Great Expectations, Distrust and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments

A Comparative Investigation of Motives for Populist Voting in Western Europe

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Abstract

The electoral success of populist parties has led to a number of competing theories on how to explain this electoral decision. It has been theorized that those who vote for populist parties have high expectations on the way democracy should function, are distrusting toward the political system, or stand to lose from structural social change. In this paper, we test these potential voting motives for nine European countries. We used the results of the 2012 European Social Survey that includes both a measurement of citizenship ideals as well as an elaborate assessment of the functioning of democracy. None of these elements, however, proved to be a decisive factor in explaining populist voting. The bulk of explained variance could be attributed to anti-immigrant sentiments and a low level of political trust. We hypothesize that levels of political trust apparently are not always based on an assessment of the actual functioning of political institutions.

Introduction

In various Western European countries populist political parties have been remarkably successful in recent elections (Kriesi, 2014). Even in the Scandinavian countries, which are typically portrayed as a bulwark of high trust and more tolerant attitudes, these parties have gained a firm ground in national parliaments (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). During the 2014 European elections, populist and anti-immigrant parties scored a major breakthrough and they are now one of the major political party groups within the European Parliament.

The rise of the populist vote poses a challenge for electoral research, as the success of these political parties cannot be attributed to one of the traditional political alignments. The appeal of populist parties transcends boundaries of class, religion and traditional left-right divisions. In recent years, various studies have tried to determine the motivations for a populist vote, and these efforts have led to a wide array of possible voting motives. Low levels of political trust are a major determinant of a populist vote: distrust toward the most important institutions of liberal democracy serves as a powerful incentive to vote for a challenger party (Hooghe, Marien & Pauwels, 2011). This negative attitude is not just limited to the main institutions of representative democracy, but also includes the functioning of what are considered to be mainstream parties (Schumacher & Rooduijn, 2013). Socio-economic exclusion and the presence of ethnic minorities in the community, too, have been shown to have an effect on the propensity to vote for populist challenger parties (Rydgen & Ruth, 2013). While thus far, in most of the literature there is a focus on single-country studies, combining these national studies suggests that various voting motives might be at play, and that these voting motives might even interact. In practice a mixture of various elements is conducive toward this kind of voting behavior: distrust toward the more mainstream parties, and a fear of immigration and diversity (Webb & Bale, forthcoming). This rather diverse array of possible voting motives renders it all the more difficult to pinpoint the exact ideological profile of populist parties.

A complication for the comparative research on determinants of populist voting is that there is strong variation between countries in the electoral success of these political parties. While it can be assumed that some kinds of social tensions are quite universal (e.g., tensions as a result of economic globalization or of increasing cultural and ethnic diversity), the electoral appeal of these parties also depends on the country-specific strategies of political entrepreneurs. In some countries these entrepreneurs clearly have been successful, partly because of the way

they have gained access to the mass media, while in other countries such entrepreneurs are still absent. Almost self-evidently, characteristics of the electoral system too might have an impact on the viability of populist challengers (van Kessel, 2011).

In this paper, our goal is to ascertain in a comparative manner what are the voting motives for a populist vote. Two major lines of reasoning can be distinguished in this regard. The first is that populism to a large extent can be seen as a very radical interpretation of democratic ideals (Kaltwasser, 2012). Populism rests on the idea that the political elite should be responsive to demands from the population, and that popular sovereignty should have a direct impact on political decision-making. This, by itself, is a notion that is at the heart of democratic ideals more generally, but this line of reasoning circumvents the institutions and rules of representative democracy (Prezworsksi, Stokes & Manin, 1999). Following this interpretation, populism might be labelled as an expression of 'great expectations', as citizens simply expect much more of the democratic process than is currently being offered to them in the routine workings of representative democracy.

The second line of reasoning is that populism can be regarded as the expression of the 'losers' in society (Kriesi et al., 2012). Those who (correctly or incorrectly) have the perception that their own legitimate interests are being left out of the decision-making process are more likely to cast a protest vote that will benefit populist political parties. The protest votes that result from this perception of being left out can be targeted as protests against the political elite as well as against outsider groups like immigrants or ethnic minorities.

In this paper, we test both competing hypotheses to ascertain whether a populist vote is mainly determined by high expectations of democracy and citizens' roles within their democracies, or rather by distrust toward the current functioning of the political system. To this end, we aim to identify potential voting motives by distinguishing between various strands within populist voting and electoral appeal, including the functioning of political elites and institutions, economic policy and cultural diversity.

