better off and more educated than the average. Poland provides a more complex picture but again there is no direct link between poverty, unemployment and the vote for populist players.

2) This conclusion is supported by the Austrian case as well: the voters for the Freedom Party are not vulnerable groups dependent on the welfare state. Growing inequality is often cited as one of the principal causes of populism.

between populist voting (or the crisis of democracy) and this disparity has been proven, but draws attention to the strong correlation.⁶

There are reasons to doubt these conclusions for a strong link between growing inequality and voting populist. We build our case here on the evidence from the study conducted by the PLUS team within PaCE for this report (see Appendix for more details on the study and its results). Studying the effect of voters' perceptions of inequality demanding action from the government, on voting populist/nativist among the voters of 15 populist (left and right) and nativist parties across Eastern, Southern and Western Europe⁷, we found strong positive correlation only in the case of voters of left-wing populist parties - those of *Die Linke* (0.62***) and *La France insoumise* (0.97*), and weak positive correlation in the case of PiS voters (0.22*) and M5S (0.22*). Voting for nativist parties, on the contrary, is negatively correlated with perceptions of inequality requiring state action - voters of RRPP ('nativist' in PaCE) *Le Rassemblement national* (RN) (-32**) and LEGA (-0.26*), as well as for voters of right-wing populists - those of Forza Italia (-0.38**) and Fidesz (-0.47***). Even more interestingly, the expectation that voters of all left-wing populist parties will be driven by such concerns are not confirmed: data on the attitudes of Podemos voters from ESS 2018 do not link their political preferences to concern with growing inequality (no data available in ESS 2018 for voters of SYRIZA, however).

These conclusions of PaCE's study of economic drivers of populist vote agree with the results of a recent study of drivers of populist attitudes in nine European countries, which found that neither individual vulnerability nor personal economic grievances per se, but perceptions of the economic situation in their country is what most strengthens them. (Rico & Anduiza 2019).

On the basis of all this evidence, we can conclude that “economic hardship” - be it due to increased poverty, growing inequality or unemployment - needs to be considered in explaining support for populist and nativist parties. Yet it should be stressed that it explains only some cases of populist mobilization and it does not have universal validity.

It is best applicable to explain the vote for:

1) populist political formations on the left (left populist) - such as Die Linke, Podemos and SYRIZA, and

⁶ In general, growing inequality has been identified as a cause of populist voting (Han 2016). Yet, there are reasons to doubt the causal significance of inequality and the GINI coefficient per se. Our case studies show the following.

1. There are no changes of the average GINI for the EU over the last decade – it stands at roughly 30.5-30.8.
2. Secondly, populism has affected countries with high levels of inequality (Bulgaria, Romania, UK) and those with very low levels (Czechia and Slovakia).
3. In some central cases for populism such as Poland, the GINI coefficient has fallen over the last decade.

⁷ All quoted coefficients in this section of the Report are results of multivariate logistic regression analysis, where the reference group are the voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding “other parties”. Additional controls included: age, gender, education, residence (urban-rural), religiosity, income. For more details on the results for all parties included in the analysis, see *Appendix*, Tables 6a and 6b.

2) to a lesser extent, of nativist formations such as AfD, FPÖ and FN (though the findings here are mixed, as shown by the evidence of PaCE's study).

3) Economic hardship explanations are much less applicable to voting for centrist and populist political formations on the right (right populist), such as Fidesz, PiS, GERB, Forza Italia.

Perceived unfairness and relative (positional) deprivation

Problems in establishing a strong causal link between *objective* deterioration of the economic situation - either at the individual or aggregate level - and voting nativist/populist, have prompted scholars to explore the *subjective* economic determinants of populist vote - such as perceived unfairness and (perceived) relative deprivation. The starting point is the heavy use in populist narratives of the “left behind” trope, particularly effective in mobilizing populist attitudes and turning them into votes for populist players. In Western Europe, this problem is framed mostly in the context of globalization and mass migration, while in Eastern Europe similar grievances are articulated by the so-called “losers-of-the-transition” narrative (transition from state socialism to democracy and market economy). Some authors therefore suggest that what drives popular discontent and may trigger populist backlash is not inequality per se, but perceived unfairness. Based on findings suggesting that what matters most for people is not so much equal but fair distribution, Rodrik (2018) takes the driving force of Trump's “angry populism” (Wahl-Jorgensen 2018) to be the worry about economic unfairness. Even though an earlier study by Oesch (2008) showed ‘social dumping’ and economic competition from immigrants to not be the main driver for voters of radical right parties in Western Europe, more recent research testifies that concerns over procedural fairness account for the opposition to “social dumping”, instrumentalized by nativists and populists to mobilize support on an anti-immigrant, welfare chauvinist card (Bent 2019).

Others have argued (de Vries & Hoffmann 2016) that economic anxiety - the self-reported deterioration in the economic situation over the previous two years with a negative outlook for the future - drives populist voting, though less strongly than fear from globalization. This study shows that economically anxious people are overrepresented among supporters of both nativist and nationalist parties such as AfD, FN (RN), FPÖ, and Lega, and of left-wing populist parties (Podemos and M5S), though the voters of populist parties in CEE (Fidesz and PiS) and of some anti-democratic and nativist parties (Jobbik and UKIP) are less anxious than the average for Europe, so the outcome again is not fully conclusive.

Focusing on “positional deprivation” Burgoon et al. (2019) found that individuals experiencing lower gains/greater losses in income than the gains experienced by others, are more likely to vote for radical parties, with support for radical left or radical right populist party depending on the type of positional deprivation the person is experiencing: if relative to the wealthiest groups in society, persons tend to vote left, if relative to the poorest groups in society – right. “Radical parties” here are a narrower set of parties within populism than those studied within PaCE, with central cases like Fidesz, PiS and Forza Italia not included in the analysis. The results quoted are mostly valid for “nativist” and for left-wing populist parties.

Looking into perceived relative deprivation as its driver, the PLUS team within PaCE found little support for the hypothesis that it is a strong predictor of voting either populist or nativist. A strong positive correlation was found only in the case of the right-wing populist AfD (0.46***), but not for left populists. Of the five cases of nativist parties in the study, only in one case there was a correlation and it was a negative one - FPÖ (-0.16**). Supporters of two populist parties in CEE were also found to more likely vote populist, the less relatively deprived they felt – those of GERB (-0.21**) and of Fidesz (-0.26**).

These findings support the conclusions above that economic grievances are not a uniform predictor of either populist or nativist vote. This negative conclusion seems even more pronounced in the case of subjectively interpreted economic grievances - such as perceived relative deprivation, than for objective economic hardship.

Economic status anxiety is also believed to trigger populist vote. Kurer (2020) traces the trajectory of routine semi-skilled workers, susceptible to displacement through automation, who while surviving on the job, experience status anxiety leading them to support nativists. Those actually losing status, on the other hand, are less likely to vote radical right, opting instead for pro-distribution left parties.

Even more counterintuitive are the findings that populist and nativist attitudes grow as much in times of relative deprivation as in times of gratification - and also among members of “the middle class” - a result known as “the Wealth paradox”. Jetten et al. (2015, 2016) examined the link between support for nativists and economic prosperity and established that both relative deprivation and relative gratification enhance anti-immigrant attitudes, central for voters of nativist parties. They also demonstrated that opposition to immigration grows stronger for all wealth groups and this opposition increases rather than declines with increasing inequality - due to greater status competition, instability and anxiety. Fear of future deprivation is what underpins opposition to migration even among the relatively well-off.⁸

Fears of globalization is another aspect of economic anxieties that may trigger feelings of *group* relative deprivation. Globalization is portrayed by many populist leaders as a threat to the wellbeing of the nation state: global foreign actors become dominant, while local producers and businesses gradually become non-competitive. The EU and other supranational organizations are presented as the main instruments through which the global actors unravel the nation state. Research has indeed identified 'losers of globalization' as voters for radical right nativist and populist parties (Betz 1994, Kitschelt 1995, Kriesi et al. 2008, 2012, Kriesi and Pappas 2015, and Rodrik 2018). Rooduijn (2018), however, did not find in this feature a common predictor of populist vote. Based on a comprehensive study of voters of 15 populist parties from 11 European countries, he showed that the 'populist voter' is not the proverbial 'loser of globalization' but has a much more diverse profile. On the other hand, the study *Fears not Values* (De Vries and Hoffmann 2016) mentioned above identifies fear of globalization as the single most important defining feature of the voters for populist parties (the cases studied fall into PaCE categories of nativist and populist - both right-wing and left-wing - parties). For those identifying with right wing challenger parties in Europe ['nativist' in PaCE] globalisation fears are very pronounced - AfD (78%), FN/RN (76%), FPÖ (69%), Lega Nord (66%), PVV (57%). Globalisation is seen as a threat by voters of populist parties in CEE - PiS 58%, Fidesz 61% of Fidesz and Jobbik 50%, and for 50% of UKIP voters. Left-wing populist parties (Die Linke, Podemos, M5S also attract people who fear globalisation, but to a lesser degree. (De Vries and Hoffmann 2016: 4). A recent study by Colantone and Stanig (2019b) also attributes the populist vote to the “shock of globalization”, yet they acknowledge it is very difficult to evaluate “the overall effect of economic drivers vis-à-vis cultural or

⁸ Rooduijn & Burgoon 2018 identify a further “paradox of well-being”. Trying to explain why the less well-off often turn to radical right and left populist parties particularly under favorable aggregate level economic conditions, Rooduijn and Burgoon (2018) found support for the relative deprivation hypothesis only among nativist voters and for the risk aversion hypothesis for both types of radical voters, with economic hardship leading to radical right voting when the socioeconomic circumstances are favorable and to radical left voting when net migration is modest. Paradoxically, individual economic suffering might foster both left and right radicalism, yet this happens mainly when that suffering takes place amid favorable conditions at the aggregate level.

social status factors... as different economic shocks not only interact with one another but also influence cultural factors” (Colantone and Stanig 2019b). Fear of globalization plays out differently in Eastern and Western Europe. In both places economic migration is problematic, but in the East many fear “brain drain” and even depopulation of Eastern European states.

