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# THE STATE OF POPULISM IN EUROPE

POLICYSOLUTIONS 

FOUNDATION FOR EUROPEAN  
PROGRESSIVE STUDIES  
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D'ÉTUDES PROGRESSISTES



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# 1 | Introduction

If we wanted to use a single word to describe the political trends of the year 2015, then populism will be definitely among the first terms to come to mind. Not since the beginning of European integration has there been a year in which populist parties have wielded such an extensive influence over the governance of individual member states and the EU overall. Populism is massively gaining ground, and its increasing strength has a substantial impact on the European left in particular: not only because in many countries populists tend to attract traditional left-wing voters but also because established party systems based on the competition between major social-democratic/centre-left and conservative/Christian democratic parties are undergoing a transformation, with the result that previously bipolar systems are increasingly likely to become tri-polar. Populist parties are emerging as equal challengers to mainstream parties on the right and left, and in some countries right and left-wing populists have become the most important competitors of centre-right parties.

Learning about populist parties will help us in better understanding them, and ultimately also in defending values such as liberal democracy, solidarity and deeper European integration. That is why Policy Solutions and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) have decided to jointly compile and publish a study that analyses changes in the public support for all relevant populist parties and the prevailing trends in European populism.

In the following pages, we will first attempt to clarify the concept of populism. Many researchers have attempted to define populism, and interpretations of its meaning vary widely; this makes it difficult to achieve a consensus on what we might refer to as populism and especially what parties we can attach this label to. Our goal will be to help the reader navigate the jungle of competing interpretations.

In the next section, we review the election and polling results of 71 populist parties in 26 EU member states, also presenting the trends that have characterised the situation of populists in the EU since the 2014 EP election. We show which parties have made the biggest gains and which have lost the most ground since May 2014, and especially highlight those populist parties that are involved in the governments of their respective countries. Our analysis will show that 2015 definitely marks a “breakthrough” for populist parties as at the end of the year there were four countries in the EU where a clear majority of likely voters backed populists, while in a further two member states populists enjoy near majority support. Furthermore, in a quarter of all EU member states at least a third of all voters with party preferences indicate that they support populist parties, while in a majority of member states (16) at least 20 percent of all voters would vote for a populist party.

Moreover, in Hungary, in Greece and in Poland populist parties constitute the largest governing party, while in another four countries (Bulgaria, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania) populist parties are members of the governing coalition. In Denmark and Portugal populist parties support the government from the outside. In other words, populist parties have some level of influence over the government in 9 out of 28 member states.

One interesting aspect of this development is that there appears to be a kind of “populist iron curtain” in Europe: while left-wing populism is on the rise in the entire Mediterranean region (with the exception of Italy), and right-wing populism is rather weak in this part of Europe, in western and eastern Europe the situation is just the reverse, that is, we observe a surge in the strength of right-wing populist forces – without strong competition from the left.

Another important aspect of the 2015 developments is that populist parties lose popular support when they join governments or cooperate with mainstream parties. This is the situation in Denmark and Finland, as well as numerous other EU member states. Nevertheless, there are exceptions: Fidesz in Hungary has been leading in the Hungarian polls continuously for nearly 10 years now despite being in government for the past five years.

Our monitoring of populist trends will not end in 2015, of course: We will continue to track this phenomenon, which is of decisive importance for the future of European politics, in the future. A year from now we will be back with a publication that will offer a comprehensive review of the trends in 2016. In the meanwhile,

you can find our research and publications on the website of our organisations, [www.policysolutions.eu](http://www.policysolutions.eu) and [www.feps-europe.eu](http://www.feps-europe.eu).

We hope that you will find this study on the State of Populism in Europe a useful and interesting reading.

## 2 | What is populism?

**A**t a 1967 conference the philosopher Isaiah Berlin spoke of a “Cinderella Complex” when it comes to populism. What he specifically meant was that even though “there is a shoe in the shape of populism,” there is “no foot to fit it.”<sup>1</sup> Berlin argued that the prince (to wit, the scholar or the analyst) with the shoes in his hands searches in vain for actual manifestations of an ideal “Platonic” type of populism, he will never find it.<sup>2</sup> As Stijn van Kessel put it, “it is something of a cliché to start a text on populism with the observation that agreement on a definition is lacking and that the term is used for many different type of actors through time and space.”<sup>3</sup> Though such clichés may err from time to time, they are seldom without a basis in reality.

A majority of scientific treatises on populism acknowledges with some resignation that the concept is hard to pin down and resists efforts at developing a widely accepted scientific definition; after

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<sup>1</sup> Ivan Krastev. *Populism Today*. Aspen Institute, 2008, p. 22-23. Accessible here: [http://www.aspeninstitute.it/en/system/files/private\\_files/2010-07/doc/Asp35\\_krastev\\_e.pdf](http://www.aspeninstitute.it/en/system/files/private_files/2010-07/doc/Asp35_krastev_e.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Ernest Gellner and Ghita Ionesco. *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. New York: Macmillan Co., 1969, p. 34.

<sup>3</sup> Stijn van Kessel. *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents of Discontent?* London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 2.

several decades of intense scholarly attention, hard conceptual boundaries that clearly define populism and set it apart from other concepts remain elusive. In their classic study on the subject, Gellner and Ionescu put this dilemma as follows: "There can, at present, be no doubt about the importance of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it is. As a doctrine or as a movement, it is elusive and protean. It bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes. Does it have any underlying unity? Or does one name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies?"<sup>4</sup>

And in most cases the answer is that there is none. Margaret Canovan, a prominent early researcher on the subject, concluded that there is no way "to unite all these movements in a single political phenomenon with a single ideology, program or socioeconomic base."<sup>5</sup> This results in a significant impediment to scientific research, for "[t]he mercurial nature of populism has often exasperated those attempting to take it seriously."<sup>6</sup>

Though the lack of a clearly defined substance of populism and the murkiness of the concept implies that any scholar must be circumspect in applying the label, there is no indication of this sort of caution in the way the term is used in everyday discourse (nor do social scientists always exercise the requisite circumspection when they use the term). Politicians, journalists and in fact anyone liberally apply the populist label to all sorts of phenomena, and in the vast majority of cases they identify as populist phenomena or persons that they view negatively. In everyday discourse, populist is rarely if ever used to describe a certain ideology or even a set of coherent ideas. Instead, it

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4 Gellner and Ionescu, 1969, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

5 Margaret Canovan. *Populism*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981, p. 133.

6 Stanley, Ben. *The thin ideology of populism*. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Volume 13, Issue 1, 2008, p. 108.

refers to what the speaker considers demagogic, sensationalistic and irresponsible politics.

Yet those who want to dig deeper into this phenomenon cannot afford such conceptual laxity. That is why in the interest of clarifying the concept, experts on this issue have invested considerable energy in laying the foundations for the development of more stringent scientific approaches to the concept of populism. If we conceive of a concept as a Platonic ideal, then the two most important criteria of a useful definition are that they neither circumscribe the phenomenon too narrowly, so that it does not exclude relevant cases from the cluster falling under the scope of the definition, nor too generously, which would have the result of including many cases that do not mesh with the (theoretical) ideal type of the concept. What we will do in the following is to chart the efforts of scholars in trying to arrive at more narrow definitions of the concept of populism, and in the process we will also highlight which of these attempts at narrowing the concept we find most appealing.