We the people, or the ideal of populism

In the literature a wide array of definitions have been offered to arrive at a better understanding of the success of populist parties. Despite the stark differences in these definitions, they converge on one basic idea, namely that populist parties claim to express the

interest of the population (or at least of major groups within the population) in direct opposition to the way the political elite is responsible for routine decision-making. A hostile attitude toward the political elite, which is seen as alienated from what the majority of the population wants or needs, can therefore be considered as the basic ideology of the populist political parties (Taggart, 2000). From this perspective, populism has been labelled as a correction to the current system of representative democracy, by arguing for a more direct involvement of citizens in public decision-making processes. Taking the arguments of populist parties seriously, therefore, might even lead to more inclusive forms of political participation, and Kaltwasser (2012, 200) in this respect has argued: "when a society is characterized by high levels of economic, political and social exclusion, populism is a method through which disadvantaged groups may give their voice and lead to the implementation of policies that they prefer." Populism therefore is basically expressing an opposition between the 'sincere' preferences of the population as a whole, which are considered to be counteracted by the functioning of the political elite. If this view on populism as an inclusive ideology and electoral strategy would be correct, one should observe that voting for these parties is associated with high expectations with regard to the functioning of citizens within a democratic political system. Direct democracy in that case would downplay the involvement of political elites by paying more attention to the involvement of citizens in the democratic process. The expectations of citizens toward the political system therefore would be an important voting motive for populist parties.

Although it has been argued that a hostile attitude toward the political elite is the main, or sometimes even the only, defining element of populism (Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2014), it is clear that other elements also play a role in this regard. Kriesi et al. (2012) have argued that populism should be seen as the expression of those who stand to lose as a result of structural transformations of Western societies. This broad concept of populist support implies that there is not just a single coherent populist ideology, but rather that various groups may lose out for different reasons, and therefore also might have different resulting ideologies and political options. Kriesi (2014) in this case makes a distinction between more left-wing oriented forms of populism and more right-wing oriented forms. While left-wing populists are more inclined to pay attention to inequality and economic exclusion, for right-wing populists the focus is on nationalism, and the opposition between ingroup and outgroup cultural identities.

In the case of left-wing populism, the focus is on fighting forms of inequality and social exclusion. The groups that are most vulnerable on the labor market will be opposed to various attempts to liberalize labor market regulations and to scale down on social security protection. Here too, the interests of "ordinary citizens" are perceived to be violated by decisions being made by the political elite. Since there is strong concern about rising levels of inequality in Western Europe, the main defining characteristic of this left-wing form of populism therefore should be a concern about rising levels of inequality (Bermeo & Bartels, 2014). Combining this concern with the anti-elitist core of populist ideology would imply that the political elites are being held responsible for failing to protect the population from rising inequality and poverty (Kriesi, 2014). In some countries it can indeed be observed that populist parties in their rhetoric also emphasize this feeling of being 'left behind', partly as a result of economic policies and the liberalization of economic arrangements.

The right-wing interpretation of populism, on the other hand, stresses the potential negative impact of rising ethnic diversity. Populists tend to portray the population as a homogeneous group, with largely similar interests. This form of group thinking can also be associated with a negative attitude toward outsiders who are blamed for the threat they pose with regard to increased competition on the job and housing market (Dancygier & Donnelly, 2014). In that case, populism can easily be combined with a rhetoric against immigrant groups and policies of multiculturalism. Here, the focus is less on the antagonism between the "ordinary citizens" and the political elite, but rather on the homogeneity of the population with regard to cultural and normative affairs.

In this paper, we compare the impact of three competing explanations for populist voting. A populist vote can be explained by high expectations on the functioning of democracy, a negative evaluation of the efforts of the state and the political system to enhance economic equality in society, and by anti-immigrant sentiments. The analysis is based on the European Social Survey (ESS, 2012), which allows us to trace the motives of voters for these parties. An innovative element in the ESS 2012 questionnaire was the inclusion of an extensive battery that probed respondents' democratic ideals. Since research on populism thus far has focused mainly on the content of party programs and other elements of the party ideology, the present study's focus on the motivations of voters is an important addition to the literature and to our knowledge on the electoral appeal of populist parties (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). The fact that we rely on survey data, however, also implies that we can only focus on those parties that are represented in the European Social Survey, and therefore we cannot include populist

parties that have a very limited electoral appeal, or whose voters, for various reasons, are not well represented in the European Social Survey.

Potential Motives for Populist Voting

Democratic ideals

The 'great expectations' argument implies that populist voters simply demand much more from a democratic political system, and that subsequently they are disappointed by what can be offered by that system. The European Social Survey is one of the first comparative surveys in which respondents were asked what exactly are their expectations with regard to the ideal of democracy. This question was introduced with: "how important you think different things are for democracy in general". In this battery, respondents were confronted with different items, ranging from free and fair elections, the protection of minority rights to protecting citizens against poverty.