This short review of the *economic factors* for populist vote lends support to the following conclusions.

First, economic grievances – be they objective or subjective – *do play a role* in explaining the vote for populist and nativist parties in Europe. Second, these grievances *per se* cannot explain the wide spectrum of populist players and especially those of more centrist type as Fidesz, PiS, GERB, Forza Italia or broader social movements as the Brexit vote. Economic grievances alone do not make the voters for such parties distinctive from the rest of the electorate. This has been demonstrated in the study conducted by PLUS presented here: neither growing inequality nor perceived relative deprivation are significantly positively associated with voting either populist or nativist for most of the cases studied. More complex measures of relative deprivation produce better results, but they are also highly contextual. In short, economic indicators better explain some of the instances of left-wing populism in our sample, but fail to distinguish clearly the voters of most of the other populist parties. Further, economic factors seem to explain better what the PaCE project calls 'nativist parties' (such as AfD, FN) in Western Europe. These factors much less explain the most successful right-of-the-centre populists, often commanding absolute majorities and enjoying several terms in office - most notably in CEE, but also in Italy (Forza Italia under Berlusconi).

Table 1. Crises of representation: Economic factors (data PLUS)

	Economic Grievances	
	Individual relative deprivation	Growing inequality
Positive	0.46 *** AfD	0.22* M5S
		0.22* PiS
		0.62*** Linke
		0.97*** FI(F)
Negative	- 0.16** FPÖ	- 0.26* Lega
	- 0.21** GERB	- 0.32** RN
	- 0.26** Fidesz	- 0.38** FI (I)
		- 0.47*** Fidesz

* Coefficients from multivariate logistic regression.

Reference group – voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding „other parties“.

Additional controls included: age, gender, education, residence (urban-rural), religiosity, income.

2.2 Cultural factors behind the crisis of representation

A number of authors have argued that voting for populist parties is caused by major cultural shifts. Large segments of the voters have become more conservative and more nationalistic, which gives wings to populist leaders. Indeed, there is evidence that the voters of populist parties are strongly involved in identity politics on the right or on the left. This is particularly true for the nativist parties in our sample, for which issues as opposition to migration have become a major predictor of support.

The “cultural backlash” thesis, for example, explains this support as “retro reaction by once-predominant sectors of the population to progressive value change” (Norris and Inglehart 2016). For Norris and Inglehart (2016, 2019), the main drivers of the success of populism are cultural and have their source in the values of those who view the social changes brought about by the Silent Revolution in a negative way (Inglehart 1977) - the societal shift towards post-material values and cosmopolitan multiculturalism. These changes have produced a powerful backlash among the older generation (especially among the less educated and lower-income members of that generation) against the post-material values promoted by the ruling elite, which is the main source for the success of "authoritarian populist" forces across the globe.

The cultural explanation fails to fully account for the spectacular success of populist parties in CEE, where populist parties (Fidesz and PiS) that formed governments do exceptionally well among the young voters, as well as among all other age groups.⁹

The cultural explanation is partly supported by the findings of PaCE’s study of determinants of nativist and populist vote in 15 cases of populist and nativist parties in Europe conducted by the PLUS team within PaCE (for details of data and results see Appendix in this report).

Illiberal values

Some illiberal values - and particularly *anti-LGBT values* are positively correlated with support for nativist parties in the established democracies in Europe. For all 5 cases of nativist parties studied in PaCE for this report, there is a correlation between such values and support for these parties: 0.17* (FPÖ), 0.27** (Lega), 0.33*(Vox), 0.35** (RN), 0.41*** (AfD). Voters of populist PiS (0.42***) are also more likely to support this party, if they have anti-LGBT attitudes. Noting that the voters of the same parties do not feel relatively deprived (with the

⁹ The strong conclusion of Norris and Inglehart for the prevalence of cultural factors behind the support for authoritarian populists are partly contradicted by recent studies showing that economic insecurity and the cultural backlash do not compete as explanations for what drives populist voters, but rather reinforce each other. Thus Colantone and Stanig 2019a argue that “economic and cultural factors should be seen as tightly interrelated explanations for the observed political shifts, rather than as mutually exclusive alternatives”. Already in 2016, Colantone and Stanig (2018a) had tracked regional support for Brexit to the shock of surging imports from China over the past three decades. A cross-national study of 15 Western European countries by the same authors further supports the thesis that recent growth of values, underlying the cultural backlash hypothesis, is due to the impact of globalization on people’s attitudes (Colantone and Stanig 2018b). The causal explanation offered is: “economic shocks can translate into voting behavior through changes in people’s attitudes that might seem only indirectly related to the economic shifts”. This change in attitudes happens irrespectively of whether the individual economic situation of the persons worsens or not - it is sufficient that the region as a whole is hit by the globalization shock.

exception of AfD) indicates that the opposition against LGBT among nativist voters may have relatively little to do with deteriorating economic conditions.

This causal explanation has limits with regard to the rise of populism and nativism in CEE, however. It cannot explain, for example, support for Fidesz or Jobbik, or support for the populist GERB or nativist *United patriots* (coalition of nativist parties in Bulgaria currently in government), though it seems to well explain support for PiS as in Poland low-educated low-skilled workers experienced dramatic decrease in SSS (for details, see D 4.1).

Thus, the spread of illiberal values (opposition to LGBT rights) does not predict higher support for either populist (illiberal democratic) or nativist parties in Hungary and Bulgaria. Yet once it is noticed that voters of nativist and populist parties in the two countries (and Poland) exhibit the highest support for illiberal, anti-LGBT values in the sample (and here voters of Fidesz are ahead with 3.22 mean value on a scale from 1 to 5, followed by PiS voters, Jobbik voters (3.09), GERB voters (2.93) and United Patriots (2.89))¹⁰, the explanation for the lack of correlation in the case of populist/nativist voters in Hungary and Bulgaria may well turn out to be the almost total domination of illiberal values in the two societies. This conclusion is supported by survey data for both Bulgaria and Hungary (see for details D 4.1), and by the widespread opposition in the region as a whole towards the Istanbul Convention¹¹. The latter may be linked to the rise of nationalist populism and its war on “gender ideology”, with nationalist illiberals managing to secure the dominance of the anti-gender equality discourse. In Poland, on the contrary, there seems to be a cleavage between populists and mainstream parties around illiberal values.

Another set of illiberal values – endorsement of *strong government* – produces more mixed results. AfD, Forza Italia (I), Vox, Lega and PiS are positively correlated, while other paradigmatic populist parties – GERB and Fidesz – are negatively correlated to this indicator.

Anti-immigration

The results of PaCE’s study on determinants of populist and nativist vote confirm a finding widely-reported in the literature – that support for nativist parties is strongest among voters with anti-immigrant attitudes (the voters of all five nativist parties studied exhibit such strong sentiments), though it also may be part of the explanation for the vote for some center-left (M5S 0.67***) and center-right (Forza Italia 0.50**) populists in some countries affected by the migration crisis. Somewhat surprisingly, anti-immigration attitudes are not predictors of populist vote in CEE – and here the explanation again may be the domination of such attitudes across the ideological and political divides between mainstream and populist parties. It is worth noting, however, that in absolute terms voters of populist parties in CEE do exhibit relatively weaker anti-immigrant attitudes (PiS 2.85, GERB 3.25, Fidesz 3.48, UP and Jobbik 3.50 on a 1 to 5 scale) than the voters of nativist parties in established democracies (FPÖ 3.94, RN 3.75, AfD 3.94, Lega 3.86, Vox 3.46).

Again, as the economic determinants – such as perceived relative deprivation and growth of inequality – do not yield similarly strong results with regard to voting nativist (with the exception of AfD (0.46***), and are even negatively correlated in the case of FPÖ (-0.16**), Lega (-0.26**), RN (-0.32**), we can conclude that at least in

¹⁰ For details on the attitudes of populist party voters, see Table 5 in the Appendix.

¹¹ *Convention of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.*

some cases of nativist vote, anti-immigrant attitudes may be better accounted for by cultural rather than economic factors.

Attachment to nation and anti-EU feelings

The results from PaCE's study on the other hypothetical driver of nationalist/nativist vote – attachment to nation, however, produced significant results only with regard to Vox (0.78***), and FPÖ (0.24*). It should be noted, however, that the voters of all parties studied exhibit strong attachment to their nation (no voters, even of left-wing populist parties, have a lower score than 3.62 (Podemos), which testifies that this is an attitude shared by voters of populist and mainstream parties alike.

Anti-European attitudes are strong predictors of voting both nativist (in established democracies: 0.24**Lega, 0.27** Vox, 0.32***FPÖ, 0.48***RN, 0.62***AfD) and right-wing populist (in CEE: 0.34***PiS, 0.35*** Fidesz, though not in Bulgaria).

