

Identity Politics and Populism in Europe

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Abstract:

We review the literature on the rise of identity politics and populism in Europe. Populist parties on the extreme right and extreme left have gained large vote shares since the Great Recession of 2008, and we observe in many countries, and even in the European Parliament, a transformation of the main dimension of politics from the left-right cleavage to a pro/anti-globalization cleavage. We examine how this relates to changes in voter attitudes and the adjustment of political parties to these changes. Two main types of causes for the rise of populism have emerged: economic and cultural. In reviewing the evidence, we think that there is a complex interaction between economic and cultural factors. Economic anxiety among large groups of voters related to the Great Recession and austerity policies triggers a heightened receptivity to the messages of cultural backlash from populist parties.

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1. Introduction

Tectonic changes seem to be taking place in advanced Western democracies in recent years: the Brexit referendum in the UK in 2016, the election of Trump in the US in the same year, the emergence of extremist parties on the right and on the left in most countries, mass movements, such as the *gilets jaunes* in France, the rejection of globalization and free trade by large segments of the population, an increased hostility towards immigration, strong distrust of elites, the rise of nationalism, and the rejection of the European Union and supranational organizations in general. These phenomena have been labeled as *populism* but are conceptually closely connected to *identity politics* and nativism.

As a result of Brexit and Trump's election, populism research has become increasingly popular (Rooduijn 2019). Between 2000 and 2015, the *Web of Science* database only included 95 papers and books on average per year with the words populism and populist in the title. In 2016, that number increased to 266, in 2017 to 488, and in 2018 to 615. International conferences such as the International Political Science Association have been dominated by presentations on populism. There is now even a peer-reviewed international journal devoted to populism. In addition to political scientists, an increasing number of scholars from sociology, history, economics, communication science, among other disciplines have turned to the study of populism.

Many questions have been raised by these phenomena: What is the meaning of identity politics as increasingly practiced by the populist radical right parties in the context of Europe? How does the emergence of identity politics affect the European political process at the level of countries and at the level of the EU? How does it affect party platforms, vote shares and political cleavages (dimensions of politics)? To what extent does this change in party politics reflect changes in voter attitudes? To what extent are parties responsive to shifts in voter attitudes? How is the emergence of populism explained? What is the role of economic factors and that of cultural factors, and how might they be linked?

In this article, we review the rapidly expanding literature aimed at addressing these questions. After defining what is meant by identity politics in the context of rising populism in Europe, we briefly describe the emergence of populist parties in terms of vote shares in Europe. We then examine the extent to which the rise of populism has changed the traditional left-right cleavage in democratic politics and replaced it with a new cleavage opposing centrist parties to populist parties from the right and the left. We also analyze interactions between changes among voters and changes in the platforms of political parties to better understand the supply and demand of populist politics. Finally, we review various explanations of the rise of identity politics and populism in Europe: the role of the crisis and economic factors, the role of cultural explanations, fake news, and social media. We conclude by summarizing what we have learned, what we do not know, and what open questions remain to be answered.

2. What is the meaning of identity politics in Europe and how is it related to populism?

The meaning of *identity* in the modern notion of *identity politics* is quite different from the standard dictionary definition. The latter focuses on a personal notion of identity that characterizes what identifies a person. It implies sameness across time and persons. Following the lead of Erikson (1968), who is said to have first conceptualized the modern notion of national or ethnic identity as a social category, Fearon (1999) defines this modern notion of identity as “a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and (alleged) characteristic features or attributes.” As a social category, it is not given by nature but is socially constructed, i.e., varies over time and space depending on the social and historical context.

Salient among the many possible applications of identity as a social construct is the notion of ethnic or national identity. Chandra (2006) defines ethnic identities as a subset of identity categories in which eligibility for membership is determined by attributes associated with, or believed to be associated with, descent. Descent-based attributes have two intrinsic properties: constrained change and visibility. The property of constrained change is related to the role of inheritance rather than the choice of attributes in defining group identity, as emphasized by Hochschild (2003). Visibility is related to the visibility of physical attributes as characteristic of particular ethnic identities, such as hair and skin color, etc.