## **2.1. Movement, politician or party?**

For starters we must decide whom we consider the subject of populism in the context of the given research. Populism may manifest itself in the form of movements that, though they are active in politics, do not pursue political goals within a traditional framework. The US Tea Party, the Occupy movement or the anti-Islamic Pegida come to mind. Incidentally, there is no consensus as to whether we can – social scientifically – label movements as populist. Nadia Urbinati, for example, argues that populism does not work without a leadership structure

traditionally understood, and thus the Tea Party is “a movement that has many populist components in its ideology and rhetoric, but lacks a vertical and unified structure which [...] characterizes populism.”<sup>7</sup> Urbinati’s opinion is used to illustrate the diversity of interpretive approaches when it comes to populism, even though we do not share her opinion on this particular question, that is we do not agree that the concept of populism is limited to hierarchically structured organisations.

In fact, we would argue that populism usually also has a movement character of sorts that might contrast with the strictly tiered structure of the traditional organisations of representative democracy, namely political parties. The populist label can be applied to persons as well, and in fact outside the theoretical framework it is difficult to imagine a populist organisation without populist individuals in their leadership (non-populist political organisations in the meanwhile can of course exist with populist politicians in their leadership, though a preponderance of the latter will at one point lead to a qualitative shift in how we would classify the organisation on the populist/non-populist axis).

Nevertheless, in the framework of the current analysis, we will focus on parties, and for good reason, for they are “still the key actors in contemporary European politics in terms of democratic representation.”<sup>8</sup> Movements have an indirect impact at best on political decision-making, whereas political parties are the organisations that have the most direct impact on the politically relevant decision-making processes.

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7 Nadia Urbinati. *The Populist Phenomenon*. Manuscript submitted to the University of Chicago Political Theory Workshop, 2014, p. 3.

8 Van Kessel, 2015, *op. cit.* p. 1.

## **2.2. Communication tool, strategy or ideology?**

Another basic question is whether populism is a communication instrument used to attain strategic power and/or ideological objectives, or if it is in fact an ideology itself. And the answer is, once again, that these components exist independently of one another. In other words, it may happen that non-populist actors (parties, politicians, movements) employ populist communication tools or strategies. Nevertheless, there are some basic ideological tenets that those we refer to as populists in this study espouse. It is obviously difficult to imagine a scenario where a party is populist only in the ideological dimension, that is it is extremely unlikely that one would encounter a party that identifies with what a large segment of the scientific community would consider populist ideology, but propagates these with non-populist instruments. Though we approach the issue primarily from an ideological perspective, we also believe that for the most part communication, strategy and ideology tend to be in sync in the case of populists.

The reason we primarily focus on the issue of ideology is that we assume that this is the dimension that allows us to distinguish those actors that one might refer to as “professional” populists from the “dilettantes” who occasionally dabble in populism. (All the while we also acknowledge that there is continuous back-and-forth movement along the populist/non-populist divide, but such a movement, that is a party becoming populist, is an entirely different matter qualitatively than the occasional use of populist instruments/strategies, which most democratic parties and their leaders tend to engage in from time to time).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For a good review of the issue, see Noam Gidron és Bart Bonikowski: *Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda* (Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University, No. 13-0004, 2013). See especially p. 5-17.

Populism is not a complex ideological system and does not provide a foundation for a comprehensive social structure, such as liberalism, social democracy, Christian Democracy or conservatism. Populism, by contrast, is what several researchers refer to as a “thin ideology”,<sup>10</sup> that has “a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts.”<sup>11</sup> Specifically, this means that there is no populist health, education or tax policy. Any given populist might or might not have fixed stances regarding any or all of these policy areas, but in any case, it is not these views (nor their absence) that connect it to other populists, nor can these be used to distinguish populists from non-populists.

Some experts argue that stemming from the narrow ideological framework of populist ideology, the populist/non-populist divide cannot be interpreted in a traditional left/right framework. However, in western Europe, argues Stijn van Kessel, “populism is habitually associated with xenophobic politics and parties of the extreme or radical right (and therefore considered to be dangerous). This is not surprising, since populism in Western Europe has often been expressed by parties characterised by a nationalist and culturally conservative ideology, and hostility to immigration and multiculturalism.”<sup>12</sup> Outside Europe, Kessel claims, populism is often identified with a completely different ideological orientation. In connection with the abovementioned thin ideology, analysts of the South American continent, for example, write that “the parties formed by populist leaders never had clear ideological profiles; they were anti-oligarchic and anti-imperialist and for the people,

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<sup>10</sup> Stanley, 2008, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> Michael Freeden. *Is Nationalism a Distinct Ideology?* *Political Studies*, 46: 4, 1998, p. 750.

<sup>12</sup> Van Kessel, *op. cit.* p. 2. Also see Paul Taggart: *The Populist Turn in the Politics of the New Europe. Paper prepared for presentation at the 8th Biannual International Conference of the European Union Studies Association conference, Nashville, March 27, 2003.*

but in terms of general reform commitments they followed their leaders.”<sup>13</sup>

While there is a large number of successful populist parties in Europe (the Front National in France, the Danish People’s Party, the Austrian Freedom Party, the British UKIP, etc.), in South America we tend to find left-wing or left-tending populist parties, such as for example the Socialists Unity Party in Venezuela (the party of late president Hugo Chávez) and the Proud and Sovereign Fatherland (PAIS Alliance) in Ecuador. The Thai Rak Thai party in Thailand also falls into the same category (with all the analytical problems that such a cross-cultural comparison implies). Left-wing populist parties are increasingly gaining ground in Europe as well, as illustrated by the successive electoral victories of the Greek Syriza and the results of the Spanish Podemos or the Dutch Socialist Party. Looking at the phenomenon globally, it is equally (not necessarily in a mathematical sense) conceivable that a populist party fights for social equality or that it advocates a flat tax.

## **2.3. Seeking a definition**

So what is the leitmotif that connects this ideological diversity that manifests itself in the wide variety of populist parties? The ideological foundation that a significant portion of academic studies analysing populism agree on is that drawing a contrast between the interests of the elite and the people plays a central role in populist ideology.

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<sup>13</sup> Evelyn Huber and John D. Stevens. *Democracy and the Left Social Policy and Inequality in Latin America*. The University of Chicago Press, 2012, p. 29.

Though by far not all research would reduce populism to this single issue, an overwhelming majority agree that at the minimum it plays a role, and in fact many acknowledge the central role that this issue plays in populism. In his widely cited *The Populist Zeitgeist* – one of the seminal studies in current populist research – the Dutch scholar Cas Mudde summarises the populist phenomenon as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”<sup>14</sup> This is a concise definition that is useful for research. It does not necessarily imply that this is the “one and only” definition, if there is such a thing, but it is specific enough to allow us to establish a set of observations that match the definition and is at the same time not so broad as to extend to a wide variety of political parties that have only a tenuous connection to populism.

One must add that even though Mudde’s parsimonious and practical definition is rightfully popular among populism researchers, he was by no means the first to realise the pre-eminent role of the people vs. the elite dichotomy. Already back in 1956, Edward E. Shils wrote that “populism ‘is tinged by the belief that the people are not just the equal of their rulers; they are better than their rulers and better than the classes – the urban middle classes – associated with the ruling powers’.”<sup>15</sup> British scholar Peter Wiles also defined populism in similar terms in 1969: “virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions.”<sup>16</sup> Among contemporary scholars, van Kessel, for example, also points to the

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14 Cas Mudde. *The Populist Zeitgeist*. *Government & Opposition*, 39.3, 2004, p. 541-563.