If we look at the results of this battery, a first striking finding is that respondents tend to consider almost all elements as very important. The rule of law, as expressed by the item: "The courts treat everyone the same", however, clearly is considered as the most important hallmark of a democratic political system with a score of 9.22 on the 0 to 10 scale. Free and fair elections obtain an almost equally high ranking, while there is obviously less emphasis on reducing poverty or on distinct alternatives between political parties (Table 1).

Table 1. Scores on 'Democratic ideals' battery

Description	Abbreviation	Mean
The courts treat everyone the same	cttresa	9.22
National elections are free and fair	fairelc	8.96
The government explains its decisions to voters	gvexpdc	8.85
The media provide citizens with reliable information to judge the govt.	meprinf	8.75
The government protects all citizens against poverty	gvctzpv	8.68
Governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job	gptpelc	8.39
The rights of minority groups are protected	rghmgpr	8.34
Opposition parties are free to criticise the government	oppcrgv	8.31
The media are free to criticise the government	medcrgv	8.26
The government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels	grdfinc	8.24
Different political parties offer clear alternatives to one another	dfprtal	7.99

Notes: European Social Survey, 2012 (n=54,673). Prefatory survey question: "Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general that…". Responses coded on a 0 to 10 scale where 0 indicates "not at all important" and 10 indicates "extremely important". The standard error for the mean value for all indicators rounded to two decimals is 0.01.

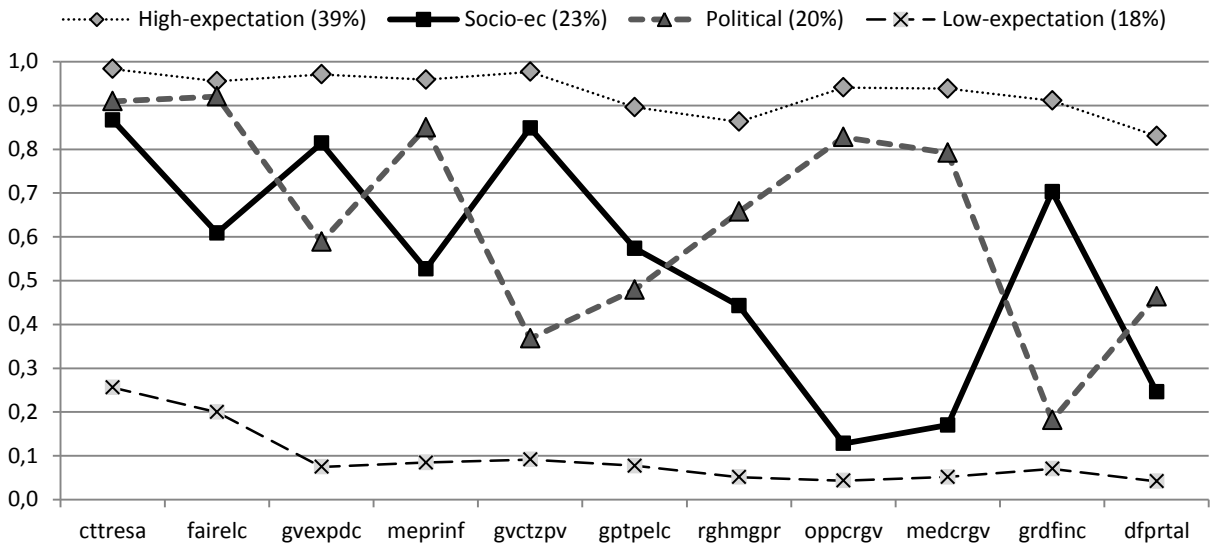
In order to reduce the complexity of this battery, we performed a latent class analysis (LCA), that allows us to identify groups of respondents that are characterized by a similar combination of items within this battery. The main advantage of LCA is that it allows for a form of data reduction that is not based on the items, but on the combination that every individual respondent in the survey makes between those items. Therefore it allows us to identify distinct groups of respondents who hold on to different combinations in their set of priorities with regard to what is important for a democracy. In other words, the LCA allows us to identify groups of people who have distinctly different conceptions of what an ideal democracy looks like. In contrast to ordinary cluster analysis, however, LCA allows the researcher to determine the optimal number of clusters to be distinguished, and in this case the analysis allows us to distinguish four different groups of respondents.