Fukuyama (2018) conceptualizes identity politics as the demand for recognition of one’s identity, proposed as a master concept unifying much of what is going on in world politics today. Rural people in Western democracies often believe their traditional values are under threat by cosmopolitan, urban elites. In the European context, as a result of the refugee crisis of the mid-2010s, a panic has arisen over the possibility that Muslim migrants might shift the region’s demographic balance. Similarly, Kaufmann (2019) argues that the white majority’s concerns over identity—immigration-led ethnic change—is the main factor behind the rise of the populist right in Western Europe, just as it was with Brexit and the election of Trump.

In American politics, identity politics has mostly been used to describe political activism by various minority groups, such as the women’s movement, LGBTQ, and ethnic minorities, to fight discrimination and be included in the political process. Outside the US, it has been used to describe the separatist movements in Canada and Spain, and violent ethnic and nationalist conflict in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe (see Bernstein, 2005 for a review of the literature). In contrast, the new identity politics, as seen mostly in Europe, is exclusionary. It is based on promises to protect the “silent majority” from harmful consequences of globalization, increased European integration, and immigration. In this sense, identity politics, as practiced today, is based on the understanding of identity based on ascriptive characteristics, such as race, ethnicity, and religion. As such, it is a significant departure from class-based politics.

This new form of identity politics is behind the phenomenon of right-wing populism that is playing an increasingly important role in issues like rejection of globalization, hostility to immigration, Euroscepticism, and Brexit. Populism is a disputed concept and its definition is not always clear. The literature includes at least four concepts of populism. It has been analyzed as an ideology, as a political communication style, as project of political renewal, and as a political strategy (Brubaker 2017, Kriesi 2018). A useful and widely adopted definition that is broad enough is the “minimal” definition of populism by Mudde, also called the “ideational” approach. Populism is defined as a “thin-centered 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” (Mudde, 2007, p. 23). Important concepts in right-wing populist discourse are the *nation*, often defined in ethnic terms, associated with *people* and *national sovereignty*. Distrust of the elite by the *people* is based on the perception that the latter are corrupt, but also favoring foreign interests, i.e. Israel, immigrants, globalization, multinational companies.

In his book, Müller (2017) argues that populism is always a form of identity politics, though not all versions of identity politics are necessarily populist. For populists, only some of the people are really the people, excluding others. Nigel Farage, for instance, when celebrating the Brexit vote, claimed it was “a victory for real people.” Thus, for him, the remaining 48 percent of the British electorate is less than real. Populism entails the construction of a binary divide between antagonistic groups. They oppose pure, innocent, always hard-working people against a corrupt elite, and, for right-wing populism in Europe, also against culpable others (immigrants) who do not work and live like parasites off the work of others. For Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), as populism is thin-centered, it can ally with all sorts of ideologies, including nativism. They argue that populist radical right parties are usually Eurosceptic parties and resort to nativism, which combines nationalism and xenophobia, and feeds on the feeling that EU integration and mass migration, as well as mechanisms of multiculturalism, threaten ethnic or national identity. In other words, there is a kind of marriage of convenience between populism and nativism in Europe. (see Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017 and Rooduin, 2019).

In the context of Western Europe, Taggart (2017) observes that, in addition to corruption, populist parties focus on issues of identity: ethnic (migration), regional (European), or national (minority nationalism). The politics of identity in certain cases (Belgium, Italy) is fused with the assertion of sub-national identities. By focusing on issues of immigration, regionalism, corruption, and Euroscepticism, populists attack the core pillars of contemporary Western European politics. The situation in Central and Eastern Europe is different in that it gave rise to a new sub-type of populist parties that are centrist and not always Eurosceptic (Stanley 2017). Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) note that populism is not a recent phenomenon and traces the existence of populism in the past, particularly in the history of the twentieth or even the nineteenth century (see also Eatwell and Goodwin 2018).