15 Edward E. Shils. *The Torment of Secrecy*. New York: Free Press, 1956, p. 101.

16 Im: Juraj Buzalka. *Nation and Religion: The Politics of Commemorations in South-east Poland*. LitVerlag, 2006, p. 16.

centrality of this dichotomy in the prevailing conceptions of populism: "Populism is generally associated with a Manichean vision of society (pitting the good 'people' against the corrupt 'elites')."17

In a 2003 study, Paul Taggart advances a definition that is more detailed than the one proposed by Mudde. Two of the six points he proposes as criteria for establishing populism overlap with Mudde's own suggestion. As his first criterion, Taggart suggests that populism implies a rejection of representative democracy (which is incidentally the main bastion of the influence exerted by the elite). Citing the abovementioned Margaret Canovan, in his second point Taggart rejects the widely shared (also by us) notion that the "people" are at the centre of populism, arguing that "the "people" is too broad and diffuse a concept to have real meaning as it means different things to different populists."18 Instead, Taggart puts forth the notion of "heartland", a theoretical concept that the scholar identifies with ancient traditions and the mores of the people.

Taggart's criticism of the term "people" is justified, for it is indeed difficult to nail down, and this haziness is also manifest in populists' vague invocations of the "people" to justify their political demands. What the "people" want is in any case impossible to establish, which is why the term is often merely a rhetorical tool for populists. At the same time, there may be practical substitutes for the absence of the Rousseauian "General Will", such as instruments of direct democracy, which either contradict or complement the institutions of representative democracy. Populist parties often endorse referenda, especially on issues where the elites are intransigent even though the populists assume that the majority is behind their position rather

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17 *Van Kessel, op. cit. 5. p. o.*

18 *Taggart, op. cit, p. 6.*

than the elite's view. Nevertheless, this support for direct democracy is neither universal among populists nor does it extend to all issues. Moreover, on a more theoretical level one could also object that they may be an insurmountable gap between the general will as a theoretical concept and the outcome of referendum.

Nevertheless, our view is that Taggart's suggestion does not help in clarifying the concept of populism, for when he suggests to replace the vague term "people" with the term "heartland", which is at least as vague (and to some extent he admits this vagueness), then it would appear that at least in terms of concreteness we are back at square one – though that does leave upon the possibility that heartland may be a theoretically a better concept, but this is a discussion we do not have the space to go into right here.

## **2.4. Alternative approaches**

Maybe even an entire volume would not be sufficient to review all the possible interpretations and definitions of populism in any detail. In light of our limited space, we will not even try to do so below; we will focus on some key notions instead. In contrast to Mudde's abovementioned simple definition, several researchers use a multi-dimensional definition (see for example Taggart, whom we discussed just now) that attempt to capture the phenomenon from a variety of perspectives, by setting out a variety of necessary conditions for populism. The disadvantage of such an approach is that if someone were to try strictly apply all these criteria, then the set of populist entities would be very narrowly construed, that is very few parties would be defined as populists. If it is possible to apply these

criteria selectively, however, then the sample threatens to expand uncontrollably. In our opinion, this is the dilemma that Mudde's narrow definition successfully solves.

Since as we previously mentioned ideology is only one aspect of populism (though in our view it is the most important), it is also worthwhile to explore how it might be complemented by two further dimensions, populist communication and populist strategy. Hanspeter Kriesi and Takis Pappas<sup>19</sup> try to capture populism in all three previously mentioned dimensions, yet they also consider that if any one of these three applies, then that is enough to classify the given observation as populist. In our view, this would definitely result in construing the concept too broadly and in connecting parties and other organisations that have nothing relevant in common.<sup>20</sup> In explicit agreement with Mudde, Kriesi and Pappas assess that, "populism is an ideology that splits society into two antagonistic camps, the virtuous people and some corrupt establishment, effectively pitting one against the other."<sup>21</sup> At the level of communication, "populism as an ideology manifests itself in specific discursive patterns for identifying foes and solidifying the community of friends."<sup>22</sup> Finally, as a strategy populism is an instrument that charismatic leaders use to capture power.

In addition to ideology, Urbinati also stresses the relevance of the populist leader, but unlike Kriesi and Pappas she does not believe that

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19 Hanspeter Kriesi and Takis Pappas. *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*. ECPR Press, 2015.

20 *The scientific discourse distinguishes between the so-called "family resemblance" approach and the so-called Sartori approach. The first lays down criteria for defining the phenomenon, but it does not use these in an exclusive manner, that is if a given observation matches any one of the criteria, then that is at the same time also a sufficient criterion to qualify as being part of the given category. According to the classic approach, by contrast, all criteria must be met simultaneously. For further details see: Alan Sikk. Parties and Populism. Centre For European Politics, Security & Integration, 2009-2, p. 2-5.*

21 *ibid*, Introduction.

22 *ibid*.

the presence of either a populist ideology or a populist leader is an and of itself sufficient to apply the designation of populist. Like the present study, Urbinati also investigates political parties, and thus she considers that the relevant dividing line is when a populist movement such as the Tea Party become a political party. What connects the movement and the party is an “organic polarising ideology.”<sup>23</sup> But we speak of populism when there is “a strategy for mobilizing the masses toward the conquest of the democratic government, and finally an organized party that can actualize that ideology and leader’s plan to power. Without an organizing narrative and a leadership claiming its people to be the true expression of the people as a whole, a popular movement remains very much what it is: a sacrosanct movement of protest and contestation against a trend in society that betrays some basic democratic principles, and in particular equality. Yet populism is more than populist rhetoric and political protest.”<sup>24</sup> What the Urbinati definition therefore assumes is necessary for populism to apply is the person of the populist leader, a desire to win power and a strategy to this end. Urbinati’s definition is one we could endorse, yet the question is whether complicating the working definition by adding dimensions beyond ideology would have a genuine impact on the range of parties that belong in the populist cluster. If that is not the case, then it is questionable whether these additional levels constitute an improvement over Mudde’s more parsimonious approach.

Rafal Pankowski<sup>25</sup> also takes Mudde’s definition as his starting point, but in his analysis of Poland he is not only curious about the concept of populism but also seeks to find out what distinguishes successful populist movements from those that never take off, and

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23 Urbinati, 2014, *op. cit.* p. 3.

24 *ibid.*

25 Rafal Pankowski. *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*. London: Routledge, 2010.

proposes an interesting refinement of the concept. In his analysis he concludes that “populist movements have been successful where they manage to make a connection with a culture of the ‘common sense’ ordinariness.” In the Polish case specifically, this includes a connection with Catholicism. This recalls Taggart’s concept of “heartland” – in other words Pankowski does not think that it is enough to address the people as a whole, but one must also connect with the cultural/mental dimension of the people, understand the basic concepts that underlie the cultural community, which connect the populist players with the voters and the voters with one another. Though at first glance populism may seem to be more connected to right-wing/nationalist conceptions, it is worth pointing out that from Venezuela to Thailand all the way to Slovakia and Greece, left-wing populists often operate with the concept of the “nation”, voters often go back and forth between left and right-wing populist parties, and the parties themselves also often cooperate with one another (the left-wing Syriza, for example, entered into coalitions with a right-wing populist party instead of opting for moderate alternatives).