Table 2. Crises of Representation: Cultural Factors (Data PLUS)

	Identity		Illiberalism	
	Anti-immigration	Attached to nation	Strong Government	Anti-LGBT
Positive	0.50** FI (I)	0.24*FPÖ	0.38** AfD	0.17* FPÖ
	0.67*** M5S	0.78***Vox	0.40* FI (I)	0.27** Lega
	0.79***FPÖ		0.41** PiS	0.33* Vox
	0.79***Vox		0.48** Vox	0.35** RN
	0.96*** Lega		0.66***Lega	0.41***AfD
	0.98*** RN			0.42*** PiS
	1.15*** AfD			
Negative	-0.59***Podemos	-0.22* Linke	-0.39***GERB	-0.24** M5S
			-0.45** FI (F)	

* Coefficients from multivariate logistic regression.

Reference group – voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding „other parties“.

Additional controls included: age, gender, education, residence (urban-rural), religiosity, income.

2.3 Political factors behind the crisis of representation

A third group of factors, which could lead to a crisis of the established forms of representation are of a political nature. Of course, all factors are in a wide sense ‘political’ in their nature. What we mean here is ‘political’ in a narrower sense: pertaining to the functioning of the representative structures of democracy.

Here two explanatory logics could be distinguished.

On the one hand, voters could be frustrated by the cartelised and over-constitutionalised character of contemporary political systems. Elections may bring a different party to power, but the policies may remain the same, because of extensive formal or informal agreements between the governing majority and the opposition, or because of the role of expert bodies such as central banks, independent judiciaries, regulators, etc. In such an environment, voters may opt for radical players of the populist type, who promise not to observe existing agreements and conventions, and which rail against independent bodies, such as courts, the media and banks. The logic is that the voters see the populists as a tool to loosen the hold of the party cartels and to push through partisan agenda without the consent of the opposition and other players.

On the other hand, voters may be frustrated by what they see as corruption or state capture by established political parties. The collapse of the party system in Italy in the 1990s was produced in this way and this has been the model of emergence for many of the East European populist players. According to a growing scholarly consensus, populism as a ‘thin’ political ideology (Mudde 2004, Stanley 2008) at its core, which opposes the “good people” to the “corrupt elite” and claims that the people see themselves as being relatively homogenous. It is logical then to assume that political grievances about corruption are at the heart of the causal mechanism leading to vote for populist parties.

Yet, the puzzle is that, as in the case of economic factors, frustration with the political process is wide-spread and is reflected in the attitudes of most of the voters. Trust in political parties in liberal democracies in Europe, for instance, is around 15% on average. Another institution, which is a major part of the representative structures of democracy, the parliament, fares hardly better than the political parties in terms of trust. Further, many people are sceptical of the capacity of elections to change policy outcomes. And significant groups of people are not convinced that government is exercised in the public interest.

These political disappointments may be linked and even caused by economic or cultural factors, but they may also have a separate standing. Over the recent years these types of political grievances start to affect the median voter and ever larger groups in the centre of society. Particularly revealing of this trend is the study *Populism Barometer* (Verkamp and Merkel 2018), mentioned above. Germany is one of the polities in Europe in which the inroads made by populist parties (in the wider sense, referring to both illiberal democratic and nativist parties) have been relatively moderate: AfD and Die Linke together account for around 20% of the electorate. Yet, the study finds that only a third of the people do not have populist attitudes reflecting strong political frustration. Another third has strong populist attitudes, while the rest are moderately populist. This expansion of populist attitudes towards the centre of society is a very important phenomenon: both novel and of great political significance.

The authors of the *Populism Barometer* define populism as a set of specific attitudes of political frustration: namely, that politicians do not reflect the will of the people, that politicians “sell out” the interests of the people through compromise, that professional politicians distort the will of the people, that representative democracy does not defend the interests of the people, etc. The growth of these attitudes puts pressure on mainstream parties to cater better for the views of the disappointed. Not surprisingly, a number of studies find that mainstream parties (especially centre-right ones) adopt many of the policies of populist parties in order to preserve public support.

Bértoa and Rama (2020) find a causal link between the increase of the vote for populist anti-establishment parties and two structural factors: the volatility of the public vote and the fragmentation of the party systems. Both of these factors indicate a certain political crisis as the cause for populist voting: disappointment with the mainstream parties, the dilution of classical “cleavages”, falling party loyalty, experimentalism with voting, etc. It is an important argument of the authors of this study that the political factors alone – without recourse to underlying economic or cultural explanations – are linked to the vote for anti-establishment parties.

Further, populists have to a large extent succeeded in convincing the people that the political establishment is corrupt in a deep, structural way. Cartelization of the political parties (famously argued for by Katz and Mair, 1995) may *per se* be considered a form of corruption. Many populist players rally against policies such as public financing for the political parties, because in their view this measure leads to decrease of political competition and greater dependence of the parties on the state. Further, populists often campaign for the reduction of the number of MPs, as a way of “punishing” a political class, which is perceived to have grown alienated from the people (Smilov 2020).

It has long been argued that a major sources of voter alienation from the mainstream parties is the growing perception that elected governments are not sufficiently responsive. Parties in government fail to ensure the desired balance of responsible and representative government, which is “a principal source of the democratic malaise that confronts many Western democracies today” (Mair 2009). Recent empirical study of the profile of ‘populist citizens’ across countries in Europe and Latin America demonstrates that these are dissatisfied democrats – they value democracy highly yet find faults with its performance as they feel they are not well represented (Kaltwasser and van Hauwaert 2020).

Populism could be understood as a response to wide spread perceptions of corruption among the populations of most of the states. Populist parties have often come to power after serious corruption scandals. They have also often promised to eradicate corruption from politics, “drain the swamp”, etc. The first such significant advent of a populist player was the coming to power of Silvio Berlusconi in Italy after the major party funding scandals in the country, which devastated the mainstream party of post-war Italy. Similar developments took place in Bulgaria in 2001, when the former tsar Simeon II formed a government with the promise to rid the country of the corrupt politics of the 1990s. In 2009, GERB came to power with a very strong anti-corruption message.

In Hungary, Fidesz returned to power in 2010 after major corruption scandals in the Socialist Party. In Romania, corruption and anticorruption have also been turned into a major, if not the major political factor over the last decade. Similar processes could be seen in Czechia and Slovakia.

Further, populist parties vent the frustration of the people with “democracy without choices” by focusing public attention not so much on socio-economic matters, but on the issue of corruption and identity politics. In the words of Gidron and Hall 2017 “in order to mount distinctive appeals at a time when the differences between parties on economic issues has narrowed, many parties have put more emphasis on identity or values issues, which often draw middle-class voters to the left but working-class voters to the right”.

At the level of voter attitudes, this mechanism implies a link between voting for populist parties and:

- frustration with (cartelized) mainstream political parties;

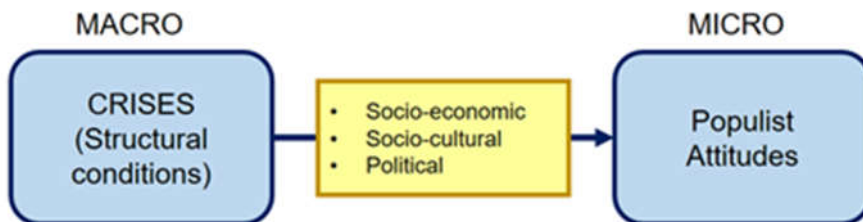
- over-constitutionalisation of politics (national or supranational);
- frustration with the power of elections to change policies.

Populist leaders use corruption scandals to amplify these frustrations and to turn them into anger and a desire for the voter to “punish” the political establishment.

The political mechanism for mobilizing populist voting is important because it explains why populist parties emerge even without a deep economic crisis. Cases such as PiS in Poland (and other parties in Eastern Europe more generally) and Forza Italia are better explained by political frustration rather than economic ones. Further, phenomena such as the Brexit vote or the election of president Trump in the US suggest that it is not only the economically deprived or anxious, who find populist issues and leaders attractive. People in the centre, who feel that they have lost political control, that democratic decision making is not tightly linked to their will, also may go for a populist option.

To briefly sum up the discussion in the preceding sections, the three factors - economic, cultural and political that may lead to a crisis of representation. They detail the “situational” mechanisms (macro-to-micro/structure-to-agency transition), which lead from a certain macro phenomenon (crisis) to a result at the micro level – a surge in populist attitudes.

Figure 3. Situational mechanisms of populist vote



3. Populist voters: demand-side analysis

3.1 Two types of populist voters: ideological and strategic voters

One of the striking facts about populist voters is that many of them are indistinguishable from the voters of liberal parties in terms of economic hardship\deprivation or in terms of cultural predispositions. There are paradoxes in this regard – for instance, liberal and populist voters in some Eastern European countries may be equally conservative regarding immigration or other culturally divisive issues. And curiously, in some countries voters or populist parties may be more pro-European than others.

These paradoxes could be simply dismissed as noise in the data, but the fact that many indicators – economic, cultural and political - fail to distinguish clearly populist from non-populist voters needs to be taken seriously into account.

For this purpose, we suggest that there are two supplementary logics, which lead voters to support populist parties (here we draw on the findings of our previous report D 4.1).

3.1.1 The ‘squeezed middle class’ logic

This logic implies that the rising vote for populist parties is caused by the fears and anxieties of a growing number of people, who increasingly start to include the middle, the centre of society. For these people the current political and economic system does not work, they feel ‘left out’ and are more and more lured to vote for populist, anti-establishment and “anti-systemic” parties, which promise to dismantle (parts of) the liberal-democratic status quo. Thus, ‘the squeezed middle class’, whose economic status has become more precarious and which fears that it could lose its social status and cultural identity, is thus getting ready to experiment with more radical changes of the political and economic order.