The LCA findings point to distinctive democratic ideals held by four different groups of citizens. The latent class labeled "high expectations", which includes 39% of the respondents, identifies a group of citizens who deemed all of the elements of democracy investigated in the survey to be highly important. This group of respondents gives the maximum score to almost all of the items. Conversely, the group labeled "low-expectation", which includes 18% of the respondents, attributed fairly low importance to all of the democracy indicators. Apparently this group does not have very high expectations about how a democratic system should function. These findings show that just over half of the respondents do not attribute special importance to certain elements of democracy, but rather consider all (or none) to be important.

The other two latent classes identified in the analysis identify individuals who have two contrasting normative conceptions of what is important for democracy. Since in Figure 1 the democracy indicators are ordered on the x-axis from highest to lowest means in the general population, the contrasting emphases of these democratic ideals is visually clear in the criss-crossing of the connective lines. The democratic ideal labeled as "socio-economic" that is held by 23% of the respondents places relatively high importance on democratic values of economic equality (the reduction of income inequality and protection from poverty) and governmental accountability (government explaining its decisions and held accountable in elections). In contrast, the ideal labeled "political" that is held by 20% of the respondents place its relative emphasis on the importance of a free and competitive electoral process, free

media, and the protection of minority rights (Figure 1). The propensity to belong to one of these four groups of citizens can therefore serve as an independent variable in the analysis.

Figure 1. Democratic ideals held by four groups of citizens



Notes: Latent class analysis conditional probabilities. The y-axis plots the conditional probabilities that members of a latent class will consider the indicators on the x-axis to be important aspects of democracy. Indicators on the x-axis are organized from left to right by decreasing means. Findings based on a dichotomous coding of democratic ideals indicators suggested by the mean and median values of this battery of indicators: responses of 0 to 8 are recoded as 0; and responses of 9 and 10 are recoded as 1.Robustness tests were performed to investigate whether the findings were affected by using the original 10-cateory response items, as well as different dichotomization cutoffs (e.g. 6, 7, 8, 10, as well as the mean or median of each variable), and these tests all yielded similar results. See the appendix (Table A1) for goodness of fit statistics.

Evaluations of democracy

In addition to ascertaining the abstract ideals of democracy that citizens hold, it is also important to know how these citizens evaluate the extent to which their own country lives up to these ideals. The ESS questionnaire included a related battery of questions in which respondents could indicate to what extent each specific aspect of democracy applies in their own country. These questions thus probe respondents' evaluation of current practices within each individual country that participates in the ESS. The results of the factor analysis (Table 2) indicate that two factors can be clearly distinguished in this evaluation battery. On the one hand citizens evaluate items related to an over-arching idea of equality, including the socio-economic policy of their national government and obligations toward individual citizens, with as most characteristic item on this factor, the statement that government does protect citizens from poverty. On the other hand a more procedural form of evaluation prevails that places

emphasis on the proper functioning of democratic institutions, with as most characteristic item the statement that opposition parties are free to criticize government policy in the country of the respondent. These two factors therefore express different dimensions along which citizens evaluate the functioning of their democracies, and they can be used to explain a vote for populist parties.

Table 2. Evaluations of functioning of the national political system

In my country…	Equality	Procedural
Elections are free and fair	.418	**.657**
Opposition parties can criticize government policy	.135	**.899**
The media can criticize government policy	.181	**.881**
The courts treat everyone the same	**.731**	.319
Government protects citizens against poverty	**.891**	.151
Government explains the decisions it takes	**.849**	.199
Government reduces income inequality	**.882**	.128

Results of a principal compent analysis, with varimax rotation. Source: ESS 2012.

While the previous two measurements are based on innovative batteries of questions about democratic ideals and evaluations as they were first developed in the ESS questionnaire for 2012, it is important to supplement these variables with the more traditionally used instruments to investigate populist or protest voting. First, we include trust in political institutions. Lack of political trust has been shown to be one of the main voting motives for populist anti-system parties. In the ESS, five national political institutions are listed for which respondents can express their level of trust on a zero to ten scale. The institutions are parliament, the legal system, police, politicians and political parties. In line with theoretical expectations and previous research (Hooghe, 2011), these five items prove to be a one-dimensional scale (Eigenvalue 3.626, explained variance 72.52 %) with a strong internal coherence (Cronbach's α .91). In order to assess a negative attitude toward immigrants, we include the three item anti-immigrant sentiment scale that is routinely included in the European Social Survey (Semyonov, Raijman & Gorodzeisky, 2006). Some populist parties have also stressed a negative attitude toward the process of European integration. In the European Social Survey questionnaire, this Eurosceptic attitude is only measured with one item about whether or not European integration has gone too far. In countries that are a member of the EU this item can be used to assess a negative attitude toward the process of European integration and the accompanying loss of national sovereignty.