In their analysis focusing on neighbouring Slovakia, Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton<sup>26</sup> propose a completely new framework. Though in their social scientific treatise on populism they acknowledge the dominance of the people vs. elites dichotomy, the authors assess that despite the “occasional rescue attempts”, the concept continues to be subject to such a level of imprecision that, at least in its current form, it would be better to set it aside altogether.<sup>27</sup> To rescue the “core” of the concept, the authors propose to abandon the use of the term “populism” as a noun, and to no longer refer to parties or

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26 Kevin Deegan Krause and Tim Haughton. *Toward a More Useful Conceptualization of Populism: Types and Degrees of Populist Appeals in the Case of Slovakia*. *Politics & Policy*, Volume 37, No. 4, 2009, p. 821-841.

27 *Ibid.* p. 822.

politicians as populists or non-populists. Instead, populism should be seen as a quality that certain players embrace to varying degrees as they engage in certain types of communication or certain types of public policies. One advantage of such a research approach, the authors argue, is that it conceives of populism as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. So a party is populist to a greater or lesser extent rather than altogether or not at all. While acknowledging that on a theoretical level the authors' reasoning is very persuasive, one must also add that operationalising this particular concept of populism for research is far more challenging (incidentally, the authors try to rise to this challenge, but even in the context of a single party system this takes up considerable space and energy, and extending it to a cross-European comparison would be a humungous undertaking). For the time being, we won't be able to follow this more refined model, or to offer our own variation thereof, so we must note that a majority of scientific analyses have also adopted simpler frameworks. But in the future, it is worth tracking whether a conceptual framework based on a populism spectrum will gain ground and replace the populist/non-populist dichotomy.

# **3 | Support for populist parties in the European Union**

## **3.1. Analysing populist parties**

One of the most contentious issues in the European Union is the presence of populist parties and their impact on political life. These formations, which define themselves as different from and opposed to the mainstream, constitute a fundamental challenge to the political mainstream. One reason is that as a result of their efforts traditional parties often lose support to successful populist parties which operate with slogans that may be popular with the public but are likely to be untested in terms of their public policy impact. Another reason is that the competition between mainstream and populist parties could shift the entire political system into a more populist direction, since in order to prevent populists from gaining further, mainstream parties might rely on emotional (usually anti-European and xenophobic) messages, similar to those of the populists, that serve no other purpose than to boost popularity.

The following section of our study refers to the situation of European populist parties in 2015. Relying on the most recent public opinion data, we wish to find out how extensive the support of populist forces

was in the European Union at the end of 2015, and we also wish to gauge recent trends in the support of these parties.

The most precise indicator of the support enjoyed by these parties are the parliamentary elections every 4-5 years, but since general elections are held at different times throughout the EU member states, in the interest of better comparability we have chosen to rely instead on the most recent EP election in the spring of 2014. The results attained by the populist parties in the spring of 2014 provide the baseline for our research – we compare these with the most recent survey data in individual member states in order to identify changes in the strength of European populist parties.

In selecting information about party preferences, we used public opinion polls from the last months of 2015 that measured the party preferences of likely voters (rather than the entire voting age population including those with no intention to vote). The polls used samples of at least 1,000 respondents. Alternatively, we also relied on the results of parliamentary elections whenever those were available towards the end of the period in question.

The classification of individual European parties – just as the definition of the concept of populism itself – as populist/non-populist is a contentious issue among researchers. In the following, we used the academic literature (and primarily the works of Cas Mudde and Stijn van Kessel) as well as our analysis of the manifestos of individual parties and speeches by their leaders to decide whether a given party is populist or not. Our analysis does not extend to parties whose popularity is not near the parliamentary threshold in their respective countries (where thresholds do not exist, we posited a 1% limit).

Overall, we classified 71 parties in 26 countries of the EU as populist for the purposes of this study, and our observations below refer to these parties. The list of populist parties is in the Appendix.

## **3.2. The situation at the end of 2015**

Today the existence or the massive electoral gains of populist parties are no longer isolated phenomena in Europe; in fact, they are pervasive. This assertion is further buttressed by the telling fact that populist parties are now captured with significant support in the opinion polls of 26 of the 28 EU member states. In other words, such type of parties is present in virtually all member states of the European Union, regardless of geographic or economic situation. Based on the most recent public opinion data, the only EU countries where such type of political organisations do not have discernible support are Malta and Slovenia, but even in Slovenia there are several parties whose classification on the populist/non-populist axis is somewhat controversial.

There are of course substantial differences in terms of the scope of the popular support enjoyed by populist parties in the EU member states. While in Romania, for example, only one percent of voters back the non-mainstream populist party, the Greater Romania Party, in Hungary, by contrast – singularly among EU member states – almost three quarters of likely voters would opt for a populist party.

Before 2014 it was rare for populists to enjoy the support of even third of all voters in any EU member states. Comparing the current European situation with the two most recent EP elections, we observe

that in 2009 the combined vote share of populists was at least 20% of all votes only in nine countries (a third of the member states), and there were only two member states – Cyprus and Bulgaria – where populists attained over 30% of the vote (at this time the Hungarian Fidesz party was not yet considered a populist party). Five years later, in the spring of 2014, there were fourteen countries in the EU where populists garnered at least 20% of the vote, and there were nine countries where their electoral tally exceeded 30%. Nevertheless, results of 40%+ only occurred in Hungary, Bulgaria and Greece.

Over the past few years there has been a steady expansion in the cluster of EU states where the total support of non-establishment populist political parties is substantial, exceeding 20%, 30% or even 40% of the vote. 2015 definitely marked a breakthrough for these parties, since by the end of the year there were four countries where a majority of likely voters backed populists, and in a further two the aggregated support for populists was almost 50%. In addition to Hungary, there were three other countries where populists enjoy the support of more than half of likely voters: in Bulgaria the aggregated support of the various populist parties stands at 60%, in Greece at 53% and in Poland at 51%.

Moreover, in Hungary, in Greece and in Poland populist parties constitute the largest governing party, while in another four countries (Bulgaria, Finland, Latvia and Lithuania) populist parties are members of the governing coalition. In Denmark and Portugal populists support the government from the outside. In other words, populist parties are involved to various extents in the functioning of nine of 28 EU governments.

In Italy and the Czech Republic populist parties also enjoy levels of support near 50%. Cypriot and French populists, too, have very

high levels of support in European comparison, as roughly 40% of likely voters support them. Since three of the previously mentioned countries are among the most populous in the EU, this also implies that we are not just talking about high ratios of support; adding the numbers from Poland, Italy and France, we find that the absolute number of people who support populist parties is also very high.

The combined support for populist forces is over 30% in Austria (32%), while at least a fourth of all voters would opt for some populist political party in the Netherlands (29%), Sweden (26%) and in Estonia (26%). In Ireland, Spain, Denmark and Lithuania, too, populist forces enjoy the support of at least every fifth likely voter, while in a further four member states their share of support ranges between 16-18%.

What this means, therefore, is that in a quarter of EU member states over a third of voters with party preferences have professed support for populist formations, while in a majority of member states – 16, to be specific – at least a fifth share this attitude. There are only four countries where the base of populist parties is under 10%: they stand at 9% in Croatia, at 7% in Slovakia, at 4% in Luxemburg and 1% in Romania. There are only two member states within the EU, Malta and Slovenia, where we could not identify populist parties that match the definition we used. Based on the state of affairs outlined above, the absence of populist parties is the exception in the EU in 2015, and their pronounced presence is the norm.