The fears and anxieties of the middle class have most commonly been described in economic terms. The already mentioned disparity between productivity and average wages means that most of the benefits of economic growth go to the richest members of society and the ones involved in technological innovation. In comparison with those groups, the average voters see only moderate growth or even stagnation of their income.

The fears and anxieties of the middle class may also be linked with cultural and identity issues. Globalization is both an economic force but it also affects the life of communities and makes them vulnerable to issues such as foreign immigration, brain drain, demographic decline, etc.

The ‘squeezed middle class’ model assumes that more and more political parties take the characteristic of what was known as ‘radical right parties’ (‘nativist’ in PaCE vocabulary). They start to cater for the interests of economically deprived (in real terms or as a matter of perception), and groups, which see their cultural or religious identity as marginalized or otherwise threatened.

The “squeezed middle class” model has important implications.

According to it, we have to expect two types of readjustments of the political systems, if democracy is preserved, and if political parties reflect the preferences of the electorate:

1. The emergence of a new ‘populist consensus’. The middle sections of society have already grown much warmer to the anti-establishment/anti-systemic attitudes of the populists. This factual state of affairs will be followed by a normative recognition and mainstreaming of populism. Simply, the political systems of liberal democracies should admit that these systems do not serve well the interests of ever larger groups of their populations and should make amends to recognize their claims.
2. Policy changes aiming to settle the anxieties and fears of the ‘squeezed middle class’ are to be expected (and should be expected). These policy changes could range from conservative revisions of constitutions (reducing sexual and minority rights, limiting migration, dismantling of the supra-national constitutionalism of the EU and the Council of Europe) to economic reforms aiming to reverse globalization and re-establish the class-compromise of the post-war period. Such an economic reform could arguably stabilize jobs and secure higher incomes for the middle classes in a much more national (rather than international and globalised) economy.

The ‘squeezed middle class’ logic takes a specific view on economic and migration crises. On this model, the crises accelerate the retreat of the current establishment and mainstream and speed up the building of a populist consensus. The crises (financial crisis of 2008, immigration 2015, COVID-19) demonstrate the dysfunctionality of the current system and are a harbinger of a new one, according to the populist voters.

Of course, the retreat of the mainstream parties could take various forms. In some systems, they could be swept aside and replaced by populist parties. This has happened in a number of polities: Italy, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Greece. It is also possible, however, that the mainstream parties – in order to survive – readjust their political platforms and start to resemble the populists. With the Brexit movement and the election of president Trump, mainstream parties such as the Conservative party in the UK and the Republican party in the US were virtually taken over by populist players and agendas. But even in proportional electoral systems, such as Germany, Austria, Bulgaria and many other European states, mainstream parties have started to mimic the populist ideology, style and policies. The People’s Party (ÖVP) in Austria, for instance, has ruled together with populists and has adopted many of their policies.

Finally, the ‘squeezed middle class’ logic is based on the assumption that a new political system is emerging, which will reflect better the growing number of people with populist views. This new system has not found its definitive articulation yet, but maybe Viktor Orbán’s idea of ‘illiberal democracy’ shows the direction of transformation. In any event, if populism stands behind any alternative idea of democracy, this idea is more majoritarian (even aggressively majoritarian), less constitutional and liberal, and obsessed with the preservation of the identity of the majority.

3.1.2 The ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic

This alternative logic explaining the rise of the support for populists also starts with the anxiety of the middle sections of society. But it notices a particular paradox. No matter how they are measured, the economic anxieties and feelings of relative deprivation are much less spread among this middle class than the frustrations with the political process. Our analysis of the economic factors never showed such high levels of inequality, economic anxiety and deprivation, as the levels of frustration with the established democratic processes and institutions. Further, it is often the case that people, who are not and do not feel economically ‘left behind’, also opt for populist players. This phenomenon has lent some credence to the thesis of the purely ‘cultural’ drivers of the populist vote.

But even from a purely cultural perspective it is difficult to argue that somehow Western societies have become more nationalistic, xenophobic, anti-LGBT and narcissistic over the last two decades. This miraculous change in itself needs causal explanation, if we are not to believe in magical shifts of values. Also, after all we are trying to explain the behaviour of the middle classes in the most advanced, affluent and proud of their identity and heritage countries in the world: it is somewhat paradoxical that the most privileged billion of the global population is driven by feelings of ‘relative deprivation’ to choose potentially anti-systemic parties.

Thus, the ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic of voter behaviour steps on two empirical facts.

1. Political frustrations with the democratic process go well beyond the people who have economic or identitarian complaints. As discussed, distrust in the representative infrastructure of democracy is very

high and the political populist attitudes in one measure or another may reach close to 2/3 of society (if we take the German example - *Populism Barometer 2018* - as representative).

2. Not all people with populist attitudes vote for populist parties, but people with such attitudes are more likely to vote for such parties. This means that in the centre of society there is a large reservoir of potential voters, whose frustration mostly concerns the political processes in contemporary liberal democracy.

What are these frustrations? In the terms of the analysis from the previous sections, they tend to be of political nature and are linked with the cartelization of the political process – a complex web of agreements between major parties, which minimize the gains of the winners and the losses of the losers. They are linked also with over-constitutionalisation – the existence of national and supranational constitutional in their nature rules, which make policy changes very difficult after electoral change. ‘Democracy without choices’ is one in which policies persist even after political change.¹²

In such circumstances, people could be politically frustrated even if they are not or do not feel that the system does not work for them in economic or cultural aspects. Even if they are convinced that personally they are doing well, they could have two other, further grievances.

First, they may feel that they *cannot gain anything* more, due to the complex compromises and constraints on which the system relies.

Secondly, they could be *wary of a future loss*: since the system is not very responsive to changes of the will of the people, they may fear that it will not react timely and adequately if they are in need.

These two frustrations could drive centrist voters to support populist parties even though they are not interested and do not aim to subvert or radically change the system. Their support for potentially anti-systemic illiberal players could be interpreted as *a rational choice strategy with* two elements.

The centrist voters opt for anti-systemic parties as a ***bargaining trump***. In over-constitutionalised and cartelised political systems, if you want any further gain, you have to have a credible threat of ruining the system in case your wish is not granted. As a bargaining chip, the populist parties serve as such a credible threat. Alternatively, voting for populists may serve the centrist voters as an ***insurance policy***: that the voter would not have to compromise her interests in favour of other groups. And indeed, the rise of populism has not been associated with redistributive policies towards the neediest in society: on the contrary, most typically populist leaders and parties have fought to minimize the tax burden for the middle classes and to block aid for minorities.¹³

Although the ‘bargaining and insurance’ model also relies on the (political) frustrations of the middle classes, it has a different logic and results in different implications for the political processes. First, it implies that populism

¹² On this point, see our report D 4.1 on causal mechanisms of populist voting.

¹³ Viktor Orbán introduced relatively flat income tax rate (17%) upon coming to power in 2010. Low flat taxes are typical for Eastern Europe, including for countries ruled by populist parties. In the US president Trump has obviously had a policy of lowering the tax burden. Even the populist government of M5S and Lega in Italy did not increase the tax burden, although it did increase the benefits for vulnerable groups.

is not a tool for the middle classes to *change the system*, but rather to obtain opportunistic gains *within the system*. And indeed, the advent of populism in the Western politics has not resulted so far in any serious constitutional or institutional change.¹⁴

In comparison with the ‘squeezed middle class’, the ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic relates in a different way with crises – economic, migration, and corruption-based. On the first model, the deeper the crisis is, the better visible the dysfunctionality of the current system for the average voter becomes. Thus, the deeper the crisis, the more people from the middle will turn to populist parties.

The ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic also relies on crises as triggering events but with the proviso that these crises should not be too severe as to destroy the political and economic system. They should be serious enough as to support the credible threat claim of the populists for the average voter. But if they become existential for the system, they will scare the average voter and will discourage him from looking for opportunistic gains. Thus, on the ‘bargaining and insurance’ model, the centrist voters will stop supporting anti-systemic populists, if there is an existential crisis of economic, health or cultural character.

This implication may seem paradoxical but actually there is case study evidence to support it. Many of the radical propositions with which populist players lure voters are actually not put in government action when they come to power. A most spectacular case (apart from president Trump’s ‘Mexico-funded wall’) was SYRIZA in Greece: in the bargaining process with the EU and its European partners, the SYRIZA government made a lot of credible (or not that credible) threats to leave the Eurozone and put stress on the supranational European order. This strategy actually did win for Greece a lot of concessions from the partners. After the climactic moment with the bailout referendum in 2015, the SYRIZA government did not try to seriously break the European monetary system. On the contrary, it brought back Greece to the financial markets and generally observed the conditions for EU aid.

The Hungarian example with the emergency law in the COVID-19 crisis is also a case in point. Viktor Orbán did use the crisis to suspend parliament indefinitely, but actually then voluntarily removed the emergency legislation roughly at the time other European countries did so. Thus, if one expects that populists are trying to subvert the liberal-democratic system for good, it may seem that a good opportunity for that was missed by the Hungarian leader. From the point of view of the ‘bargaining and insurance model’, however, the introduction of

¹⁴ There are two significant exceptions to this rule. One is arguably Hungary, where a populist majority adopted a new constitution and concentrated the power in the hands of Viktor Orbán in an almost autocratic way. But even Hungary (and to a greater extent Poland) remain (troubled) democracies and their voters are as a whole pro-EU. Populism in these cases seems as an attempt by certain majorities to obtain extra profits within a system by threatening to destroy it: with some qualifications, this could be interpreted as a bargaining strategy.