We also include a rather large number of control variables, in order to be sure that we do not find any spurious relations. More specifically we included variables that previously have been shown to have an effect on the propensity to vote for a populist party. More specifically we include the education level of the respondent, and obvious socio-demographic information like age and gender. Further, we include generalized trust, placement on a political left-right scale, and political interest.

As dependent variable we include voting behavior, that was asked in the European Social Survey by asking the party the respondent voted for in the last general elections. In this survey too, however, it can be observed that the percentage of respondents indicating a populist vote is clearly lower than what we know from electoral results. Partly this can be explained by social desirability, and is partly a result of the fact that the determinants of a populist vote (e.g., lower level of education or less trust), also renders it more likely that a potential respondent will not take part in the survey. Nevertheless, for nine countries that were included in the ESS, we do have sufficient respondents indicating a populist vote to conduct a viable analysis. We limit ourselves to those political parties that unequivocally can be considered as populist, as indicated by previous research. For Belgium, we focus on the Vlaams Belang, combined with the smaller parties of LDD and Front National (Pauwels, 2011). In Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is included (McGann & Kitschelt, 2005). The Nordic countries are represented with the Danish People's Party, the True Finns, the Norwegian Freedom Party and the Swedish Democrats (Bengtsson et al., 2014). In France, the Front National is a traditional extreme right voice (Mayer, 1999) while in Italy the Movimento 5 Stelle can be considered as a new but electorally highly successful phenomenon (Colloca & Corbetta, 2014). For the Netherlands, the PVV Freedom Party can be considered as a typical representative of populist parties (van der Pas, de Vries & van der Brug, 2013). In each of these nine countries, the ESS contains a sufficient number of respondents who indicate that they have voted for a populist party (Table 2). The fact that these nine countries are available implies that the number of level-2 units is too limited to conduct multilevel analysis. We therefore opt to analyze the results in every country separately, which also corresponds to the notion that not every populist party might exert the same attraction for potential voters.

Table 3. Populist voters in ESS 2012

Country	Party	Proportion in ESS
Belgium	Vlaams Belang/LDD/FN	3.3
Switzerland	SVP	8.8
Denmark	DFP	7.1
Finland	True Finns	9.2
France	Front National	7.2
Italy	Movimento 5 Stelle	13.1
Netherlands	PVV	4.9
Norway	FP	8.1
Sweden	SD	3.5

Source: ESS 2012. Party voted for in the last national elections.

Table 4. Determinants of populist voting

	Belgium		Denmark		Finland		France	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
Citizenship ideals High Expectations Socio-Economic Political	 -.431 (.504) .055 (380) -.100 (.547)	 -.403 (509) .037 (.390) -.050 (.549)	 -.060 (.567) .024 (.493) .137 (.477)	 .283 (.576) -.043 (.498) -.49 (.487)	 1.006 (.327)*** .492 (.295) .973 (.318)**	 .765 (.332)** .271 (.299) .817 (.319)**	 -.008 (.341) .209 (.270) .244 (.405)	 .080 (.347) .286(.275) .312 (.408)
Evaluations Equality Procedural	 .111 (.201) .008 (.179)	 .060 (.206) .007 (.181)	 -.270 (.204) .160 (.227)	 -.236 (.207) .120 (.229)	 -.154 (.122) .029 (.156)	 -.111 (.123) .004 (.157)	 .094 (.129) -.025 (.123)	 .069 (.132) -.044 (.124)
Political Trust	-.620 (.221)***	-.612 (.224)**	-.403 (.209)	-.334 (.211)	-.649 (.144)***	-.546 (.146)***	-.488 (.158)**	-.404 (.161)**
Gender	-.295 (.299)	-.287 (.304)	-.293 (.265)	-.382 (.270)	-.809 (.179)***	-.760 (.180)***	-.486(.195)*	-.533 (.198)**
Age	-.006 (.008)	-.007 (.008)	.016 (.007)*	.016 (.008)*	-.009 (.005)	-.009 (.005)	-.009 (.006)	-.009 (.006)
Education	-.033 (.044)	-.038 (.045)	-.037 (.027)	-.030 (.027)	-.055 (.024)*	-.054(.024)*	-.012 (.031)	-.006 (.032)
Generalized Trust	-.369 (.188)*	-.355 (.191)	.062 (.174)	.139 (.179)	.199 (.125)	.195 (.126)	.170 (.132)	.207 (.135)
Left Right	.331 (.077)***	.332 (.078)***	.221 (.062)***	.234 (.062)***	.013 (.041)	.021 (.041)	.207 (.043)***	.214 (.043)***
Political Interest	.106 (.172)	.110 (.174)	.176 (.178)	.221 (.180)	-.257 (.111)**	-.225 (.113)*	.096 (.115)	.077 (.116)
Satisfaction Economy	-.030 (.079)	-.025 (.081)	-.071 (.061)	-.062 (.062)	.028 (.050)	.049 (.051)	-.023 (.055)	-.024 (.056)
Anti-Immigrant Sent.	-.367 (.188)	-.326 (.203)	.860 (.155)***	.746 (.162)***	-.585 (.117)***	-.389 (.123)***	-.795 (.125)***	-.780 (.127)***
Euroscepticism	---	.007 (.061)	----	.149 (.053)**	---	.225 (.043)***	---	.070 (.040)
Cte	-4.381 (1.209)	-4.361 (1.245)	-3.748 (.996)	-4.632 (1.056)	.403 (.688)	-1.294 (.767)	-3.157 (.825)	-3.585 (.872)
Nagelkerke r2	.186	.182	.283	.297	.149	.178	.216	.221
N	1689	1681	1353	1332	1952	1944	1744	1730