Although the populist/extremist surge was of course not at all a limited southern or Mediterranean phenomenon, a key distinction sets the Mediterranean region apart. In this region the recent challenges to the established parties come predominantly from the left (with the exception of the Five Star Movement of Italy), while in the countries

of the wealthy North (and also in Central and Eastern Europe), the opposite tends to apply – there, the primary beneficiaries of the trend towards populism are far-right populist parties. There are indications that unlike in the South, the prevailing sentiment in the North was not one of economic desperation or protest, but nationalism and the fear that “aliens” would gnaw away at the prosperity in the North. Another key difference between North and South is of course that while in the latter countries populism appears to have the potential to completely revamp the party system, in the North the success of the populist far-right is mostly a shift in emphasis, though a pronounced one.

### **3.3. Trends in the support of populist parties in 2014/2015**

In order to see what changes have taken place in European politics over the past years, it is worth comparing the populist parties’ current support as it is manifested in polls or actual recent elections results with data from the 2014 EP election. Despite the fact that non-mainstream formations traditionally perform better in European elections than in general elections, current public opinion polls show that in 18 of the EU’s 28 countries their present level of support exceeds even the unusually high – and distorted – levels of support experienced on the EP election day in 2014.

There were only eight member states in which the total aggregated support for populist parties was lower at the end of 2015 than a year and a half ago. A particularly interesting aspect of this development is that we only observed a significant decline in the support of populists in three countries (Denmark, Finland and the United Kingdom). In the first

two of these three countries populists became involved in government either as coalition partners or outside supporters, while in the latter the governing party essentially adopted many of the demands of the main populist formation, the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

If we look at the surge in the support of populists as part of a long-term trend, we observe that between the two most recent EP elections, that is between 2009 and 2014, support for such formations has grown in 19 member states, while it dropped in 7. In other words, over the past year and a half marked a continuation – and strengthening – of a trend that had already begun earlier.

Of course, there were major differences between individual member states in terms of the levels of change in the support of populist parties. In some cases, we also observed an extraordinary decline as compared to the average European value between the EP election in 2014 and the late 2015 opinion polls.

As we noted already in the first part, Hungary is the absolute (negative) “top” performer when it comes to populism. After four years in government and a decisive shift towards populism, Fidesz, the winner of the general election in 2010 – at which point it was still right-wing rather than right-wing populist – went on to win re-election in 2014 with a 45% vote share, and it swept the EP elections a few weeks later with a share of 51%. Following some drops in support, the governing party continues to lead massively in the polls, and at the end of 2015 Viktor Orbán’s party continued to enjoy the backing of roughly 51% of voters. Over the same period, far-right populist Jobbik has emerged as Hungary’s second most popular party. Adding Jobbik’s 21% and Fidesz 51%, roughly 72% of Hungarian voters would opt for a right-wing populist party.

Poland ranked second in the EU after Hungary, with a populist party winning an outright majority in the national parliament. With 32%, the Law and Justice (PiS) had already finished first in the 2014 EP election, but it improved on this result in the general election of October 2015, which it won with 37.6% of the votes. This result made it the third strongest populist party in the European Union (behind only GERB in Bulgaria and Fidesz in Hungary). Moreover, the parliamentary elections have also led to the creation of new populist parties: Kukiz'15 led by the punk musician Pawel Kukiz attained 8.8% even though it had been founded only a short while before the elections, while the euro-sceptic and archconservative Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic – Freedom and Hope received 4.8%. Altogether, populists won over 50% of the votes in Poland.

In two southern member states, Italy and Greece, the base of populist parties expanded significantly in the period under investigation. In the case of the former, it grew by 14 percentage points, while in the latter populists were 8 percentage points stronger than previously. This is all the more remarkable since populists in these two countries had already enjoyed high levels of support (35% and 45%, respectively) in 2014. However, one key distinction between these two EU member states is that in Italy the boost in the strength of populist parties benefitted the right, while in Greece the additional support accrued to left-wing forces. In the former case, the massive growth in the populist voter base owes primarily to the success of the Northern League and the Five Star Movement (which is increasingly drifting rightwards). Within the span of a year and a half, the Northern League achieved an over two-fold increase in its level of support, growing from 6% to 14%, which was the fourth highest increase in terms of total support in all of the EU. The Five Star Movement started out strong in 2014 with 21% in the EP elections, but it also remained on a rising trajectory

since and currently stands at 29%. Left-wing populists, however, are not successful in Italy right now: all left-wing populist parties have experienced a significant decline in support as compared to the levels measured in 2014.

In Greece, by contrast, as compared to the spring of 2014 the parliamentary election in September 2015 led to a surge in the aggregated support of two left-wing populists, governing Syriza and a new party, Popular Unity (LAEN). Syriza's back-to-back general election victories constitute an outstanding feat even among successful populist parties; with a result of over a third of all votes, Syriza exceeded its 2014 EP election tally by 9 percentage points. The left-wing populist party has lost some support since the general election, but it still stood at 29% in December 2015. In the meanwhile, the far-right and the populist right is far weaker: though the once fearsome Gold Dawn stands at 9%, and the Independent Greeks (the coalition partner of Syriza), too, command a further 3%, this support pales by comparison to Syriza's outsize strength.

The biggest surge in support for populists was measured in Estonia, where the populists are represented by right-wing conservative parties (the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (EKRE) and the Estonian Free Party (EVA)). Their combined support has grown by 22 percentage points, from 4% to 26% in the period under investigation. Nevertheless, to paint a full picture one must add that both these parties are of fairly recent vintage; EKRE was founded in the spring of 2012, while EVA was barely a year old at the time when we looked at the survey data (it was founded in the fall of 2014). This puts their post-EP election growth somewhat into perspective. The relatively quick gains made by these two recently created populist parties, their popularity levels of 10%+ in this period – that is their establishment,

for the time being, as medium-sized parties in Estonian politics – could result in a shift of the entire Estonian political sphere towards populism, and it could also have an institutional impact through the implementation of populist demands into public policy.

After Estonia and Italy, Bulgaria experienced the third highest level of surge in the support of populist parties within the EU. This is all the more remarkable since populist parties started out with an extraordinarily high level of support (47%) in the EP election of 2014. The past one and a half years saw a further massive expansion in the public support of these parties: six out of ten Bulgarians currently back populist parties. Right-wing populism tends to dominate in Bulgaria, though there has been some massive rearrangement in their support in the period investigated. The Bulgaria without Censorship party, which had achieved a result of around 10% as recently as 2014, has disappeared completely, while the Patriotic Front has doubled the 3% support attained it had obtained in the EP vote. The third non-mainstream Bulgarian party, the extremist Ataka, continues to remain a marginal player. By the end of 2015, its previous 3% had shrunk to 2%. The backbone of Bulgarian populism, however, is GERB. GERB received almost a third of all votes in 2014 and managed to increase its support massively, by 20 points, by the end of 2015; it now enjoys the support of over half the Bulgarian electorate.

We also observed a huge boost in the popularity of Czech populists over the past year and half. Their overall level of support was 13 points higher at the end of 2015 than in the spring of 2014. To a large extent, this owes to the success of the moderate ANO party, which has increased its share of likely voters by eight points in the period under investigation, with the result that it is now backed by a quarter of the voting-inclined segment of the electorate. The Czech

communists also increased their level of support, and their most recent polling figure was roughly 3 percentage points higher than their actual result in the 2014 EP election. It is now backed by every seventh likely voter. The new right-wing populist Freedom and Direct Democracy party stands at 3.4% in the polls, while the euro-sceptic Party of Free Citizens has lost two points as compared to the 5% it had won in 2014 and continues to hover around 3%, on par with Dawn-National Coalition, another rightwing formation whose level of support is essentially unchanged.

