

Populism and Its Two Faces: Understanding Electoral Advances by Left and Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Europe

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Abstract

Much cross-sectional scholarly work has been done on the causes of radical-right wing populist movements in western Europe, but much less has been done on both left-wing populist parties and Europe's peripheral states. This paper engages both shortcomings through a two-stage quantitative and qualitative approach and finds that unemployment is a most likely cause of left-wing electoral success for all European democracies regardless of geographical location. Moreover, the assumption that immigrants breed right-wing success is challenged. This paper instead finds their achievements to be contingent on the political strategies employed by the center. For ethno-territorial and xenophobic parties to succeed, there first must be adversarial engagement of their issue from the established middle, otherwise, their issue is not made salient in the public's eyes.

1. Introduction

Following the 2008 European Sovereign Debt Crisis, radical left-wing parties began to garner the attention of electorates increasingly disenchanted with both mainstream party politics and deteriorating sociological conditions. Accordingly, states where said conditions were the most inauspicious experienced the greatest surge in radical leftism. In Greece, where the external budget deficit ballooned to -9.1 percent of overall GDP, *The Coalition of The Radical Left* (SYRIZA) were met with much support in the 2012 national elections, with their vote share climbed from a scant 4.9 percent to a noteworthy 16.79 percent. Now, SYRIZA fields Greek prime minister Alexis Tsipras and is, by all accounts, the primary left-wing party in Greek politics.

Conversely, radical right-wing actors have attained similar electoral gains. Although it is true that these parties had achieved greater success than left ones from 2000 to 2008, the far right still enjoyed a sizable spike in popularity across Europe post economic crisis. A myriad of other factors further led to the emboldening of both radical-right and ethnoterritorial parties in the 21st century. Consider the Syrian refugee crisis and its resulting impact on Germany and Sweden's ethnic composition as well as other EU member states or the EU's 8 country Easternization and subsequent compulsory migrancy programs. Both neophyte and longstanding center-right parties have made concerted efforts to increase the salience of immigration debates, coming out in favor of cultural homogeneity and increased law and order. And their electorates have been willing to listen, as radical-right support has more than tripled in national elections since 1998.

At first glance, these two types of parties share few commonalities. Ideologically speaking, far-left and far-right parties espouse diametrically opposed viewpoints on almost all issues, as well as stress separate political dimensions; the socialist far left and their economics-centered platform, and the authoritarian right organized around social concerns. However, 21st century European extremism is imbued with one inextricable linkage, the rise of populism and its accompanying rhetoric and strategies.

The term Populism has skyrocketed in popular vernacular in the wake of Britain's 2016 decision to leave the EU and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential victory. Consequently, mainstream media's usage of the term as an identifier for almost any extreme right and left parties/politicians has become ubiquitous in most states where such a party has emerged. Empiricism of populism, however, has been an arduous proposition in the social-scientific enterprise long before this spike, and many disparate definitions have emerged since academic scholarship surrounding the concept began. The definition of populism used here is premised on two basic understandings that form a consensus in this literature. Populists are both critical of elites and distinctly *antipluralist*. What is meant by these ideas will be expounded upon in my literature review.

While creating an empirical definition of populism is an integral part of this piece, it is not the primary question at hand. Rather, my paper looks to define the differences between left and right populist parties. Specifically, this paper focuses the sociological, economic, and mainstream party conditions and responses that provide for the rise of left vs. right-wing populism in contemporary Europe. The research question can thus be summed up as such: What are the circumstances that have engendered different branches of populist support in Europe post-2000?

To answer this question, dominant socioeconomic theories meant to explain radical-left and right support in conjunction with a theory of spatial interaction are tested. It is found that unemployment does an effective job of explaining left-wing populist electoral support, while the strategic behavior of existing actors does a good job of explaining right.

2. Literature review

Before beginning empirical measuring of the concept of interest, we need to address exactly what is meant by the terms in use and the implications of these terms. To do so, the literature review is divided into four subsections.

First, a working conception of term populism is formulated. The tradition of European populist studies has changed immensely from the 1970's and 1980's, when it was often used *writ large* to denote communist governments- both in social choice theory^{1,2} and comparative works. The differences present in contemporary studies of populism and the undeniable paradigm shift precipitated by Laclau³ are outlined. Central to my definition is the use of *antipluralism* and *antielitism* found in both his work and other inquiries.

Secondly, Left-Wing populism as it exists today is defined. The study of left-wing populism (LWP) itself is a burgeoning field, but still pales in comparison to the abundance of work that exists in relation to its right-wing counterpart. In fact, many contemporary scholars who study populism choose to omit LWP from their work altogether. I believe this is mistake that has left the topic severely understudied. Still, this paper attempt to identify a pattern in the minimal work that exists on the subject, as well as discusses LWP's notable stronghold in Latin American politics.

Next, I venture into the tumultuous field of defining right-wing populism. Since the 1980's, or what Mudde has deemed the era of "third wave" populism, the populist radical right has emerged as the most frequently written about phenomenon within political science.⁴ Additionally, there have been three separate movements within academia surrounding the subject. The largely historical pieces analyzing postwar Europe from 1945 to 1980, the beginnings of social scientific explanations for populist success that homed in on definitive pathologies for populist success from roughly 1980-2000, and the ongoing study of populist parties that largely attempts to frame populism as an independent variable rather than as an effect. All three of these periods and the scholars that feature prominently in them will be examined.

Lastly, there is a discussion of the connections frequently outlined between economic variables and measures of ethnic homogeneity in relation to the electoral success of populist parties. I also delineate the major properties of Meguid's theory of spatial competition,⁵ thus the groundwork for the two major components of my theory are adequately supported.