Table 4 continued. Determinants of populist voting

	Italy		Netherlands		Sweden		Switzerland	Norway
	I	II	I	II	I	II		
Citizenship ideals High Expectations Socio-Economic Political	1.189 (.626) .454 (.641) .115 (.844)	1.181 (.627) .422 (.641) .098 (.845)	.112 (.150) -.676 (.468) .116(.392)	.109 (.551) -.652 (468) .129 (.394)	.827 (.688) .051 (.734) .754 (.679)	.873 (.697) .040 (.733) .703 (.687)	-.228 (.456) -.080 (.335) .021 (.389)	.731 (.456) .626 (.417) .0947 (427)
Evaluations Equality Procedural	.044 (.169) -.485 (.127)***	.049 (.171) -.476 (.128)***	-.803 (.218)*** -.276 (.208)	-.731 (.218)** -.280 (.208)	-.306 (.164) -.213 (258)	-.347 (.168) -.186 (.267)	.140 (.187) .066 (.176)	-.293 (.158) -.003 (.207)
Political Trust	-.400 (.200)**	-.408 (.202)**	-.329 (.220)	-.237 (.223)	-.209 (.247)	-.227 (.257)	.133 (.192)	-.385 (.180)*
Gender	-.333 (.251)	-.328 (.253)	-.596 (.269)*	-.571 (.271)*	-.417 (.344)	-.547 (.357)	.048 (.231)	-.849 (.238)***
Age	-.022 (.008)**	-.021 (.008)**	-.008 (.008)	-.007 (.008)	-.007 (.009)	-.003 (.010)	.007 (.006)	.001 (.006)
Education	.044 (.028)	-.046 (.028)	-.094 (.041)*	-.088 (.042)*	-.084 (.062)	-.093 (.064)	-.095 (.040)*	-.103(.026)***
Generalized Trust	.087 (.154)	.103 (.156)	.132 (.188)	.127 (.189)	-.020 (.205)	-.001 (.208)	.108 (.160)	-.100 (.126)
Left Right	.046 (.052)	.042 (.052)	.344 (.073)***	.333 (.073)***	.055 (.076)	.023 (.078)	.468 (.067)***	.486(.062)***
Political Interest	-.197 (.150)	-.196 (.151)	-.334 (.071)	-.303 (.171)	-.066 (.196)	-.016 (.205)	-.332 (.156)*	-.234 (.145)
Satisfaction Economy	-.185 (.078)*	-.183 (.078)*	-.072 (.075)	-.048 (.076)	-.136 (.086)	-.148 (.088)	-.223 (.072)**	-.047 (.062)
Anti-Immigrant Sent.	.206 (.136)	.246 (.150)	-1.005 (.204)***	-.873 (.213)***	-1.695 (.213)***	-1.742 (.219)***	-.705 (161)***	-.639 (.145)
Euroscepticism	---	.036 (.052)	---	.146 (.064)*	---	-.103 (.069)	---	---
Cte	-.196 (1.040)	-.324 (1.059)	-1.014 (1.177)	-2.201 (1.296)	-1.126 (1.410)	-1.260 (1.515)	2.166 (1.033)	-2.079 (.962)
Nagelkerke r2	.173	.176	.300	.309	.376	.383	.2611	.322
N	620	610	1582	1574	1473	1443	1070	1508

Entries are the result of logistic regressions, with voting for a populist party as dependent variable. Sign. : *=<.05; **=<.01; ***=<.001.