In the Czech Republic's southern neighbour, Austria, the overall support of populist forces is 12 percentage points higher than it was in May 2014, and the scope of the surge is clearly among the highest in Europe; there are only four countries in the EU where the joint surge of the populist parties exceeded this level of support between 2014 and 2015. While in the last EP election a fifth of all Austrian voters opted for these parties, at the end of 2015 significantly more, a third, would do the same. This surge is primarily attributable to the far-right Austrian Freedom Party, which has massively gained in the polls, rising by 12.5 points, from 19.5% to 32% in the polls conducted at the end of 2015; a smaller far-right populist party, the Alliance for the Future of Austria, has completely disappeared from the political arena.

Populists have also significantly surged in Sweden, where in the spring of 2014 they had already won 16% – that was considered a huge breakthrough at the time – and now they are jointly at 26%, that is their base has expanded to one and a half its original size. This is mostly the result of the increased popularity of the Swedish Democrats, who have doubled their 9.7% level of support in the 2014 EP elections, and now stand at 19% in polls of likely voters. The Left

Party has not raised its support significantly, it grew by only 1% and stood at 7% at the end of 2015.

Though much has been made of the rise of populism in France in 2015, in reality the support of populist forces in France grew by only 3 points between the spring of 2014 and the end of 2015 – but it is also true that the baseline was very high as the French populists ran very strong in 2014. Thus the total support for populist parties in one of the key EU member states is near 40%. As far as the distribution of support between parties specifically is concerned, though both left and right-wing populism are simultaneously present, the latter dominates by a wide margin. With its 29% in the polls, the Front National boasts the largest level of support and is the main populist party in the country; at the moment, the far-right party's level of support is 4 points higher than it was in May 2014. The three other populist formation in France are far less important. The other right-wing formation, France Arise, stagnates around 4%, while the left-wing Anticapitalist Party is barely discernible at 1.5%. In the meanwhile, the Left Front has lost a third of its voters and currently stands at 4%.

Though in Latvia populists enjoy relatively low levels of support (18%), and their growth rate was not outstanding either (3.7 percentage points over the span of a little more than a year), the country is nevertheless interesting in the sense that the For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK Party, which had stood at 15% in 2015, currently controls several ministerial portfolios in the Latvian centre-right government. Apart from the populist governing party, a new formation, For Latvia from the Heart, is the only party with measurable results in the polls: it stands at 3% according to surveys of likely voters in Latvia.

The support of populists has essentially stagnated in Lithuania as well (-0.9% drop), and on the whole, populist parties only enjoy a 20% level of support. Yet like Latvia, this country is also interesting in the sense that a representative of the Order and Justice Party holds a ministerial portfolio. Another interesting aspect is that the representative of a right-wing populist party is the member of an otherwise left-wing cabinet. Order and Justice lost 3 percentage points in support over the past year and stood at 11% at the end of 2015. Lithuania's other populist party, the green/agrarian Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union, increased its strength to 9% in this period.

Finland is one of the few countries in Europe where the support of populist parties declined substantially. Already at the outset it was relatively modest in European comparison. During the most recent EP vote, populists received 22.2%, but by the end of 2015 the size of their base had dropped to 17%, in other words we observed a 5-point decline in their support. Thus there was a modest decline in the support of the two populist parties in this country, and the result is that the level of support for the right and left-wing populist parties is roughly on par now: The conservative and euro-sceptic Finns Party has lost the support of 4% of likely voters, while about 1% of voters turned their back on the Left Alliance, with the result that both parties now have around 8% in the polls.

Finally, Denmark holds the "record" in terms of dropping support for populists, because confidence in non-mainstream parties had dropped by 14 percentage points between spring 2014 and the end of 2015. At the end of 2015 every fifth Danish voter would have opted for a populist party, whereas in the EP election of 2014 every third actually voted for one of them. On the whole, therefore, these parties have lost the support of a third of their voters over the span of the

past year and a half. The 14-point decline owes mostly to the fact that the People's Movement against the EU has lost most of the public support that had netted it 8% of the votes cast back in 2014. Denmark's second most popular party, the far-right Danish People's Party, lost 6 points, but still retains the backing of every fifth likely voter (20%) in Denmark. Despite the populists' overall loss of support as compared to their 2014 results, the current polling results – which are roughly similar to the results attained in the parliamentary elections in the summer – mark a massive breakthrough for the populist Danish People's Party, since back in 2011, at the time of the previous general election, its result was only 12%.

### **3.4. Populist parties with outstanding results**

In addition to reviewing the aggregate support of populists, it is also worth taking a separate look at the “individual performance” of populist parties. If we analyse our table of populist parties from this perspective (see Appendix 1), then we observe that there are two populist parties across Europe whose support exceeds 50% of likely voters: the Bulgarian right-wing GERB with its 52% support may be regarded as the strongest populist outfit in the EU at this time, and it is closely followed by the Hungarian governing party Fidesz, which stood at 51% towards the end of 2015. Both organisations are members of the mainstream conservative group in the European Parliament, the European People's Party, which also illustrates how European mainstream politics has become “infested” by populism.

Apart from the two aforementioned formations, there are three other populist parties in the EU whose support exceeds 30%. Support for the Polish Law and Justice Party, which won a resounding election victory with its 37.6% result at the end of October, is also extraordinarily high; its election tally made it the third most popular populist party in the EU, followed by the Freedom Party of Austria and the Cypriot communist/Marxist-Leninist AKEL, which enjoy 32% and 30.8% support, respectively. The Italian Five Star Movement is also part of the populist “elite”, as is the French Front National and the radical left Greek Syriza, with their respective bases of 29% each.

There are four further populist parties whose support among likely voters exceeds 20% (bringing the total to a dozen across the EU): the moderate ANO in the Czech Republic, which has 24% support, the Hungarian far-right Jobbik and the Irish Sinn Féin with 21% each, and the Danish People’s Party with 20%. Rounding out the group of leading populist parties in Europe, other major players are the Dutch Party for Freedom (19%), the Swedish Democrats (19%), Podemos (17%) in Spain, the British UKIP (16%), the Latvian National Alliance (15%) and the Estonian Free Party (15%).

Another interesting perspective on the same issue is to rank the parties based on the greatest changes in support over the past year and a half. No party is anywhere near GERB’s massive surge of 21.6 percentage points. The second largest expansion was achieved by the Estonian Free Party (EVA), which climbed to 15% in the polls following its creation in September 2014. Coming in third, the Freedom Party in Austria grew by 12.5 points in the period under investigation. Though, these were the only three formations that achieved double-digit growth, there were three other parties with a 9 percentage points increase in support: Podemos in Spain, the Swedish Democrats, and

Kukiz 15 in Poland, which was also founded recently. They are followed by seven populist parties whose support has grown substantially, between 6-8 points in 2015: the Northern League and the Five Star Movement in Italy, the Belgian Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang), the Czech ANO, the Conservative People's Party of Estonia, the Hungarian Jobbik party and the Dutch Party for Freedom.

It is striking that with the exception of Podemos all those that experienced a substantial surge in support are right-wing populist parties. Nevertheless, the trend of surging right-wing populism has thus far not spread to the Mediterranean region, that is to Greece, Spain, Portugal, Malta or Cyprus, where left-wing populists tended to gain in strength.