The second major exception is Brexit Britain, where populist actors initiated and successfully carried out an act of dismantling of the supra-national constitutional order. A definite anti-systemic effect here has actually been achieved. For the purposes of this analysis, it is interesting what role the middle voters played in this process, however. It may be the case that they grew more radical and convinced that the *status quo* is not working for them: then, Brexit does not fit the ‘bargaining and insurance’ model. But it could be also that the median voter was involved in a decision, which resulted in a much ‘harder’ break with the EU than they wanted. From this perspective, what started as the making of a credible threat in order to improve one’s bargaining position, ended up with dismantling of the system as a whole. Such miscalculations may explain the difficult three-year process of partition with the EU and the remorse on behalf of some of the voters and (mainstream) parties.

indefinite emergency law and its subsequent removal make perfect sense: they create perceptions of a ‘credible threat’ within the system, without trying to radically change or subvert it.

Similarly, in many EU polities the COVID-19 crisis restored the public confidence in mainstream parties: with a serious crisis, average voters went back to mainstream, non-populist players. The position of Angela Merkel in Germany is a case in point: trust in her increased, while the support for anti-establishment parties such as the AfD decreased during the corona crisis (Vehrkamp and Merkel 2020). But more generally, the corona crisis spurred European governments to look for joint, solidaristic actions through the elaboration of Recovery Fund of the EU– something, which the ‘squeezed middle class’ model could hardly predict.¹⁵

Next, the ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic does not require an alternative vision of democracy – be it ‘illiberal’, conservative or something else: this makes it especially applicable in the current circumstances of populism (the state of nature), which are marked by a lack of a credible alternative to liberal democracy. It implies not a major transformation of the political systems of liberal democracies, but the intensification of opportunistic, self-centred behaviour of voters within it. Instead of ultimate transformation into an illiberal polity, the bargaining and insurance logic predicts greater voter volatility, the emergence of new parties, corruption scandals and crises, and the rise of anti-systemic parties. But somewhat paradoxically, it implies the preservation of the system itself (unless accidents and serious miscalculations as the Brexit vote happen).

Finally, the ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic accounts better for the existence of more radical and less radical populist parties. In general, many of the so-called nativist parties target voters that are really more economically deprived and fearful about immigration and globalization. Yet, there are also softer populists, who aim more to capture the attention of the average voter. The ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic predicts that many populist parties will start as more anti-systemic populist but may turn into parties indistinguishable from the mainstream. This is so, because they cater for the middle of society, which according to this model is only opportunistically ‘anti-system’ and actually has a strong interest in preserving the system. Case study evidence suggests that parties, which have started strongly as populist, then have grown to be more or less mainstream centre-right: Forza Italia, GERB and NDSV of tsar Simeon II in Bulgaria. The mainstreaming of these parties normally coincided with the emergence of a more radical, populist party, however. Both Forza Italia and GERB have ruled and coalesced with such more radical parties, allowing them to cater both for the centrist, opportunistic vote, and for the angrier, radical vote.

The two alternative logics – the ‘squeezed middle class’ and the ‘bargaining and insurance’ model – have different implications about the role of political leadership and the use of psychological mechanisms to attract voters. In short, on the ‘squeezed middle class’ model, the political leaders are expected to transform economic and cultural frustrations into fears and anger against the existing liberal democratic system (Smilov 2017). Further, these leaders are expected to present visions of internally coherent alternatives to the current system. Viktor Orbán seems to come closest to this scenario.

¹⁵ At the moment of writing, the Recovery Fund has not been finally agreed due to the veto of Poland and Hungary on the budget of the EU. The very fact that the elaboration of such a solidaristic strategy took place in a relatively short time supports the claim in the text, however.

On the ‘bargaining and insurance’ model, populist leaders are also supposed to spur anti-systemic fears and transform them into anger, but this inflammatory role is moderated by the understanding that the middle voters may be scared off, if there is a real danger of dismantling or radically changing the system. In addition, on this model the leaders do not have to present the public with a credible alternative of the system, but just with a credible threat to it, which they could use as a bargaining chip and insurance policy. Many populist leaders actually fall into this more opportunistic rather than visionary ideal type.

3.1.3 *The two types of voters: ideological and strategic*

Our claim is that both above-discussed logics - the ‘squeezed middle class’ and the ‘bargaining and insurance’ logic are consistent with the existing empirical data on voter behaviour. They are both applicable and explain the behaviour of voters for populist parties. It may be the case, however, that these voters fall in at least two different groups, according to the basic logic, which informs their actions. We suggest to call these two groups ideological voters and strategic voters. The first group follow mainly the ‘squeezed middle class’ logic, while the second - the bargaining and insurance logic. The division does not imply that these groups of voters are static - shifts from one group to another are of course possible. There may also be indeterminate cases of mixed motives of behaviour. Still, we suggest that the two groups may have explanatory value for the causal analysis of voting behaviour, though we have not yet tested this hypothesis empirically. This will be the task of future research.

Ideological voters: These are voters that are distinctive from the liberal voter either in economic terms, or in terms of cultural dispositions. They resemble the voters of radical right parties. For them the system has generally failed to work, and they may take the promise of populist leaders to radically transform it at face value. These voters may be willing to experiment with autocratic modes of government, and are not preoccupied with concerns about the constitutional protection of rights.

In our cases, these voters tend to vote in a more concentrated fashion for “nativist parties” and form a much lesser part of the voters of centrist populist parties.

Strategic voters: These are voters for whom the primary concerns are not so much cultural or economic, but political. They feel frustrated that although the system of liberal democracy is generally working well for them, they may benefit even more, if they do not have to compromise with other political groups. They do not aim at radical transformation of the system, but rather use populist radicals as a bargaining instrument to extract better results for them and their own social group.

The attachment of such groups to populist parties and leaders is more strategic and opportunistic. For instance, they may endorse populist leaders just to advance their preference for lower taxes, less regulation, etc. Such voters are by no means a subject of victimisation or discrimination in society, but they may want to limit their obligations to others (vulnerable minorities, etc.). In essence, for these voters the populist leaders are a good tool for the blocking of specific policies of redistribution, which may burden them with additional taxes or fees. Finally, these voters may not object to liberal democracy, but they may prefer some of its constitutional set up regarding the entrenchment of rights of sexual minorities to be dismantled. They may see in the populist leader an opportunity for a moderate constitutional amendment, which otherwise would not have been possible.

In comparative perspective, the ideological voters are much more committed anti-liberals than the strategic ones. The first are generally disappointed members of “the squeezed middle class”, the frustrated part of the middle of society, which have grown to believe that liberal democracy does not work for them, and that it needs some sort of radical transformation.

The strategic voters are much less committed to the radical agenda of populists, but are willing to use them as a tool for putting pressure on their political opponents. And as an efficient break on public initiatives, which may burden them with taxes and other forms of solidarity with the most vulnerable in society.

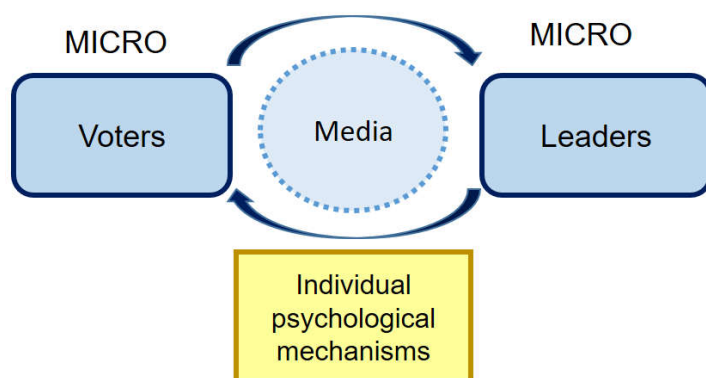
The voters of all populist parties are a mixture of ideological and strategic, albeit in different proportions. In our sample the ideological seem to dominate the nativist parties, while the strategic voters are more common for centrist populists and populist, who have managed to win governing majorities.

Strategic voters are crucial for populists, if they would like to form governments and win national referendums. Ideological voters – the populist core – may be sufficient for securing them place in parliament. The ability to expand in the group of strategic voters may be a key feature of contemporary populism.

3.2 Activation mechanisms: the role of emotions

The analysis of the ideological and strategic voters seems to imply that the main motivations for voting for populist parties are rational - be them the considerations of the ‘squeezed middle class’ or the calculations of strategic voters bargaining for gains in complex cartelised political systems. The picture is more complex, however, and research has shown that some specific emotions and personal psychology more generally play a crucial role in activating (triggering) voting for populist parties. The trajectory to be explained here is how populist attitudes of voters are activated through the interaction of voters and populist party leaders (against a background of favourable media environment). And how they ultimately produce populist voting. A more detailed analysis of the mechanisms of populist voter activation was provided in D 4.1 of PaCE.

Figure 4. Action-formation mechanisms of populist vote



Recent research has focused on identifying the specific emotions that trigger vote for populist and nativist parties. Salmela and von Scheve (2017) identified emotions linked specifically to status anxiety as a source of radical right populist support among the middle classes in particular. Insecurities of the middle classes “manifest as fears of not being able to live up to salient social identities and their constitutive values, and as shame about this actual or anticipated inability.” The link between fear and shame is particularly salient in contemporary

capitalist societies with their individualized responsibility for success and failure, where failure is further stigmatized as unemployment, receiving welfare benefits, or labour migration.