Results

The results of the different logistic regression analyses are quite telling (Table 4). Despite the obvious differences between the various countries and political parties, it is striking that we do observe some clear patterns. First of all, we can observe that the models are quite successful, with explained variances ranging from 15 to 38 per cent. Our models are thus quite good in explaining why respondents have opted for a populist party.

First we deal with the democratic ideals of these voters. As can be observed, this variable is hardly ever significant. The idea that populist voters have high expectations or democratic ideals that simply cannot be met, therefore, is not supported at all by this analysis. Only for Finland, we find an exception among the voters of the True Finns, where having democratic expectation significantly contributes to the likelihood for voting for this party. But in all the other countries, this is not the case, so we can safely arrive at the conclusion that high democratic expectations cannot help us to explain the success of populist votes.

The evaluation scores too, do not help us very much to understand a populist vote. Both for the economic equality as for the procedural evaluation of respondents' own country, most results are non-significant. Quite striking, the major exceptions here are Italy and the Netherlands. In Italy, voters for the Movimente 5 Stelle are clearly motivated by a negative evaluation of the democratic and legal procedures in their country, which might be interpreted in the light of the various corruption scandals during the Berlusconi era. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, we see a significant effect of the evaluation of how the country deals with inequality and poverty, and here one can relate this to the strong austerity measures that have been taken in that country.

The concept that there are 'left' and 'right' wing populist parties in Europe is not supported at all by these results. On the contrary: in almost all cases, populist voters situate themselves strongly on the right of the political spectrum. As already mentioned, only among the Dutch voters for PVV, we do find an element of concern about economic inequality, but this is certainly not a general rule among European countries. While various studies have suggested the occurrence of a left wing interpretation of populism in Latin America, for the populist parties in Western Europe at least it is clear that this not the case, and that all the major populist parties can be situated on the right wing side of the political spectrum, with the only exception as the Movimente 5 Stelle in Italy.

So what does explain a populist vote in Western Europe? Basically, the major motivations can be summarized in two variables: political distrust and anti-immigrant sentiments. First, it can be seen that in almost all counties political trust has a strong negative effect on a populist vote. It should be noted here that in this regression, we do control for an evaluation of e.g. the way the political system function in providing free and fair elections or protecting minority rights. Low levels of political trust therefore do not reflect a negative evaluation of the way these institutions function, but apparently they express a much deeper and more generalized alienation from the basic political institutions of the country. No matter how populist voters evaluate the actual functioning of these institutions and the results of how they work, low levels of trust are a clear and distinct motive to vote for a populist party.

The second major determinant is anti-immigrant sentiments, which for most populist parties provide rather staggering effects. The Swedish Democrats here offer the clearest example: the bulk of the explained variance for this party can be attributed to the very strong effect of anti-immigrant sentiments. Again, we would like to point out that in this analysis we do control for an assessment of the state of the economy in the country, an assessment that in most cases is not significant at all. The only exception here is the Swiss SVP, which is quite remarkable given the fact that unemployment levels have tended to be rather stable in that country. But the effect of anti-immigrant sentiments therefore cannot be reduced to an economic threat hypothesis, as if the immigrants will be held responsible for an increased competition on the labor market, and therefore higher unemployment figures. The effect of anti-immigrant sentiments is rather strong and direct, and is not based on a negative assessment of the state of the economy. The idea that especially the losers of economic transformation processes would be motivated to vote for populist parties, therefore is not supported: concern about the state of the economy in the country does not seem to have an effect at all. This would lead us to speculate that other elements might play a role in this regard.

Finally, the analyses also allow us to investigate the effects of a hostile attitude toward the process of European integration. As can be observed, only in Denmark and Finland we do find a clear effect of an Eurosceptic attitude, but the contribution to the explained variance remains rather modest. If we compare the basic models, without Euroscepticism, it can be observed that the two non-EU-members (Norway and Switzerland) show a similar pattern as the EU member countries that we have investigated.

Discussion

The rise of populist parties in various European countries has led to a number of theories on how to explain this apparently new phenomenon. In this paper, our goal was to put these theories to the test, by using comparative survey data from nine European countries with an electorally successful populist party.

The findings make a number of new contributions to understanding the phenomenon of populist voting. First, the notion that a populist vote expresses high or very distinct expectations with regard to how democracy in general should work was not supported at all by the findings. In fact, it can be seen that principles like free and fair elections, or the rule of law, are shared by almost all respondents in Europe. Expectations about democracy clearly are high, but they are fairly high for all European citizens, and varying expectations about democracy did not affect the likelihood of voting for populist parties.