At the other end of the spectrum, among the parties that experienced the greatest drop in support, the leader is British UKIP. The anti-EU party has lost 11.5 percentage points since 2014, which means that its support has essentially halved since the EP election. The underlying reasons are primarily the British electoral system, along with the euro-sceptic policies of Prime Minister David Cameron, who is mindful of the electorate's concerns about the European project. For the second and third-ranked parties in this list of losing parties, their declining support has had more drastic consequences: Bulgaria without Censorship (-10.64 points) and the Danish Popular Movement against the EU (-8 points) saw virtually all of their electoral support evaporate over the period investigated, as did the Polish Congress of the New Right (-7 points).

Though it is among the few who have suffered a massive drop in the polls, the Danish People's Party with its -6.7-point decline remains the second most popular party in its country. In Spain the United Left's

5.2 percentage point implies a loss of half its voters. In Portugal the Unitary Democratic Coalition's almost 5-point drop is also massive, while the Finns Party, the Croatian Labourists-Labour Party, the Lithuanian Order and Justice party and the French Left Front lost slightly – they each receive over 2% less than previously.

The support of many of these parties has suffered from moving too far towards the mainstream. The Finns Party and the Lithuanian Order and Justice party have joined government coalitions, while the Danish People's Party and the Portuguese communists tolerate their respective governments from the outside. The Croatian Labourists-Labour Party joined forces with the governing party to compete in the 2015 general election in Croatia. Yet there are also exceptions to the attrition that tends to characterise the public support of governing parties: Fidesz in Hungary has been leading domestic polls for almost 10 years now, even though it has been in government for over five years (since the spring of 2010).

# 4 | Appendix

## The list of populist parties in the European Union

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
<b>Austria</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>17,30%</b>	<b>19,97%</b>	<b>2,67%</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>12,03%</b>
Freedom Party of Austria	12,70%	19,50%	<b>6,80%</b>	32%	<b>12,50%</b>
Alliance for the Future of Austria	4,60%	0,47%	<b>-4,13%</b>		<b>-0,47%</b>
<b>Belgium</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>14,36%</b>	<b>4,16%</b>	<b>-10,20%</b>	<b>11,90%</b>	<b>7,74%</b>
Flemish Interest	9,85%	4,16%	<b>-5,69%</b>	11,90%	<b>7,74%</b>
List Dedecker (D)	4,51%		<b>-4,51%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
<b>Bulgaria</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>36,32%</b>	<b>47,05%</b>	<b>10,73%</b>	<b>60,00%</b>	<b>12,95%</b>
Attack	11,96%	2,96%	<b>-9,00%</b>	2,00%	<b>-0,96%</b>
Bulgaria without Censorship		10,64%	<b>10,64%</b>		<b>-10,64%</b>
Patriotic Front		3,05%	<b>3,05%</b>	6,00%	<b>2,95%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	24,36%	30,40%	<b>6,04%</b>	52,00%	<b>21,60%</b>
<b>Croatia</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>5,77%</b>	<b>3,40%</b>	<b>-2,37%</b>	<b>8,93%</b>	<b>5,53%</b>
Croatian Labourists – Labour Party	5,77%	3,40%	<b>-2,37%</b>		<b>-3,40%</b>
Human Blockade			<b>0,00%</b>	4,24%	<b>4,24%</b>
Croatian Democratic Alliance of Slavonia and Baranja			<b>0,00%</b>	1,36%	<b>1,36%</b>
Milan Bandić 365 – The Party of Labour and Solidarity			<b>0,00%</b>	3,33%	<b>3,33%</b>
<b>Cyprus</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>34,90%</b>	<b>33,68%</b>	<b>-1,22%</b>	<b>38,60%</b>	<b>4,92%</b>
Progressive Party of the Working People	34,90%	26,90%	<b>-8,00%</b>	30,80%	<b>3,90%</b>
Citizens' Alliance		6,78%	<b>6,78%</b>	7,80%	<b>1,02%</b>
National Popular Front			<b>0,00%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
<b>Czech Republic</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>15,44%</b>	<b>35,47%</b>	<b>20,03%</b>	<b>48,20%</b>	<b>12,73%</b>
Czech Communist Party	14,18%	10,98%	<b>-3,20%</b>	13,90%	<b>2,92%</b>
Party of Free Citizens	1,26%	5,24%	<b>3,98%</b>	3,30%	<b>-1,94%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
Dawn - National Coalition		3,12%	<b>3,12%</b>	3,80%	<b>0,68%</b>
Freedom and Direct Democracy				3,40%	<b>3,40%</b>
ANO 2011		16,13%	<b>16,13%</b>	23,80%	<b>7,67%</b>
<b>Denmark</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>22,50%</b>	<b>34,60%</b>	<b>12,10%</b>	<b>20,40%</b>	<b>-14,20%</b>
Danish People's Party	15,30%	26,60%	<b>11,30%</b>	20,40%	<b>-6,20%</b>
People's Party Against the EU	7,20%	8,00%	<b>0,80%</b>		<b>-8,00%</b>
<b>Estonia</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)		<b>4%</b>	<b>4,00%</b>	<b>26,00%</b>	<b>22,00%</b>
Conservative People's Party of Estonia		4%	<b>4,00%</b>	11,00%	<b>7,00%</b>
Estonian Free Party			<b>0,00%</b>	15,00%	<b>15,00%</b>
<b>Finland</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>15,70%</b>	<b>22,20%</b>	<b>6,50%</b>	<b>17,00%</b>	<b>-5,20%</b>
Finns Party	9,80%	12,90%	<b>3,10%</b>	8,90%	<b>-4,00%</b>
Left Alliance	5,90%	9,30%	<b>3,40%</b>	8,10%	<b>-1,20%</b>
<b>France</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>23,57%</b>	<b>35,41%</b>	<b>11,84%</b>	<b>38,50%</b>	<b>3,09%</b>
National Front	6,30%	24,95%	<b>18,65%</b>	29,00%	<b>4,05%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
Libertas (Movement for France)	4,60%		<b>-4,60%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
Left Front	6,00%	6,34%	<b>0,34%</b>	4,00%	<b>-2,34%</b>
New Anticapitalist Party	4,90%	0,30%	<b>-4,60%</b>	1,50%	<b>1,20%</b>
France Arise	1,77%	3,82%	<b>2,05%</b>	4,00%	<b>0,18%</b>
<b>Germany</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>7,50%</b>	<b>15,50%</b>	<b>8,00%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>2,50%</b>
The Left	7,50%	7,40%	<b>-0,10%</b>	10%	<b>2,60%</b>
Alternative for Germany		7,10%	<b>7,10%</b>	8%	<b>0,90%</b>
National Democratic Party of Germany		1,00%	<b>1,00%</b>		<b>-1,00%</b>
<b>Greece</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>20,20%</b>	<b>45,47%</b>	<b>25,27%</b>	<b>53,50%</b>	<b>8,03%</b>
Popular Orthodox Rally	7,15%		<b>-7,15%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
Communist Party of Greece	8,35%	6,07%	<b>-2,28%</b>	8,50%	<b>2,43%</b>
Coalition of the Radical Left	4,70%	26,57%	<b>21,87%</b>	29,00%	<b>2,43%</b>
Golden Dawn		9,38%	<b>9,38%</b>	9,50%	<b>0,12%</b>
Independent Greeks		3,45%	<b>3,45%</b>	3,00%	<b>-0,45%</b>
Popular Unity			<b>0,00%</b>	3,50%	<b>3,50%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
<b>Hungary</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>71,13%</b>	<b>66,16%</b>	<b>-4,97%</b>	<b>72%</b>	<b>5,84%</b>
Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary)	14,77%	14,68%	<b>-0,09%</b>	21%	<b>6,32%</b>
Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Alliance	56,36%	51,48%	<b>-4,88%</b>	51%	<b>-0,48%</b>
<b>Ireland</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>13,86%</b>	<b>17,00%</b>	<b>3,14%</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>7,00%</b>
Socialist Party	2,76%		<b>-2,76%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
Sinn Féin	11,10%	17,00%	<b>5,90%</b>	21%	<b>4,00%</b>
Anti-Austerity Alliance–People Before Profit			<b>0,00%</b>	3%	<b>3,00%</b>
<b>Italy</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>13,58%</b>	<b>34,99%</b>	<b>21,41%</b>	<b>48,90%</b>	<b>13,91%</b>
Northern League	10,20%	6,15%	<b>-4,05%</b>	14,30%	<b>8,15%</b>
Communist Refoundation Party, European Left, Italian Communists	3,38%		<b>-3,38%</b>	1,20%	<b>1,20%</b>
Five Star Movement		21,15%	<b>21,15%</b>	29,10%	<b>7,95%</b>
Brothers of Italy - National Alliance	0	3,66%	<b>3,66%</b>	4,30%	<b>0,64%</b>
For Another Europe - With Tsipras		4,03%	<b>4,03%</b>		<b>-4,03%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
<b>Latvia</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>7,45%</b>	<b>14,25%</b>	<b>6,80%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>3,75%</b>
For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (National Alliance in 2014)	7,45%	14,25%	<b>6,80%</b>	15%	<b>0,75%</b>
For Latvia from the Heart				3%	<b>3,00%</b>
<b>Lithuania</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>12,22%</b>	<b>20,89%</b>	<b>8,67%</b>	<b>20,00%</b>	<b>-0,89%</b>
Order and Justice	12,22%	14,27%	<b>2,05%</b>	11,00%	<b>-3,27%</b>
Lithuanian Peasant and Greens Union		6,62%	<b>6,62%</b>	9,00%	<b>2,38%</b>
<b>Luxembourg</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>3,41%</b>	<b>5,76%</b>	<b>2,35%</b>	<b>4,00%</b>	<b>-1,76%</b>
The Left	3,41%	5,76%	<b>2,35%</b>	4,00%	<b>-1,76%</b>
<b>Malta</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)			<b>0,00%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
<b>The Netherlands</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>24,07%</b>	<b>29,80%</b>	<b>5,73%</b>	<b>29,00%</b>	<b>-0,80%</b>
Party for Freedom	16,97%	13,20%	<b>-3,77%</b>	19,00%	<b>5,80%</b>
Socialist Party	7,10%	9,60%	<b>2,50%</b>	10,00%	<b>0,40%</b>
<b>Poland</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>27,40%</b>	<b>39,39%</b>	<b>11,99%</b>	<b>51,18%</b>	<b>11,79%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
Law and Justice	27,40%	32,33%	<b>4,93%</b>	37,58%	<b>5,25%</b>
Congress of the New Right		7,06%	<b>7,06%</b>	0,03%	<b>-7,03%</b>
Kukiz'15				8,81%	<b>8,81%</b>
Coalition for the Renewal of the Republic – Freedom and Hope				4,76%	<b>4,76%</b>
<b>Portugal</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>22,59%</b>	<b>19,29%</b>	<b>-3,30%</b>	<b>17,30%</b>	<b>-1,99%</b>
Left Block	10,73%	4,93%	<b>-5,80%</b>	9,50%	<b>4,57%</b>
Unitary Democratic Coalition	10,66%	12,69%	<b>2,03%</b>	7,80%	<b>-4,89%</b>
Workers' Communist Party	1,20%	1,67%	<b>0,47%</b>		<b>-1,67%</b>
<b>Romania</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>8,65%</b>	<b>2,70%</b>	<b>-5,95%</b>	<b>1,30%</b>	<b>-1,40%</b>
Greater Romania Party	8,65%	2,70%	<b>-5,95%</b>	1,30%	<b>-1,40%</b>
<b>Slovakia</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>5,55%</b>	<b>3,61%</b>	<b>-1,94%</b>	<b>7,10%</b>	<b>3,49%</b>
Slovak National Party	5,55%	3,61%	<b>-1,94%</b>	7,10%	<b>3,49%</b>
<b>Slovenia</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)			<b>0,00%</b>		<b>0,00%</b>
<b>Spain</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>3,73%</b>	<b>17,96%</b>	<b>14,23%</b>	<b>22,10%</b>	<b>4,14%</b>