2.1 Defining Populism

In Müller's brief but illuminating 2016 work, it is suggested that populism is a "*moralistic* imagination of politics, a way of perceiving the political world that sets a morally pure and fully unified, but ultimately fictional, people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior."⁶ There is a key distinction that must be made here. *Elites* used in such a context is highly amorphous and often varies dramatically both from nation to nation and left-right leanings. However, what can be used to separate populist resistance from the traditional revolt present in almost every political party is that is centered against a structure of values more so than any political or economic establishment. In the type of manifestations in western European democracies, it can be said that populists represent

hostility towards the individualism, internationalism, and multiculturalism present within elite liberal circles.⁷ The same cannot be said uniformly for populism around the globe, and it is troublesome to form a proper typology out of these ideas alone. For such a reason, populism has been called a “soft ideology.”^{8,9}

While the creation of this elite and the values that are formed in opposition to it is important, antielitism’s critical function in the emergence of populist movements is its dialectical relation to the abstract concept of *the people*. The identification of an abstract elite allows heterogeneous concerns to be encapsulated within an ultimately homogenistic body. Such a conception does not exist within traditionally democratically liberal parties. For although vast differences may exist within these parties and their members, they are never represented as a monolithic unit placed in opposition to another monolithic unit. In accordance with traditional liberal values, there is an emphasis placed on the *individual* that cannot so easily be subsumed.

This distinction is elucidated effectively by two theoretical insights present in Laclau’s work,³ the contrast between the *logic of difference* and the *logic of equivalence*. The logic of difference postulates that differences are to be accounted for when constructing society. Thus, a government advocating for a welfare state as its endpoint would in effect be employing such a logic because “social need should be met differentially and there would be no basis for creating an internal frontier.”³ Social differences are to be accounted for in government action. Similarly, a neoliberal society presents the same goal, with the endpoint instead being a society derived from Smithian economic principles. In such cases, the market would represent a “panacea for a fissure less society.”³

Conversely, populist movements organize around the latter of the two theories, the logic of equivalence. This theory focuses on the drawing of society into antagonistic frontiers and is largely incongruent with the logic of difference. Laclau agrees with this premise, but ultimately maintains that the two logics require each other and are ultimately interrelated in the creation of the public. Still, for the purposes of this paper, it is best to assume that populist demands employ equivalential logic and to put aside the role that differential logic plays.

Through the use of equivalential logic, populist movements form what Laclau calls “equivalential bonds.” These can be thought of as binding signifiers that unite “the people” against the elite. Once more, the elite constitute a set of values rather than tangible ideas, which is one reason why Laclau demarcates these bonds as “floating signifiers.” Ultimately, the function of these chains is to transform the *plebs* into the *populus* or “the body of all citizens.” They allow a partiality “to function as the totality of the community.”³

We thus have come to an understanding of what populism is in its purest form. My definition does not differ immensely from Müller’s, but I hope that I have helped illustrate a few central tenets of this definition effectively through a synthesis of Laclau’s work. First, populism does not conform to any party naturally. It can accompany both left and right preferences and parties of different sizes as long as the logic of equivalence and anti-elitism is present in its usage. Second, the lines drawn to separate the elite are often arbitrary and not limited to criticism of political actors, but rather anyone who espouses the values targeted. Third, the people in populism is an *antipluralist* term, meant to represent a uniform, ever-growing in-group, while simultaneously maximizing out-group differences.

2.2 Understanding Left-Wing Populism

Left populism has been invigorated across Europe. *SYRIZA* in Greece, *SP* in the Netherlands, *Sinn Féin* in Ireland and many others have all enjoyed an uptick in popularity in recent years, consistent with the trends of the 21st century. Furthermore, traditional Communist parties and their roots have been all but extirpated from European party politics and established center-left parties such as the German *Social Democrats* have moved rightward, leaving the political situation ripe for the emergence of new left-wing demands.

So how exactly do these demands differ from those of their predecessors? Left-wing populism, just as traditional socialism does, employs a class based political ideology.⁹ The obvious distinction is that it substitutes “the people” for the proletariat, and as such has far less concern for ideological purity and class consciousness¹⁰—the formation of “the people” is not clearly drawn across class boundaries. Additionally, left-wing populism emphasizes the rapacious tendencies of the establishment, stressing that political parties choose to pander to the business elite rather than to the masses it was elected to serve.⁸ This is how the “anti-elitism” addressed earlier manifests here. Lastly, European left-wing populists raise awareness of effects that supranational decision makers have on their nation, often highlighting the neoliberal austerity policies of the EU.¹¹

Left-wing populism is fairly new to Europe, historically enjoying much greater success in Latin America. Perón’s regime in Argentina, Cárdena’s rule in Mexico, and Vargas’ reign in Brazil are often identified as quintessential examples of “classical populism.”¹² These leaders’ achievements have been attributed to a combination of the widespread attachment of electorates to exuberant political personalities and the shift from agro-export economies to rapid state-led industrialization that separate Latin America from Europe.¹⁰ And while current economic conditions

have changed, LWP has still maintained traction in 21st century Latin American politics in the form of Chávez in Venezuela, Correa in Ecuador, Morales in Bolivia and more.

Furthermore, socio-economic disparities are and have always been much greater in Latin America than Western- and most of Eastern- Europe. To this point, Mudde has identified twenty-first century Latin America populist movements as being *inclusive* of all lower strata social demands as opposed to focusing on the *exclusion* of outgroup ones.⁸ Because the welfare system is more advanced in most of Europe, popular movements tend to be structured around “welfare chauvinism,” the point that immigrants are stealing welfare benefits, rather than the actual implementation of federal housing programs, health care benefits or other social programs.^{13,14} For this reason, populism in Europe seems to naturally accompany an authoritarian sentiment consistent with right-wing populism.