Gidron and Hall (2020) similarly look at the psychological mechanisms behind radical populist-left and populist-right voting. The main psychological source of vote for them is not so much status anxiety, but problems with “social integration” - with the levels of “social relations linking individuals and promoting their sense of being valued members of society”. Problems with social integration are more widespread among individuals with perceptions of low and declining social status, who feel they are “pushed to the fringes of their national community and are deprived of the roles and respect normally accorded full members”. This approach, these authors argue, brings together economic and cultural explanations for populist support. Feelings of social marginalization (low levels of attachment to the normative order, low levels of trust in others and social engagement, and low sense of social respect) are thus found to be associated with voting for radical parties. In addition to the vast literature studying the role of diverse fears and anxieties (from globalizations, from status loss, from relative deprivation, loss of control, etc.) summarized above, some have focused on outlining the sources of resentment (Betz 1994) and of *ressentiment* itself (Demertzis 2006, Salmela and von Scheve 2017) as possible explanations for such a vote. *Ressentiment* does not always directly lead to increased support for populists as its effect may be mediated by alienation from mainstream parties, which most often leads to vote abstention. With a supply of a pro-active populist party, however, *ressentiment* may activate support for it, as it may enhance anti-immigrant attitudes, triggered by amorphous fears. Here, in addition to the emotion of *ressentiment*, a key role plays the populist party/leader itself, who through various discursive strategies, helps turn the latent populist attitudes into active populist support.

Recent studies, furthermore, show anger rather than various kinds of amorphous fears and anxieties to be closely linked to populist attitudes (Rico et al. 2017). Anger spurs more targeted, stronger anti-elite sentiments via clear blame attribution, and it is shown to be a strong driver of active support - through vote - for radical left populists (Ibid). It has also been demonstrated (Magni 2017) that anger may indeed lead to voting radical populist (UKIP), though its effect on the vote choice is mediated by political efficacy. Anger generally triggers desire for change, yet the level of efficacy determines where the political options for realizing this change are found: those with high efficacy opt for the mainstream opposition, while those with low efficacy may either abstain or vote for an anti-establishment actor (like UKIP).

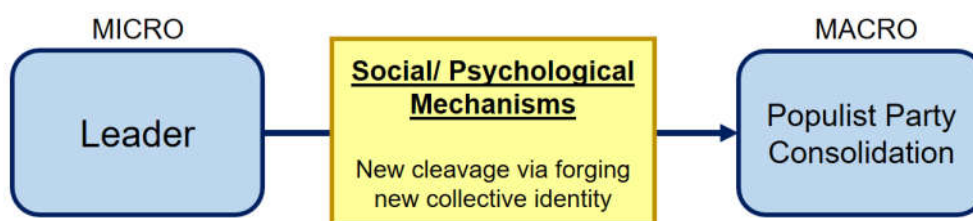
For populist support turning amorphous fear and anxiety into pro-active emotions (such as anger) is key. At this key juncture populist entrepreneurs and favourable media play a crucial role. They help *politicize* the amorphous fears, anxieties and *ressentiment* and turn them into pro-active and (via blame attribution) - targeted anger. But populist leaders may achieve politicization even without much prior *ressentiment*. Acting as 'crisis performers' (Moffitt 2016), apt political entrepreneurs are able to even turn objective relative gratification into subjective relative deprivation, as shown by Mols and Jetten (2016).

4. Transformational Mechanisms and Populist Leaders: supply-side analysis

In this section we focus on the supply side of populism - the role of populist leaders. Our main argument is that they need to cater both for their ideological and their strategic voters in order to be successful. Further, they need to appeal to emotions as well to reason in order to forge a sense of belonging and community among their followers. Pappas (2019a) has argued that populists use a number of mechanisms to mobilize their voters and to forge a sense of belonging to “the people”. These mechanisms have a very strong psychological undercurrent and they aim to instil a sense of victimhood in a group, and to create or strengthen a variety of feelings of resentments towards specific groups of society. The end result is social polarization, as the populist leaders become to speak the language of the more radical groups in society.

Transformational mechanisms account for the emergence of a new structure - a successful populist party. This is achieved through the agency of a populist leader who forges new collective identity to mobilize support for an emerging populist party. The key here is the strategic employment of populist discursive frames (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2017), whose message is amplified by scandal-hungry media - it reinforces populist attitudes and helps activate them for action. New cleavages to forge new identities and reconstitute majorities with the aim of gaining and retaining political power are introduced by populist players without rigid ideological positions, opportunistically instrumentalizing diverse ideational frames for their political purposes. The explanatory mechanisms for the success of this exercise of forging new/reconstituting identities via new cleavages are mostly social-psychological and have been presented in detail in D4.1.

Figure 5. Transformational mechanisms of populist vote



4.1 The sense of belonging and the sense of being a victim

One of the particular skills of populist political entrepreneurs is to craft new collective identities. Trying to solve the puzzle of growing opposition to migration during times of prosperity (‘the wealth paradox’) even among the well-to-do, Mols and Jetten (2016) identified the particular aptitude of nativist and populist leaders as one of its major drivers. As crafty identity entrepreneurs, populist leaders manage, through various discursive techniques, to present the people as victims of injustice by conspiring elites and migrants. Such artificially induced perceptions may create feelings of injustice and resentment towards outgroups, who might be viewed as threatening the interests of the ‘disadvantaged’ group. Remarkably, this discursive new identity formation (as victims of injustice) is sometimes sufficient to turn objective relative gratification into perceived relative deprivation (Mols and Jetten 2016). Jetten (2019) studied further this phenomenon of support for radical right populists (nativists in PaCE vocabulary) among the relatively well-off within the framework of classical social

identity theorizing (commonly applied for analysis of low status groups). She shows that less tolerance and hostility towards outgroups among wealthier groups may be accounted for by the “status anxiety, status threat, and fear of falling” among members of such groups, as group boundaries are increasingly permeable and these strata's wealth positions – less secure.

There is a vast arsenal of threats (real or perceived) that may be employed in crafting such new identities. Threats to majority group's standing and future status (Mutz 2017), 'nostalgic deprivation' (Gest et al. 2018), and “collective nostalgia and the desire to make one's group great gain” (Wohl and Stefaniak 2020) are all discursive frames successfully employed to forge new collective identity and mobilize support for populist and nativist parties. Bonkowski (2017) also shows how a “variety of social changes have engendered a sense of collective status threat among national ethno-cultural majorities”, which is then “channeled by political and media discourse into resentments toward elites, immigrants, and ethnic, racial and religious minorities, thereby activating previously latent attitudes and lending legitimacy to radical political campaigns that promise to return power and status to their aggrieved supporters”. Such real or perceived threats to ethno-cultural identities prompt anti-immigrant attitudes, which are the strongest predictors of 'nativist' vote, as shown by PaCE's study among many others (Lubbers and Scheepers 2002, van der Brug et al. 2005, Rydgren 2008). The halting and reversion of the erosion of established patterns of ethnic and cultural dominance is often justified by stressing the uniqueness of the native culture and the impossible integration in this culture of non-natives (Betz and Johnson 2004), favouring an exclusivist interpretation of ethno-cultural identity ('differentialist nativism', Betz 2002), which is most often expressed in anti-immigrant attitudes and support for nativist parties. Social identity theory posits that individuals tend to associate with similar individuals and their desire for self-esteem causes people to perceive their in-group as superior to out-groups. This perceived superiority of the in-groups is often exploited by nativists to mobilize support, stressing that immigrant behaviour and values are incompatible with those of the native population.

Another trope used by populists to mobilize support is to present a 'nationalist' identity politics - a central tenet of nativist populism - as a reaction of threatened majority groups to the excessive victimization of marginalized groups by anti-discrimination warriors of diverse stripes. Fukuyama (2012, 2018) identifies the surge of leftist identity politics in particular as the primary source of this nationalist populist backlash of groups feeling threatened by the liberal agenda of multicultural diversity. Populists aptly activate and then instrumentalize a 'yearning for closure' (van der Walt 2019) - a major source of the populist “counter-revolution”.

In short, collective victimization is a central feature of all populist regimes generally. Populists in Central and Eastern Europe, in particular, aptly employ the “historic injustices narratives” (Kreko et al. 2018), while not shying away from portraying Eastern Europeans as subject to more recent humiliations as well. Krastev and Holmes (2019) identify the felt humiliation of imitating Western liberal models of democratization and marketization as well as the feeling of lost authenticity as the primary source of the backlash which ushered in the illiberal populist turn in the region. The idea of collective victimhood that needs redress adds context-dependent and historically coloured local specificity to the idea of an ethno-national community with shared identity and interests, whose absolute ontological priority is the central element of illiberal populism and nativism alike. This longing to restore the lost authenticity and regain national pride is readily weaponized by the belligerent illiberals of the region. Employing an old illiberal strategy, they fan the popular resentment and direct the popular anger towards the external enemies and the internal traitors: the global liberal elites and their local allies, thereby strengthening their own grip on power. The growing anxiety prompted by imitation may affect

those being imitated as well, as they fear that their authentic identity is being ‘stolen’ from them by their imitators. Such fears are readily exploited - indeed induced and further fanned - by populist entrepreneurs. They promise remedies for the collective soul via excluding the non-natives- threatening the collective identity of the natives - from the collective body.

A further fear - that of dominant groups losing their privileged status, is one aspect of what Krastev (2020) aptly calls “the fear of shrinking numbers”. It is closely related to another background condition (in addition to the cultural and economic transformations): the demographic changes in the developed world. The demographic fears of disappearing monoethnic nations play out prominently in the political field, with the deeply rooted in this field fear of the dominant ethnic majorities of being outnumbered and losing their dominant status - fear easily mobilized by illiberal populist entrepreneurs.