Second, the findings indicate that a populist vote is not a reaction motivated by a negative evaluation of the current performance of political institutions. When respondents are explicitly asked to evaluate the functioning of parliaments, governments and the courts, this evaluation does not have an impact on their likelihood to cast a populist vote. The few exceptions to this observation can be related to specific characteristics of the country, like for example, the concern about a correct application of the rule of law by the Italian courts. While the cognitive evaluation of the functioning of these institutions does not help us to understand populist voting, we can observe that the more affective trust measure is better able to capture the motives for a populist vote. This observation shifts the puzzle: even if respondents say they are quite satisfied with the functioning of a central democratic institution like the court (e.g. the way the courts treat everyone in the same manner), their levels of trust in the courts still can be low. We do not know, however, why there is so little trust in these institutions, if apparently there is satisfaction about the way they fulfil their core function. Trust and functional evaluation apparently are different procedures, and we do not know currently the dynamics of these two processes. In light of interest in better understanding the curious rise of populist voting in Europe, the findings in this paper render it all the more important to further investigate the development of trust in political institutions.

Other elements that have been proposed in the literature were not confirmed in the present analysis. Membership of the European Union, or attitudes about the process of European

integration did not matter as a voting motive. While it is correct that second-order elections like those for the European Parliament might easily lead to a higher percentage of the vote for populist parties, this observation should not lead to the conclusion that there is an intrinsic relation between European integration and populist voting. Furthermore, while Kriesi and others have expressed the expectation that in Europe too, left wing populism can be found, with the major exception of Italy, we do not find any indication for the occurrence of this phenomenon.

Authors on populist voting have developed a large number of theoretical approaches, in trying to understand what exactly might lead to this kind of voting behavior. Do the voters fear European integration, or are they not satisfied with the way the courts function, or do they feel themselves as the victims of an economic downturn? None of these explanations, however, proves to be very powerful in explaining a populist vote. Two elements provide the bulk of the explained variance: political trust, and anti-immigrant sentiments and it is not always easy to understand the cognitive logic behind these judgments. Previous studies have indicated that there is not a direct relation between satisfaction with government services that are provided, and the level of political trust. It is equally clear that there is no relation between the presence of ethnic minorities in society, and the level of anti-immigrant sentiments. This, of course shifts the question: if anti-immigrant sentiments and political distrust can have such important electoral consequences, it becomes all the more important to try to understand the determinants of these two feelings. The dominant idea that populism offers a vote for the 'losers' of structural transformation processes has to be qualified given our results. Admittedly, the element of 'losing' should be further developed. Specific groups of the population might feel at risk, as a result of globalization process. The standard indicators for social stratification (such as income, economic situation, education level, unemployment experiences) apparently do not help us to identify this group of potential 'losers', and other indicators in this regard might be called for. Simultaneously our analysis suggests that objective indicators do not clearly determine the likelihood of a populist vote. Even if we can correctly identify the losers of social change, subjective assessments still might play a role in the decision to cast a populist vote.

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Appendix

Table A1. Latent class analysis model fit statistics for democratic ideals

	BIC(LL)	L^2	% change L^2	Class.Err.
1-Class	689600.906	245117.9518		0.00
2-Class	550962.274	106047.4319	-0.57	0.03
3-Class	524006.536	78659.8059	-0.68	0.07
4-Class	**506639.148**	**60860.5307**	**-0.75**	**0.09**
5-Class	502715.456	56504.9508	-0.77	0.12
6-Class	499370.932	52728.5388	-0.78	0.14

Notes: BIC = Bayesian Information Criterion; LL = log likelihood; L^2=likelihood ratio chi-square statistics. Entries are test statistics for latent class models identifying one and more clusters of respondents, based on 11 indicators of democratic ideals with 'country' as a covariate.

Model choice note: The BIC is the most widely used statistic for assessing goodness of fit, and a smaller BIC indicates better model fit. A complementary approach is to evalaute the perfect change in the likelihood chi-squared statistic L^2 in comparison to the one-class model (Magidson & Vermunt 2004: 176-177). Even though the absolute value of the BIC continues to decrease through the 6-class model, the percent reduction of the L^2 is minimal in the 5-class and 6-class models. The results of the 5-class model show that the newly added class adds no theoretical nuance to the analysis, adding a fifth class that essentially splits the "low-expectations" class into two groups, one that has somewhat higher expectations than the other. Based on these considerations, we selected the four-class model.