2.3 Understanding Right-Wing Populism

Right-wing populism (RWP) brackets “the people” as a culturally homogenous group rather than as an economically downtrodden one. As such, it tends to be centered around nativism, xenophobia, and targeting of cultural outsiders.¹⁵ Politicians link immigrants and asylum seekers to the erosion of the welfare state- what I have called welfare chauvinism above. Obviously, parties utilizing these tactics have existed for some time in both western and eastern Europe. Accordingly, there is an expansive amount of literature surrounding them and their perceived explanatories, which has vacillated greatly in terms of scope, data and method, causes, and consequences.¹³ A brief discussion of the three eras of scholarship identified by Mudde serves to highlight these differences and situate 21st century populism properly in this paper.

From 1945 to 1980, radical right parties were predominately referred to as “neo-fascist.”^{16,17,18,19} Most of the work in this period chose to focus on the similarities between pre-war and post-war Europe and was written by historians.^{18,19} There was far less done here on the subject compared to the two forthcoming generations- a consistency with the fairly low number of right-wing populists that achieved noteworthy success. A few parties sprang up (e.g. NPD in Germany, PSI in Italy), but for the most part voters were not quick to forget the perturbing racist genocide associated with the war, and as such were hesitant to vote for parties espousing racist ideals.

The radical right became a hot-button issue in political science beginning in the late 1980’s. As new right-wing challengers emerged in France, Austria, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Sweden, and Belgium, researchers set out to understand why these parties’ ethnocentric policies appealed to electorates in countries with seemingly well-settled party systems. Many conflicting hypotheses emerged, which are summarized effectively by Karapin.²⁰ One view maintained the neo-fascist explanation carried over from years past, holding that the modern far right somehow had organizational linkages with interwar fascist movements. The second asserted the far right was a single issue, xenophobic response to the multiculturalization of European society. The next looked at voters growing disenchantment with the mainstream, often referred to as “political alienation.”²⁰ A final outlook determined the extreme right to be a backlash to the rise of the Greens and other culturally liberal parties of the 1970’s.

Emerging from these came an amalgamation of the second and third hypotheses. It was found that the influx of immigrants from “Non-Occidental” countries did contribute to the Radical Right’s popularity, but only when combined with decisively capitalist, free market undertones.^{14,21} The combination of these viewpoints formed an underrepresented dimension that drove growing discontent from longtime center-right voters.

Modern day scholarship on the radical right now tends to utilize the “populist” label consistent with this paper, and often looks at the “supply side” of populism.⁴ Due to the radical right having a consistent presence in Europe since the resurgence in the 1980’s, it is now viewed as an understood component of political competition. Studies thus often look at what happens when these parties achieve success rather than why they achieve success in the first place.

2.4 Meguid’s Theory

In many ways, this paper falls in line with the 20th century studies of populism mentioned above. I utilize populists’ vote share as my dependent variable and look at both economic and social measures as my causes. I investigate whether these measures are a strong correlate of left-populism, right-populism, or both. However, my work looks at more than just socio-economic variables.

I also examine existing actors’ decisions and their subsequent impact on these parties. Research on niche political parties suggests that ideological and topical shifts by mainstream political actors are a precondition for single-issue parties’ electoral successes.⁵ This shift can come in many forms. Meguid first explains how a manipulation of vote share between competitors in an established political climate leads to a mobilization of far-right and far-left actors. For example, if a center-left or center-right party wishes to diminish the vote share of their primary competitors, they

can increase the salience of issues comports with extreme ideologies, thus allowing extreme left and right parties to solidify their position in public discourse. Moreover, the shift can also come in the form of movement to the political center. As political actors converge on the median voter, the polar ends of the political spectrum are left unoccupied, which provides fringe parties with new voter stratas to appeal to.

Many populist parties can be understood as “niche” in this manner, but there are also instances where established parties have resorted to populist strategies. For example, despite the fact that Fidesz of Hungary is in the center-right bloc EPP, it is undeniable that they are in fact populist if populism is to be defined as it is here. I assert that these parties’ movements could be understood as a by-product of extreme right and left sentiment further polarizing political structures, which could explain the rise in extreme-moderate coalitions,²² but fail to prove this. Ultimately, this would require an additional paper.

3. Economic Thesis

As previously mentioned, left-wing populist parties mobilize antagonistically to a construction of the economic elite. For *Podemos*, vindicating the right to employment, increasing access to subsidized public housing, the cancellation of unjust debt, and the end of exorbitant austerity policies form the basis of their platform, yet these desires are only collectively unified by the identification of the “casta” as the root of Spain’s economic woes.²³ There are three cardinal worries that can be traced in these woes which extend to left populism within Europe as a whole.

First, it may be economic disparity that triggers a shift to the left protest vote. As citizens begin to become disgruntled with the lions-share of goods being held by a minute fraction of the population, they may begin to become financially jealous of this faction and register a vote in opposition to “the elite.” In this scenario, the elite would connote the financially wealthy.

It also reasons that globalization itself may be the driving force. The rise in left-populism has coincided with European economies becoming increasingly open, and this globalization has not exactly produced widespread collective benefits.²⁴ Left-populists frequently employ tactics of Euroscepticism and are critical of decisions that are identified as being made by outside forces. Here, the targeted elite is constructed as those perceived as having a transnational presence.

Lastly, it could simply be that downtrodden economic conditions induces left-populism. It is imperative that associated variables are examined as to not ignore any low-hanging fruit.

Emerging from these three comes the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1A: Left, not right, populism will be most prevalent in states where unevenly distributed patterns of wealth, globalized economies, and comparatively impecunious conditions exist.

It may be possible that right populism is also correlated with these same factors. For while right populists concern themselves principally with social concerns, there are common linkages formed by right-wing populists between migrants, unemployment, and the decline of the welfare state. So, while financial distribution, openness, and poor conditions may be inextricably linked with left-wing populism, it may also be less directly linked with right-wing.