National collective narcissism - the unrealistic belief in the greatness of the national group, which increases in response to perceived in-group disadvantage, lack of personal control and external criticism of the group, is shown to predict populist support. The narrative of relative disadvantage, fuelled by populist leaders, might reinforce the defensive and potentially destructive national in-group positivity, with collective narcissism further increasing perceptions of relative in-group disadvantage - as it is strategically presented by populist leaders to be a victim of external enemies, conspiring against the group (Marchlewska et al. 2017). Identifying hidden plots behind complex social events and processes, and imperviousness to refutation - two central features of conspiracy thinking - warranted denoted conspiratorial thinking "collective paranoia" (Hofstadter 1996, quoted in Castanho Silva et al. 2017). Some personal traits are found to contribute to belief in conspiracies: authoritarianism, feelings of powerlessness, low interpersonal trust and anomie, uncertainty, and a preference for Manichaeic narratives presenting the world as a struggle between the good and the evil (Ibid: 426). Conspiratorial thinking shares with the populist worldview deep anti-elitism: thorough suspicion of the deceptive (if not entirely evil) establishment as conspiring against the benign people. The finding that populism and conspiratorial thinking are linked at the level of attitudes is important as it shows why conspiratorially framed anti-establishment populist rhetoric resonates well with the public (Castanho Silva et al. 2017).

This turbocharged sense of victimhood is important because it suspends or dilutes solidarity obligations towards other, more vulnerable groups. The notion that one belongs to a group, which has been victimized systematically, suspends at least temporarily obligations for solidarity towards others.

The same functions have narratives of exceptionality: feelings of superiority and exceptionality of one's own culture are instrumental in arguing for the suspending of obligations towards others (refugees, migrants, etc.).

4.2 Catering for ideological and strategic voters

There are differences in the approach of populist leaders towards ideological and strategic voters. As regards the ideological group, people in it tend to be objectively economically deprived or find their cultural views underrepresented. First, the populist leader offers to them direct, unfiltered expression of their preferences. Further, these are voters that need to believe that the populist leader plans to change the system of liberal democracy with some more illiberal alternative. They are the ones who feel “left behind” by the system and hope to replace it with a different, illiberal one.

As regards strategic voters, for them it is enough, if the populist leader is capable of presenting himself/herself as a credible threat for liberal democracy. They are not interested in the ultimate change of the system: a credible threat serves the purpose of a bargaining strategy for them. It improves their bargaining position and makes the adoption of some specific policies they prefer – low taxes and no extension of solidarity payments, for instance.

Strategic voters may be scared if the populist leader starts in earnest to dismantle the institutional infrastructure of liberal democracy. They are not interested in a change of the system: they would rather take some opportunistic gains within the system.

Thus, the populist leaders have to play a difficult balancing game in order to preserve both their ideological and strategic voters. If they become too radical and serious about system change, they will strengthen the ideological core, but are more likely to lose the strategic periphery. If they move too much to the centre and stop being seen as a credible threat, they may lose both the ideological core and the strategic periphery and become indistinguishable from other parties.

Reaction to crisis may also be revealing of the differences between ideological and strategic populist voters. The deepening of economic or health-related crises (like the COVID-19 crisis) may be seen by the ideological voters as indicators that the system of liberal democracy is dysfunctional and must be replaced. These voters are likely to exercise pressure on the populist leader to radicalize his agenda further and to use the crisis as an opportunity for deep (revolutionary) reforms.

Strategic voters are likely to have a different logic of behaviour – if the crisis is really existential for liberal democracy they may leave the populist leader and opt for a more traditional liberal democratic party. Or at least they could start to exert pressure on the populist leader to moderate his behaviour and policies in order to preserve the system. In such critical situations, strategic voters may abandon (temporarily) their hopes for opportunistic gains and endorse cooperation and compromise necessary to preserve the system.

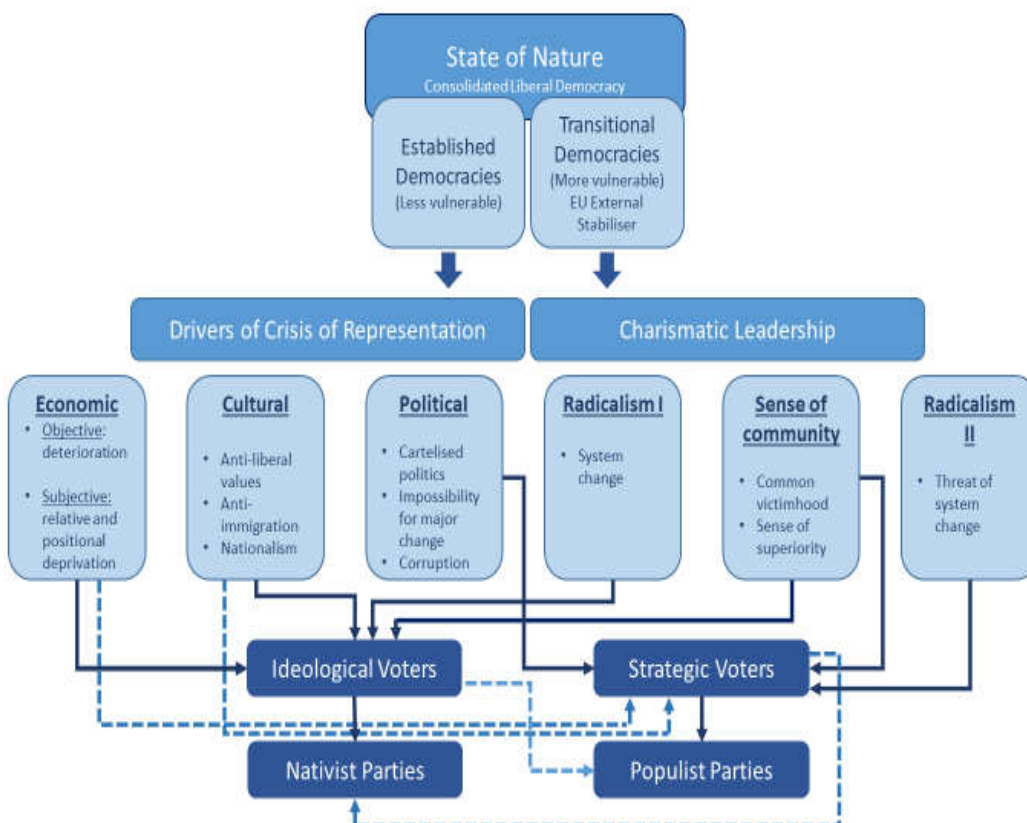
The empirical evidence that supports these claims is the following. There is a high degree of ambivalence in the messages about system change that populist leaders send. Viktor Orbán's handling of the corona virus crisis illustrates the point. On the one hand, ideological voters, who would be happy to see liberal democracy replaced by an illiberal one, were given hope by Orbán's indefinite suspension of the parliament. On the other hand, strategic voters were most probably relieved when he restored the powers of parliament roughly at the moment other countries ended their forms of temporary emergency rule. This ambivalence is visible in the behavior of president Trump as well: he caters both for his 'base' (which are ideological voters in essence), and a wider periphery of strategic voters, who share more centrist conservative views about low tax burden, etc. In terms of foreign policy, the ideological voters may hope for the dismantling of supra-national organisations in which the US has a stake either as a participant or a partner (WTO, WHO, NATO, EU); strategic voters, however, would be happier if the president uses threats to such organisations in order to obtain relative advantages for the US in the context of bargaining. Such policy ambivalence supports the thesis that populist leaders cater for two types of voters, whose preferences may at certain points be in tension with one another. It is the role of the charismatic leader to make unlikely coalitions and to throw bridges over seemingly unbridgeable divides.¹⁶

¹⁶ Many other examples of such ambivalence in the message, which has proven instrumental for the success of populist players, could be given. The Brexit movement, for instance, managed to forge a wide coalition of voters and supporters, ranging from

5. Conclusions and future research directions

The theoretical model of causes of populism presented thus far is sufficiently coherent and consistent with the available empirical data. It started with the circumstances of the rise of contemporary populism in Europe – the established post-war democracies of the west and the newly consolidated democracies in Eastern Europe. Then the notion of ‘crisis of representation’ is explored and linked to three types of factors - economic, cultural and political. On the basis of this analysis the model then outlined two types of voters - ideological and strategic. While the ideological voters are motivated more by economic and cultural grievances, strategic voters are politically frustrated by the cartelized and consensus-oriented politics in a consolidated democracy. Charismatic populist leaders cater for both strategic and ideological voters with their radicalism. To the ideological groups they promise to radically transform liberal democracy; to the strategic group they are a useful instrument to pressure on political opponents in order to obtain greater concessions. Charismatic populist leaders are also skilful operators of public emotions, capable of transforming background anxieties into intense fears and even anger. The combination between crises, specific types of voters and the actions of the populist leaders ultimately leads to a successful populist project.

Figure 6. Theoretical model of causes of populist/ nativist vote



adamant ideological opponents of the EU to strategic voters, hoping to get a better deal for the UK in the relationship with the EU. The debate between soft-Brexit and hard-Brexit, which started after the 2016 referendum in earnest, and which lasted for more than three years after the referendum, is yet another demonstration of the ambivalence in the main populist message. In Italy, for a long time Silvio Berlusconi had managed to forge ruling coalitions with the nationalistic and more ideological Lega Nord. As the Italian example suggests, such coalitions should not be taken for granted however. At different points in time the balance between the more ideological and the more strategic strands within the populist players is likely to change, which leads to their regrouping. The relative decline of Forza Italia and the rise of the Lega under Salvini is an example of such regrouping.