Although populism is a global phenomenon, in this article we focus on the European context and exclude the case of other continents that are covered elsewhere. It is beyond the scope of this paper to cover the literature on highly connected topics such as migration and Euroscepticism (De Vries 2018b, Hartevelde et al. 2018).

3. Populism and the Changing Political Cleavages in Europe

In this section, we discuss the recent growth in the power of populist parties and how it has contributed to a change in the main political cleavage from the traditional left-right cleavage to a pro-/anti-globalization cleavage. What is the role of changes in voter attitudes? How have traditional parties reacted to changes in voter attitudes, and to what extent did they let populist parties exploit changes in voter attitudes?

3.1. Populism and the Evolution of Vote Shares for Political Parties in Europe

A large body of research documents the rise of support in populist parties in Europe (e.g., Guiso et al. 2019). Hooghe and Marks (2018) observe a decline in the vote shares of moderate parties such as social democrats, Christian democrats, and liberal parties, and an increase in the vote shares for greens and the radical right and left in EU countries just before 2017.

Pappas and Kriesi (2015) analyze the impact of the Great Recession on 25 populist parties across 17 European countries, grouped in four main regions: the Nordic, the Western, the Southern, and the Eastern Region. They exclude large countries such as Spain and Germany while including Ireland where, despite a severe crisis, no major populist party emerged. In addition, some parties considered as populist, such as Front de Gauche in France, are not included in their analysis. Further, they distinguish populist and non-populist parties in a dichotomous way. Despite those limits, their approach is useful as it allows them to test the hypothesis that both economic and political crises affect populism. Based on the parties included in their case selection, they find a fuzzy relationship between populism and the crisis: during the Great Recession, the populist parties surged rather modestly, albeit with country differences.

Several studies show that the 2015 migration crisis was an important factor fueling the rise of radical right parties (Dinas et al. 2019, Hangartner et al. 2019, Steinmayr 2017, Vertier & Viskanac 2018). Following the approach adopted by Pappas and Kriesi (2015) and using their case selection, with the exception of the Dawn party (CZ), HZDS(SK), BZO(AT), LAOS (GR), and VB(BE) for which no data was available after 2015, we used the European Election Database¹ to calculate the change in the vote share of those parties

¹ The data applied in the analysis in this paper are based on material from the "European Election Database." The data are collected from original sources, prepared and made available by the NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). The NSD is not responsible for the analyses/interpretation of the data presented here.

before and after the 2015 migration crisis. The results are reported in Figure 1. In contrast to Pappas and Kriesi (2015) who found mixed results, the data illustrated in Figure 1 suggest a positive overall effect of the migration crisis on the vote shares of populist parties, albeit with a couple of notable exceptions. The leftwing populist SMER-SD (SK) and FI/PDL (IT) lost their vote shares after the migration crisis. Overall, these data confirm that crises positively affect the vote shares of right wing populist parties.

Figure 1 here

3.2. Changes in the Main Dimension of Political Competition.

Traditionally, the main dimension of political competition has been the left-right dimension. A number of studies show that the main dimension of politics is gradually becoming one defined by attitudes in favor of or against globalization. Casual observation of changes in British, French, or Italian politics suggests this change is happening and empirical research confirms this change in the major dimension of politics is taking place, albeit at different paces. Gennaioli and Tabellini (2019), for example, provide evidence that in France there was a clear shift in the dimensions of political conflict between 2012 and 2017. Based on a survey of French citizens, they show that in 2013 voters were split along left-right, but in 2017 the cleavage concerned attitudes toward globalization and immigration. Similarly, Fukuyama (2018) stresses how political conflict in the US has shifted from economic left-right to cultural issues.

The emergence of populist parties and political platforms on the European scene has been associated with major changes in coalition formation and voting patterns among voters and inside elected parliaments. Kriesi and his collaborators in various publications (2006, 2008), as well as Hooghe and Marks (2018), conceptualize immigration, globalization and European integration as a Rokkanian cleavage. This cleavage termed transnational cleavage has its focal point in “the defense of national, political, social and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods or exerting rule” (Hooghe and Marks 18: 3).