Hypothesis 1B: Left and right populism will be most prevalent in states where unevenly distributed patterns of wealth, globalized economies, and comparatively impecunious conditions exist.

4. Immigrant Thesis

Right-wing populists run campaigns based on cultural and ethno-territorial matters, as opposed to the largely economic stance taken by left-wing populists. In fact, what separates contemporary right-wing populism from the former radical right is the particular emphasis placed on anti-immigration policies.¹⁴ Whereas the former radical right mixed free-market liberalism in with authoritarian tendencies, the new radical right chooses to either disengage the economic dimension or stress a form of economic protectionism incongruous with past far right messages.

Take for example the transformation undertaken by the *National Rally* in France (formerly the *National Front*). Under Jean-Marie Le Pen in the 90’s and early 2000’s, the party mixed a distinct breed of anti-semitism with neo-liberal economic policies in order to appeal to small business and agrarian interests. Le Pen’s daughter, Marine, maintained these exclusionary tones in the form of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant policies, but shifted to an

economic platform organized around French protectionism.¹⁵ Similar developments have occurred in Austria, Poland, and Hungary.

It then seems intuitive to wonder what extent cultural outsiders are necessary for the populist right. Do greater amounts of ethnic groups and refugees provide for a rise in the popularity? Why would a citizen's ethnic and national identity feel threatened if there exists no "threat" in the first place? A corollary hypothesis may be:

Hypothesis 2A: Right-wing populism will be most prevalent among states with the greatest amount of immigrants and refugees.

5. Established Political Actors' Electoral Strategies

Meguid has found that the success of niche and neophyte parties depends on the behavior of established political actors. For a single-issue party to achieve electoral success in occupying the space on the far-left or the far-right, there first has to be a change in the political strategies used by existing actors. Otherwise, supporters of traditional parties have no reason to register a vote out of line with Downsian expectations.

These shifts in strategies, both on the left and the right, can come in a multitude of ways. Once an extreme issue is made salient, the success of fringe parties relies on the behavior of the both the proximal and non-proximal actor. Meguid has articulated three party strategies that can be used to sort political behavior: Dismissive, accommodative, and adversarial. Looking at figure 1 below, the effects that these strategies have on niche party electoral success, issue ownership, issue position, and issue salience are made clear.

Table 1. Impact of party strategies on niche issues

Mechanisms

Strategies	Issue Salience	Issue Position	Issue Ownership	Niche Electoral Support
Dismissive	Decreases	No Movement	No effect	Decreases
Accommodative	Increases	Converges	Transfers to Mainstream Party	Decreases
Adversarial	Increases	Diverges	Reinforces Niche ownership	Increases

We see first that the invocation of dismissive strategies by mainstream actors leads to an overall weakening of smaller players. Because powerful governmental parties are more established than their less popular opponents, niche challengers are unable to achieve electoral success if their issue is never introduced into a state's political climate. However, simply having said issue introduced is not sufficient. This can lead to a loss of issue-ownership as established proximal actors converge on weaker actor's policy positions and chooses to incorporate said issues into their political platforms or use an *accommodative* electoral strategy. Rather, what is necessary for an increase of niche parties' electoral achievements is issue divergence, either by non-proximal or proximal actors. If non-proximal parties wish to decrease the popularity of their mainstream partisan opponents, they can take up an *adversarial* position in staunch opposition to unestablished niche interests. This leads to internal fissures within their established competitor's party lines, as they are left with a choice to appeal to either advocates or opponents of said interest, hamstrung by spatial limitations. Proximal actors act in the very same way if they feel that far-right or far-left interests will not appeal to their established base.

The success of 21st century populism may then be ascribable to this theory. If populist parties can be understood as "niche" parties, then it is entirely possible that interaction with the political mainstream can explain their successes.

Hypothesis 3A: The success of both left and right-wing populist parties is contingent on the electoral strategies employed by mainstream political actors.

Like my last theory, it could also be true that is theory only explains the increase in either right or left-wing. There is a longstanding discussion about how established political actors' decisions tie in with right-wing populist parties

emerging, but there have been few mentions about how established parties' decisions affect the emergence of left-wing populist parties. For this reason, it could be true that contemporary left-wing populist parties are not as drastically affected by the behavior of established political actors as the Green Party movements analyzed by Meguid.

Hypothesis 3B: The success of right, not left, wing populist parties is contingent on the electoral strategies employed by mainstream political actors.

6. Measurement

The first economic condition I am interested in is economic disparity. By disparities, I mean inequalities in the way that the total output of wealth is dispersed throughout a given state. Of course, this is not the only tool for measuring economic disparity throughout a population. One could also test for average income or even a non-monetary component. However, by providing wealth as the basis for my economic variables, I hope to find evidence of inequality engendering or accentuating populist movements in a manner that a study of average income would not facilitate. For it has been established that "static" measures, such as income, must be supplemented by more "dynamic" measures, often referred to as measures of mobility.²⁵

To test this distribution, I proxy the Gini coefficient, which is scaled on an axis from 0 to 1, with numbers closer to 1 meant to represent higher levels of wealth inequality. Also implicit in the coefficient are many factors that may contribute to heightened variance amongst economic classes, such as tax policies, economic growth, and redistributive decisions. I further include the Palma Index. This measures the ratio of the richest 10 percent gross national income divided by the poorest 40 percent. Because it measures income not wealth, its primary purpose is to supplement findings from the GINI variable.

Trade/GDP is included to represent economic "openness." Globalization is often targeted by both Left Wing and Right-Wing populists alike, and this variable test if such a reality correlates with these parties rise in popularity. As opposed to simply using imports/exports, Trade/GDP is intended to capture the strength of state's domestic economy relative to their presence abroad. Lastly, GDP per capita and unemployment are included as catch-all variables. GDP per capita is a general substitute for strife, while unemployment serves the purpose of deciphering whether rhetoric about solving unemployment appeals to citizens based on fact or fiction.