Country/Party	EP-election result in 2009	EP-election result in 2014	Change in popularity between 2009 and 2014	Popularity at the end of 2015 based on opinion poll data (among likely voters)	Change in popularity between 2014 and 2015
United Left-Initiative for Catalonia Greens-United and Alternative Left-Bloc for Asturias	3,73%	9,99%	<b>6,26%</b>	4,80%	<b>-5,19%</b>
Podemos		7,97%	<b>7,97%</b>	17,30%	<b>9,33%</b>
<b>Sweden</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>8,93%</b>	<b>16,00%</b>	<b>7,07%</b>	<b>26,20%</b>	<b>10,20%</b>
Sweden Democrats	3,27%	9,70%	<b>6,43%</b>	18,90%	<b>9,20%</b>
Left Party	5,66%	6,30%	<b>0,64%</b>	7,30%	<b>1,00%</b>
<b>United Kingdom</b> (Popularity of all populist parties in total)	<b>16,50%</b>	<b>27,50%</b>	<b>11,00%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>-11,50%</b>
UK Independence Party	16,50%	27,50%	<b>11,00%</b>	16%	<b>-11,50%</b>



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**FEPS** is the first progressive political foundation established at the European level. Created in 2007 and co-financed by the European Parliament, it aims at establishing an intellectual crossroad between social democracy and the European project. It puts fresh thinking at the core of its action and serves as an instrument for pan-European intellectual and political reflection.

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## **Policy Solutions**

**Policy Solutions** is a progressive political research institute based in Brussels and Budapest. It is committed to the values of liberal democracy, solidarity, equal opportunity and European integration. Among the pre-eminent areas of its research are the investigation of how the quality of democracy evolves, the analysis of factors driving euro-scepticism and the far-right, and election research.

Policy Solutions considers it important that political research should not be intelligible or of interest to only a narrow professional audience. Therefore, Policy Solutions shares its research results in conferences, seminars and interactive websites with journalists, NGOs, international organisations, members of the diplomatic corps, leading politicians and corporate executives.

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# THE STATE OF POPULISM IN EUROPE 2015

If we wanted to use a single word to describe the political trends of the year 2015, then populism will be definitely among the first terms to come to mind. Populism is massively gaining ground in the European Union, and its increasing strength has a substantial impact on the European left in particular. Not only because in many countries populists tend to attract traditional left-wing voters, but also because established party systems based on the competition between major social-democratic/centre-left and conservative/Christian Democratic parties are undergoing a transformation, with the result that previously bipolar systems are increasingly likely to become tri-polar.

Learning about populist parties will help us in better understanding them, and ultimately also in defending values such as liberal democracy, solidarity and deeper European integration. That is why Policy Solutions and the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) have decided to jointly compile and publish a volume that analyses changes in the public support for all relevant populist parties and the prevailing trends in European populism.

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