Figure 6 visualises the theoretical model of causes for populism we have developed.

On the basis of existing research, we are confident that the large groups of voters for populist parties are not ideologically different from the mainstream (liberal democratic) parties. The proportions between strategic and ideological voters need to be further analysed empirically. It may be the case that the concrete balance between these two groups is determined by highly contextual factors in the different states.

In this report we have not been able to pay sufficient attention to some important factors, which could have causal implications. First, this is the issue of electoral systems. Our expectation is that in majoritarian systems, a successful populist leader must find the proper balance within a single party between ideological and strategic voters in order to construct a governing majority. In proportional electoral environments, populist players tend to emerge in pairs – some more radical, which mobilize mostly the ideological type of voters, and more moderate – strategic voters. In such settings there is an opportunity for coalitions between centrist and more radical (often nativist) political parties. The purpose of these coalitions is to present the populist players as a credible threat to liberal democracy, while at the same time allaying the fears of more peripheral voters that liberal democracy will be indeed dismantled.

A second issue, which has not been sufficiently addressed in the report is the role of the media, and especially the role of social media. They allow for extremely fine profiling of voters and for targeted (psychological in their nature) attacks on them by political entrepreneurs. The *Cambridge Analytica* scandal in the UK and US demonstrated the power of these technologies, which needs further research.

A third important element, which has not been covered by the model, is the causal effects of populism in office. In many countries, populists have been able to come to power or at least have become credible candidates for ruling coalitions. These processes have led to the “mainstreaming” of populism and have somewhat diluted the borderline between “established” and “populist” parties. The electoral success of populist parties has definitely shifted parts of the conformist vote – the people who like to vote for the winner – in their favour. Further, the advent of populist players in some countries coincides with shifts of public opinion against sexual minority rights, the Istanbul Convention on the Protection of Women etc. Existing research on these processes needs to be incorporated in the proposed model.

Finally, together with PLUS we have discussed first steps on how to better identify strategic and ideological voters for populist parties. A better empirical grip on these two notions promises to improve our understanding of the causes of voting for populist parties.

Appendix

Studying four drivers for populist/nativist voting

Salzburg Team (PLUS) Input for Report D4.2
October 2020

Data: ESS 2018

Table 3. Cases: Country, Party & Party Type (Pappas/PaCE)

Country	Party	Type (Pappas)	Type (The PopuList)
Austria	FPÖ	Nativist	Populist – far right
Bulgaria	GERB	Populist	Populist
Bulgaria	United Patriots (UP)**	Nativist	Populist – far right
France	La France Insoumise (FI)	Populist	Populist – far left
France	Rassemblement National (RN)	Nativist	Populist – far right
Germany	Die Linke	Antidemocratic?	Populist – far left
Germany	AfD	Nativist	Populist – far right
Hungary	Fidesz	Populist	Populist – far right
Hungary	Jobbik	Antidemocratic?	Populist – far right
Italy	Forza Italia	Populist	Populist
Italy	M5S	Populist?	Populist
Italy	Lega	Nativist	Populist – far right
Poland	PiS	Populist	Populist – far right
Spain	Podemos	Populist	Populist – far left
Spain	Vox	Nationalist	Populist – far right

Sources: Pappas (PaCE_WP1_Report2_Current state of WP1_April 2019.pdf), The PopuList.

**Electoral alliance of three parties: IMRO, Ataka, NFSB (all three are categorized as “populist” and “Far right” by The PopuList).

Table 4. Operationalization of concepts

Driver	Variable ESS 2018	ESS 2018
(1) Identity concerns (including collective status threats)	Attitude towards migration	imwbcnt
	Attachment to nation	atchctr
(2) Relative deprivation	Perceived fairness of access to job	ifrjob
(3) Growth of inequality	Attitude towards government's role in reducing income differences*	gincdif
(4) Spread of illiberal values	Do what is told, follow rules	ipfrule
	Strong government	ipstrgv
	Rights of LGBT	freehms

Table 5. Attitudes of Populist Party Voters (mean values – scales from 1 to 5)

Country	Party	Anti-Migration	Attached to Nation	Reduce income differences	Unfair Jobseeking	Illiberal	Anti-LGBT	Anti-Europe
Austria	FPÖ	3.94	4.58	4.00	2.42	3.71	2.05	3.94
Bulgaria	GERB	3.25	4.15	4.21	2.98	3.62	2.93	2.61
	UP	3.50	4.06	4.21	3.07	3.60	2.89	2.98
France	FI	2.67	4.13	4.61	2.81	2.89	1.36	2.84
	RN	3.75	4.15	3.97	2.88	3.27	1.75	3.50
Germany	AfD	3.94	4.02	3.87	2.70	3.68	2.11	3.66
	Left	2.59	3.66	4.38	2.18	3.17	1.38	2.36
Hungary	Fidesz	3.48	4.31	4.16	2.64	3.45	3.22	3.40
	Jobbik	3.50	4.02	4.41	2.90	3.24	3.09	3.09
Italy	FI	3.51	4.47	4.02	3.29	3.81	2.44	3.35
	Lega	3.86	4.36	4.05	3.14	3.90	2.42	3.44
	M5S	3.49	4.35	4.28	3.18	3.77	1.92	3.12
Poland	PiS	2.85	4.48	3.95	2.86	3.87	3.16	2.87
Spain	Podemos	2.25	3.62	4.39	2.85	3.40	1.26	2.37
	Vox	3.46	4.58	3.76	2.85	3.95	1.90	2.96

Table 6a. Explaining Populist Party Choice – Logistic and Multinomial Logistic Regressions

	Austria	Bulgaria		Hungary		Poland	Germany	
	FPÖ	GERB	UP	Fidesz	Jobbik	PiS	Left	AfD
Anti-Migration	0.79*** (0.11)	0.01 (0.10)	0.15 (0.21)	0.23 (0.14)	0.25 (0.18)	0.19 (0.13)	-0.07 (0.13)	1.15*** (0.16)
Attached to Nation	0.24* (0.12)	-0.10 (0.12)	-0.13 (0.23)	-0.01 (0.12)	-0.02 (0.17)	0.11 (0.14)	-0.22* (0.12)	-0.09 (0.14)
Reduce income differences	0.01 (0.09)	0.03 (0.13)	0.22 (0.28)	-0.47*** (0.14)	0.15 (0.22)	0.22* (0.12)	0.62*** (0.14)	0.19 (0.14)
Unfair Jobseeking	-0.16** (0.07)	-0.21** (0.10)	0.01 (0.19)	-0.26** (0.11)	0.06 (0.15)	-0.00 (0.11)	0.14 (0.10)	0.46*** (0.11)
Illiberal	-0.03 (0.12)	-0.39*** (0.14)	-0.26 (0.28)	0.16 (0.17)	0.00 (0.24)	0.41** (0.18)	-0.22 (0.15)	0.38** (0.19)
Anti-LGBT	0.17* (0.09)	-0.08 (0.09)	-0.13 (0.17)	0.03 (0.10)	0.07 (0.13)	0.42*** (0.10)	-0.14 (0.17)	0.41*** (0.14)
Anti-Europe	0.32*** (0.08)	-0.16 (0.10)	-0.05 (0.19)	0.35*** (0.11)	-0.08 (0.15)	0.34*** (0.11)	0.10 (0.10)	0.62*** (0.12)
Pseudo R ²	0.19	0.07		0.09		0.21	0.24	
(N)	(1314)	(497)		(506)		(482)	(1403)	

*** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.1

Reference group: voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding „Other parties“.

Additional controls included: age, gender, education, residence (urban-rural), religiosity, income.

Table 6b. Explaining Populist Party Choice – Logistic and Multinomial Logistic Regression

	Spain		Italy			France	
	Podemos	Vox	Lega	FI	M5S	FI	RN
Anti-Migration	-0.59*** (0.17)	0.79*** (0.17)	0.96*** (0.16)	0.50** (0.20)	0.67*** (0.13)	-0.10 (0.17)	0.98*** (0.17)
Attached to Nation	-0.02 (0.12)	0.78*** (0.20)	-0.23 (0.18)	-0.14 (0.23)	-0.16 (0.15)	-0.23 (0.18)	-0.25 (0.16)
Reduce income differences	0.29 (0.17)	-0.02 (0.15)	-0.26* (0.16)	-0.38** (0.19)	0.22* (0.14)	0.97*** (0.23)	-0.32** (0.13)
Unfair Jobseeking	0.21 (0.14)	0.10 (0.14)	-0.14 (0.13)	-0.15 (0.16)	-0.06 (0.10)	0.03 (0.15)	-0.08 (0.13)
Illiberal	-0.31 (0.20)	0.48** (0.23)	0.66*** (0.19)	0.40* (0.24)	0.08 (0.15)	-0.45** (0.20)	0.08 (0.17)
Anti-LGBT	-0.19 (0.26)	0.33* (0.18)	0.27** (0.12)	0.09 (0.16)	-0.24** (0.12)	0.29 (0.19)	0.35** (0.14)
Anti-Europe	0.18 (0.14)	0.27** (0.13)	0.24** (0.12)	0.27* (0.15)	0.07 (0.09)	0.20 (0.14)	0.48*** (0.13)
Pseudo R ²	0.21		0.14			0.23	
(N)	(601)		(718)			(794)	

*** p<0.01; ** p<0.05; * p<0.1

Reference group: voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding „Other parties“.

Additional controls included: age, gender, education, residence (urban-rural), religiosity,

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