Immigrant population, the second phenomena I am interested in, is fairly self-explanatory. There is however one key distinction to be made here. For the purposes of this study, I am measuring both refugees/asylum seekers as well as other immigrant categories. There seems to be a conflation in populist rhetoric, as many right-wing actors often fail to distinguish between those seeking asylum protections and ethnically heterogeneous non-refugee migrants. In other words, extreme-right populism seems to advocate solely for ethnically homogenous ends and ignore logistical details of migration. I thus measure immigrant percentage, refugee/asylum seekers, and refugee/asylum seekers per 1000 to adjust for population.

The data I am using in my quantitative analysis includes both parties that have transformed into populist ones and those that have utilized populist strategies since their inception. The data in question comes from Matthijs Rooduijn and the team of 35 academics he worked with, who fastidiously analyzed political speeches, manifestos, advertisements, and slogans in deeming the populist label to both newly formed and well-established parties.²⁶ To name a few examples of the latter, I am including the *Hungarian Civic Alliance* (Fidesz) and the *Law and Justice Party* (Pis) party in Poland despite the fact that their rise to prominence occurred pre-2000. This is because Rooduijn has deemed their populist transformation to have occurred in 2010 for the former and 2005 for the latter, and I wish not to exclude parties that are commonly referred to as populist from my study. Further, Countries deemed undemocratic have been removed. Although many parties in these countries are undoubtedly populist, a cross-national study of autocratic and democratic elections introduces too many confounding variables to be sound. A worry about this is the omission of some of Eastern Europe (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), which is certainly a worry to be had.

Additionally, my data includes ideology scores for each of the parties I have included. These scores are separated into two dimensions, economic and social, and can be found at parlgov.org.²⁷ A score of 1 denotes a party in favor of complete spontaneous redistribution on a state-market scale, while a score of 1 on the liberty-authority scale signifies a party in favor of *laissez-faire* government regarding social affairs. I have created weighted ideology scores for countries with more than one populist party as to maintain my unit of analysis, countries.

7. Summary statistics

The statistics indicate that right-wing populism is far more robust amongst European Democracies. Of the 31 states analyzed, the 28 EU member states, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, I found 0.38 left-wing populist parties per state compared to 1.2 right-wing ones, with LWP holding 4.6 percent of the vote share compared to 16 for their right-wing counterparts. Furthermore, all but 5 states in the selected sample have RWP parties in parliament in some capacity. It's readily apparent that populist strategies manifest primarily in right-wing agents as opposed to left, a finding likely unbeknownst to few.

The vote share gap lessens, albeit marginally, when one looks at states experiencing Left and Right populism exclusively. The mean vote share for the 12 LWP countries in my study is 11.9, while the mean vote share for the 26 states with RWP parties is 19.3. However, of the 12 LWP states, only five possess a vote share above 10 percent, with 16 of the 26 RWP states reporting a presence above such a threshold.

Italy, the country with the strongest LWP presence, is comprised solely of Matteo De Luigi's 5 Star Movement, which took home a massive 32.7 percent of votes in the March 4th Italian general election. A number more than three standard deviations away from the mean when all countries are considered, and 2.16 from the mean when looking solely at the 12 states previously identified. On the other hand, right-wing populism enjoys an even more vigorous presence in the state of Hungary, where Prime Minister Viktor Orban has utilized populist strategies during his second stint at the helm of the once moderate *Hungarian Civic Party* (Fidesz). in conjunction with Gábor Vona's *Movement for a Better Hungary* (Jobbik), which has consistently received around 20 percent of available votes following Orban's reappointment in 2010. These two parties account for a staggering 68.34 percent of Hungarian voters, 24 percent higher than the next largest vote share, Bulgaria, and more than three standard deviations away from both the mean of the 26 RWP countries and of the unaltered dataset.

Table 2. Summary statistics for key variables

	Mean	STDev	Min	Max
Unemp.	6.12	3.52	1.9	18.9
Gini	0.31	0.038	0.25	0.37
Palma	1.19	0.21	0.9	1.6
Tr/GDP	126	73	60	424
GDP/CAP	42,629	16,895	20,947	103,744
Immig.	9.8	7.12	1.7	32
Refugee	78,719	18,316	321	970,302
R/1000	2.612	3.38	0.06	14.8

For wealth inequality, as can be seen from table 2, the average Gini coefficient for my dataset sits at .31, with Bulgaria being the maximum .37, and Iceland being the minimum at .25. Of note is that Italy comes in at a noteworthy .354, while Hungary comes in at a scant .288. All Gini statistics fell within two standard deviations of the mean. Trade/GDP, my other economic variable, averages at 122 percent, meaning that the average countries total trade is higher than its domestic GDP, a statistic possible because exports are not accounted for in GDP. percent.

The highest amount of Refugee/Asylum Seekers reside in Germany, where 970, 000 applicants and accepters have been reported in an 82.79-million-person state. The lowest is Iceland, where only 321 have been admitted. Refugee/Asylum seekers vary immensely from country to country, with a Standard Deviation of 18,3136.

In terms of ideology, LWP parties average a 3.05 on the Liberty/Authority Scale and a 2.9 on the State/Market dimension. In other words, it can be said that, on average, LWP parties are slightly more to the left regarding economic

concerns than they are on social issues. The complete inverse is true for RWP parties. RWP parties are typically moderate on the State/Market dimension with a score of 5.8 but are far-right on social issues with a Liberty-Authority score of 7.7 on average. Moreover, Germany's populist left, constituted solely of *Die Linke*, are the most fervent advocates of state redistribution with a score of 1.067, and *Podemos* in Spain are the most Libertarian at 1.4. Conversely, The Netherlands, houses the biggest proponents of market economics at 8.0939 on the State-Market scale, while Belgium and the *Flemish Nationalist* are the most Authoritative at 9.5234 on the Liberty-Authoritarian dimension. Ideology scores are not included in table 2 as they are not integral to this study, but they do provide compelling insights.

8. Case studies

A qualitative cross-sectional study of countries with both strong and weak left-wing and right-wing populist presences is in order to test Meguid's theory of spatial competition. The two states I have chosen to represent this in my study are Portugal and the Netherlands.

Portugal is selected because it has experienced minimal populist success despite above-average economic inequality and refugee presence. The right-wing *National Renovator Party* (PNR) has failed to achieve any discernible electoral advances since their emergence in 2000. Accordingly, I expect to see little evidence of adversarial tactics employed by either the center-left *Socialist Party* (PS) or the center-right *Social Democrats* (PSD)

On the contrary, Netherlands has experienced much right-wing populist success, with Geert Wilder's *Party for Freedom* (PVV) making substantial strides since its surprise achievement in the 2006 legislative elections. Furthermore, the left-wing populist *Socialist Party* (SP) has overtaken labor, with their greatest gains coming in the same election as the PVV's emergence.

These case studies provide an interesting juxtaposition for two reasons apart from the differing levels of populist success. First off, the Netherlands position in the EU is vastly different from Portugal's. Whereas Portugal joined in 1986, Holland was one of the original six. The Netherlands' relationship with the larger member states is more established because of this, though this is not to say that interactions and legislative decision making between two has not had its fair share of turbulence.²⁸ As a result, the tone of populism in Holland differs from that in Portugal. Secondly, the geographical differences between the two are also noteworthy. Historically, much of the work on political extremism has focused on Europe's northern states (France, Germany, Austria etc...), but I choose a study with Portugal to understand what extent my claim may or may not be generalizable.

9. Regression Analysis

To test my theories, I run six different multivariate Ordinary Least Squares regressions. Notably, Trade/GDP is scaled in 20-unit intervals, GDP per Capita is measured in 1000s of dollars, and Refugee/Asylum measures the effect of 10,000 seekers on vote share. Gini and Palma display the effect of a .1 increase. The first two regression models measure the economic thesis first on all countries and then only countries with a left-wing populist presence. The third and fourth measure the immigrant thesis in conjunction with the unemployment variable, as unemployment constitutes an important fragment of RWP's platforms. The former includes the whole sample, while the latter only countries with a right-wing presence. Finally, the last two models test the economic thesis with the same samples as the previous two regressions.

Only one variable comes back statistically significant at a 95 percent level, which is Unemployment in the very first regression. Much of this can be attributed to the small sample size my project entails. That being said, there are many interesting substantive and directional findings.

Unemployment is strongly correlated with left-wing populism. Both regressions show a noteworthy increase in vote share when unemployment is raised one percentage point. Gini and Palma, on the other hand, return no results of substance. The sign of Gini is incorrect in both instances, and it seems that an increase is highly representative of a decrease in LWP, contrary to my theory. The sign of Palma is correct in the first regression, but the effect is miniscule when considering how it is scaled. Lastly, the direction of Trade/GDP and GDP per Capita switches per each regression, and the effect of both is marginal at best, either negative or positive.

The immigrant thesis does a negligible job of explaining right-wing populist success, as the signs of all variables are opposite to my previous understanding. On the other hand, the economic thesis returns mixed results. Once more the Gini and Palma measures display different directions, leading me to wonder about multicollinearity. If the Palma

is accurate, it shows a strong link between income inequality and the strength, more so than the existence, of right-wing parties. Lastly, the effect of 20 percentage points of Trade/GDP is slightly stronger than the effect on left-wing parties, showing that a globalized economy may contribute more to the popularity of right populism than left.

Table 3. Regression results

	LWP	LWP	RWP	RWP	RWP	RWP
Intercept	-1.77 (15.98)	44.06 (65.66)	23.88 (8.54)	26.58 (10.28)	31.34 (31.38)	34.61 (33.02)
Unemp.	1.62 (0.56)	1.92 (1.4)	-0.32 (0.96)	-0.44 (1.13)	-1.009 (1.1)	-1.28 (1.27)
Gini	-1.814 (8.248)	-8.02 (37)			1.2542 (16.19)	-13.83 (17.352)
Palma	.159 (1.4714)	-1.57 (5.464)			.635 (2.889)	3.588 (3.278)
Tr/GDP	-0.54 (0.60)	0.42 (2.2)			0.22 (1.0)	0.6 (1.2)
GDP/CAP	0.053 (0.11)	-0.34 (3.91)			-0.35 (0.23)	-0.33 (0.27)
Immig.			-0.46 (0.46)	-0.45 (0.57)		
Refugee			-0.014 (0.18)	-0.054 (0.19)		
R /1000			-0.79 (1.03)	-0.47 (1.49)		
N	31	12	31	26	31	26

10. Portugal

The Portuguese military insurrection of April 25, 1974, often coined the *Carnation Revolution* because of the gifting of flowers from Celeste Caeiro to Portuguese soldiers, represented the end of long-standing right-wing fascist *Estado Novo* rule and the beginnings of Portuguese party politics as they exist today. Following the exiling of Marcello Caetano and subsequent implementation President António de Spínola and Prime Minister Vasco Gonçalves, Portugal fell under communist rule from May 1974 until July 1976, when Mário Soares' *Socialist Party* (PS) defeated Leninist Party candidate Álvaro Cunhal. A victory that can largely be attributed to a televised debate between the two candidates that pitted the exuberant and communicative Soares against the mechanical and unimaginative Gonçalves. Since Soares, the PS has maintained a strong national presence, with a vote share never dwindling below 21.3. As of the most recent 2015 Portuguese elections, the PS own 86 seats (33.6 percent vote share), and field current prime minister António Costa.

PS's main competitor, the center-right *Social Democrats* (PSD), first enjoyed success in 1979. In 1983, the party formed a coalition with the PS known as the Central Bloc- a move that illustrates the lack of programmatic organization within both parties' platforms.²⁹ The PSD won the highest number of seats in the 2015 election with a 39.8 percent vote share but could not form a parliamentary majority given the plethora of left-wing parties in

parliament. Accordingly, the PS are currently in power based on a durable agreement with The Communist, Green Party, and Left Bloc Salgado.³⁰

Post Carnation Revolution, the radical right in Portugal failed to manage any presence on the political scene. It wasn't until the latter half of the 90's when the National Alliance (AN) were formed that any semblance of pre-revolution Salazarian authoritarianism was reinvigorated. However, the AN's presence was short lived, as they failed to gather up the 7,500 requisite votes to be registered by the constitutional court.²⁹ This failure by the AN led to a mass defection to the Democratic Renewal Party, who were quickly radicalized and given a new name in 2000, *The National Renewal Party* (PNR).

The AN defectors voted new leaders in, first in the form of Paulo Rodriguez (2002-2005) and then José Pinto Coelho (2005-present). Both succeeded in ingrating tenets of right-wing European populism into traditional Portuguese nationalism, which previously had semblances of multiculturalism. The PNR was now a firmly anti-system, anti-establishment party, which placed anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim issues at the forefront of their agenda. With this refurbished platform, they set their sights on the 2009 legislative election.

Despite their best efforts, the 2009 election did not breed the transformative results that Coelho was searching for, as the PNR only managed 11,503 votes (0.20 vote share), a number in line with their past failures. An examination of the PS and PSD's interactive strategies, or lack thereof, reveals the answer to this failure.

Neither the PS and PSD displayed much engagement with the PNR during critical campaigning for the 2009 election. The ruling PS, who enjoyed a parliamentary majority from 2005-2009, were confronted with more salient worries than those engaged by the radical-right. The PS's ruling years were marred not only by the brutal financial outcome many of the Southern states faced after the Eurozone economic crisis, but also with high profile instances of in-party political scandals.³⁰ In addition, Manifesto Project data and surveys reveal that religion and concomitant moral concerns have always constituted an important electoral dimension among Portuguese voters. In 2007, two referendums were held on abortion and appropriate legislation. Aligned with creating new legislation allowing women abortions were many left-wing parties, one of which was the PS. Paramount in their campaign was the overdue secularization of Portuguese society and the departure of the Church as a strict moral guidebook. In contrast, the PSD and the mainstream right were in favor of pro-Church and traditional values. While the PNR did actively oppose this legislation, their view overlapped with the moderate-right and received little attention due to lack of ownership.

Lastly, as briefly discussed earlier, the PS are currently in coalition with three other left-parties. As they lost nearly half a million voters from the 2005 to 2009 election cycle and the majority, they were forced to group with The Greens, The Left Bloc, and The Communist to prevent the implementation of a conservative government. Both advancements of these parties and the failure of the PS in local elections contributed to an understanding from the PS that there were other concerns besides mobilization of the PNR against the PSD that must be addressed. They first needed to prevent the erosion of the long-standing center-left.

It was not as if 1) The PNR were not critical of mainstream actors or 2) The PNR and their platform were not visible to the electorate. While the main player the PNR set in their sights was/is the moderate-right *People's Party* (CDS-PP), their grievances were linked to the SD and PSD in that they articulated the CDS-PP as maintaining *status quo* politics in coalition form.³⁰ So, while they may have directly complained towards the CDS-PP, their complaints were truthfully directed upwards. Additionally, the PNR held many marches and demonstrations to increase their presence. They rallied against the expansion of the EU to Turkish migrants, against the immigration of Brazilian citizens, and against the lack of security provided for Portuguese speakers in post-apartheid South Africa. All of these demonstrations have been fairly successful in drumming up support and/or knowledge of their campaign.

The most likely cause of the PNR's failure thus seems not to be too close an association with the center or visibility, but rather that their issue has not been activated by the mainstream. If the PNR and PSD continue to employ dismissive strategies regarding topics such as immigration bans and amendments to the refugee/asylum system, things are likely to stay this way.

11. Netherlands

21st century mainstream politics in the Netherlands has been dominated by two center-right parties currently in coalition: The *People's Party for Freedom and Democracy* (VVD) and the *Christian Democratic Appeal* (CDA). The CDA received the highest amount of votes all legislative elections from 2002 to 2006, while the VVD achieved the same accomplishment in every election since. Every ruling government in Dutch parliament since the 2002 legislative election has been comprised of varying center-right parties, with Mark Rutte from the VVD currently serving as Prime Minister. A position he has maintained in three different coalitions stretching back to 2010.

The center-left in Holland has not fared nearly as well in recent memory. The party with the most historical success, the social-democratic *Labour Party* (PvdA), fell to seventh in the 2017 election. It is not since the 1998-2002 term when Wim Kok was in office that the center-left fielded the prime minister. Furthermore, the PvdA currently wrestle with the Democrats 66 (D66) for center-left control, with the D66 jumping over their historically dominant counterpart in the aforementioned election.

The Dutch left-wing populist party, the *Socialist Party* (SP) gradually rose in popularity beginning at the turn of the century, spiking in 2006 when the party secured 16.6 percent of votes. Interestingly enough, the decline of PvdA does not coincide with these results. Rather, both the SP and the PvdA have fallen out of favor in the previous few elections. I examine why this may be through a detailed analysis of the events leading up to the 2006 election.

Geert Wilders formed the *Party for Freedom* (PVV) following Pim Fortuyn and his eponymous party's populist footsteps when he decided to break from the VVD in 2004. Much like Fortuyn, Wilders dominates all facets of party activity, choosing to delegate very little to any collaborators. Instead, he chooses to unilaterally select and train candidates, plan political campaigns and strategy, and demand sole responsibility of the PVV's platform.³¹ A platform which, much like the PNR, focuses on Islamophobia and a separation of Western values and ideas. In 2016, Wilders posted a one-page facebook manifesto proposing the ban of the Quran and the shutdown of all Mosques in Netherlands. He has further called Moroccan immigrants "scum," and explicated that "All the values Europe stands for- freedom, democracy, human rights- are incompatible with Islam."³²

The PVV secured six percent vote share in the 2006 election, and a 15.5 percent vote share in the 2010 election. While some of this increase can be attributed to a simple increase in notoriety, much can also be explained by the strategy undertaken by the VVD in response to Wilder's departure. I look at what this strategy was and how it ultimately failed miserably leading up to the 2010 election.

In the years leading up to 2006, the CDA led government of Jan Peter Balkenende pushed through a series of neoliberal reform policies. Domestic welfare initiatives such as the invalidity benefits system dealing the with sick and disabled were slashed, unemployment benefits were reduced, and the retirement age was pushed back to 65. And while Labor fumbled over the proper response to these measures, the SD solidified themselves as the only option for voters firmly against the initiatives taken by the conservative leadership. They offered up a resounding "no" in a sea of indecisiveness.

Furthermore, the Dutch electorate had become increasingly unstable since the 1980's. Of the 11 most volatile elections in post-war Western Europe, with volatility defined as "the net change within the electoral party system resulting from individual vote transfers,"³³ three have occurred in the Netherlands.³⁴ This volatility was exacerbated by the assassination of Fortuyn in 2002, and elections have continued to follow in this pattern since.

The evidence that adversarial tactics by the right or left were the driving cause of this success, as opposed to these two above explanatories, is minimal. Because both the PvdA and the CDA/VVP's perceived support was slipping, they had to explore the option of forming a grand coalition with labor. Also, the PVV faced much internal disagreement that splintered their strategic maneuvering. Both Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders exhibited discontent with Rutte's policies and vociferously criticized his coddling of the left and weakness on immigration. This activity led to the two leaving the PVV. The former through expulsion, and the latter when he formed the VVD.

Labour attempted to employ an accommodative strategy by altering their welfare ideas to encapsulate some of the SP's proposals (health care reform, lowering rent), but this proved ineffective. Part of this can be attributed to the uptick in popularity the SP enjoyed following their opposition to the amending of the European constitution. Because they already enjoyed success and were understood as a viable competitor, it was difficult to wrestle their economic issues away from them- their issue ownership was too high.

The PVV's gains, on the other hand, can be understood as a by-product adversarial tactics of the mainstream. Both the VVD and the PvdA displayed displeasure with Wilder's statements leading up to the 2010 election (and still do). In response to proposed measures advocating for declaring a state of emergency, preventative arrests, and the possible denaturalization of immigrants, the PVV pointed to Wilders as a "clear break" with the constitutional heart of Dutch liberalism.³¹ Additionally, Wilders was left out of the PVV led cabinet formation of 2010 because of ideological differences with the right.

The PvdA's response was even harsher. In face to face debates, the PvdA and Wilders were frequently pitted against each other in an inflammatory manner. The repeated failure of the PvdA in these debates undoubtedly contributed to Wilder's success and lead them to pick younger, quicker on their feet front men. The PvdA also embraced Wilder's prosecutorial process following comments made out parliament and the possible violation of Article 71 of the Dutch constitution. A position that led some to wonder about their views on free speech and was generally regarded as unpopular even amongst left-wing parties.

In sum, it seems that the tactics employed by dominant parties in response to both the PNR and PVV contributed to their success/failure. However, left-wing populist success seem to be less contingent on these strategies. It is

instead high unemployment that marks the possibility for electoral gains. This prompts a further realization that perhaps left-wing populist parties are not niche, but instead have become mainstream in much of Europe. They then have access to a greater arsenal in their political toolkit and are less likely to be affected by traditional powerhouses. As such, Meguid's theory is rendered inapplicable.

12. Conclusion

This paper fails to make a claim regarding shifts from center-right and center-left parties into populist territory. Although these parties are included in my regressions, a complete answer to this question would have to come in the form of a set of rigorous temporal cross-sectional case studies. I instead focus on either neophyte parties (PNR, PVV) or parties that have achieved success inconsistent with their history (SP). My paper thereby fails to extend Meguid's theory to these parties.

What my paper does prove is that the explanatories of ethno-territorial and nationalist parties and contemporary right-wing populist parties are very much one in the same. It is not immigration that causes right-wing extremism, but rather hostility from the mainstream. Parties should focus on the incidental effects that their strategic maneuvering may have on far-right parties and behave accordingly. This may mean more right-left cross boundary coalitions, or perhaps simply an increase in truthful campaigning. These behaviors should have a suppressive effect.

Left-wing populism and the erosion of the center-left provide an additional concern. My analysis suggests that economic policies focused on managing unemployment over other economic concerns may prove useful. This is true not only for domestic governments but also the European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Foundation (IMF). Unemployment has taken a backseat to other concerns in recent years, and policy-makers should begin to consider the implications of these decisions on party-systems. This should contribute to a return to the status-quo and an abandonment of the protest vote.

Further research should continue the two-step quantitative and qualitative approach employed by my analysis and apply it to further countries/regions. Of interest would be the various manifestations of left-wing populism in Latin America. Do these governments organize in response to widespread unemployment, or do the in-difference socioeconomic disparities render my findings ungeneralizable? It would also be interesting to find if party competition is engaged in the same manner. Does the historical presence of authoritarianism mean right-wing populism is more likely to be engaged in accommodatively? More work must be done.

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