Kriesi et al. (2008) study the transformation of political systems in six Western European countries: Austria, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK. They analyzed the content of newspaper media during electoral campaigns between 1990 and 2000 compared to the 1970s. They find that in the '70s, there were three major party families: social democrats, conservatives, and liberals. The social democrats were progressive on cultural issues (in favor of universal values like human rights and cultural diversity) but economically closed (critical of free trade and in favor of protectionist policies). The conservatives, in contrast, were economically open and culturally closed whereas the liberals were both economically and culturally open. They found that in the '70s, national configurations between the main parties were clearly left-right (with the exception of the UK and Germany). In contrast, in the '90s, the new left (emphasizing not only economic issues but also cultural ones such as women's liberation and the defense of minorities) and the Greens became important players together with the emerging

populist right. The three traditional families became both economically and culturally more open to various degrees. However, while the new left and the Greens appeared economically closed but in favor of cultural diversity, the New Right was culturally closed but economically open. In contrast to the '70s, the cultural dimension appeared to be the most important in all countries with the exception of Germany.

Whereas the data used by Kriesi et al. (2008) predate the 2008 crisis, they identify a clear shift in the salience of different dimensions. They interpret this shift as related to the conflict between winners and losers of globalization.

In line with the results of Kriesi et al. (2008), Marks et al. (2017) (see also Dalton 2018) find that the traditional economic left-right dimension has been replaced by a new cultural left-right conflict called GALTAN (Green Alternative Libertarian vs Traditional Authoritarian Nationalist). This finding of the change in the main dimension of political conflict is based on the use of the European Social Survey (ESS) and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) databases. In the same spirit, Hooghe and Marks (2018), using the CHES database, find that the salience of European integration and immigration issues have increased over time in the programs of parties between 2006 and 2014. They associate this phenomenon with the increase in vote shares of populist parties.

Hutter et al. (2018) analyze the change in the configuration of the political spaces and the key themes that structure party competition in Southern European countries (Portugal, Italy, Spain, Greece). They argue that these countries simultaneously face an economic and a political crisis (corruption, democratic reforms, EU integration), both having domestic and European components. Using a large-scale content analysis of national election campaigns between 2011 and 2015, they find that the new main dimension of political conflict reflects conflicts over austerity within the European Union. This conflict is related to the competition between old and new parties. The latter are opposed both to austerity and “old politics.” This leads to a conflict structure shaped by austerity and political renewal. Both divides (over austerity and political renewal) are closely aligned with each other except in Italy.

The situation in Southern Europe is different from what one can observe in Northern Europe, where conflict is characterized by (i) challenges of EU integration, particularly threats to national sovereignty as seen by populists, and (ii) immigration seen by populists as a threat to national identity. Focusing on the politics of the Netherlands, De Vries (2018a) uses the CHES database to analyze dimensions of political competition in recent years. She finds that the left-right dimension has become less salient and is less correlated with immigration. Instead, EU integration has become more salient and is now directly correlated with the immigration issue. She calls this new dimension the cosmopolitan-parochial divide. This dimension in Dutch politics is less the result of a popular backlash against cultural liberalism, but more a reflection of increased economic insecurity. It is orthogonal to the left-right dimension, and in that it differs from the results of Kriesi and his colleagues and Hooghe and Marks who emphasize attitudes towards austerity policies (which is correlated with the left-right conflict) as playing a

dominant role. Also, Hooghe and Marks as well as Kriesi and his colleagues stress the shift in the main axis of competition and change in the content of political competition.

At the pan-European level, Hix et al. (2019) have analyzed the change in dimensions of politics inside the European Parliament. The European Parliament is particularly important in the context of identity politics. Populist parties on the left and on the right are opposed to the European Union that symbolizes globalization. In the 2019 European Parliament elections, populist parties mobilized voters with the goal of obtaining an anti-European majority and thus blocking the functioning of the European Union. In their previous work (Hix et al. 2005, 2007), they found that politics inside the European Parliament had been dominated by the traditional left-right cleavage while attitudes in favor or against European integration were clearly the second, less salient dimension. In their new research, they find this was still true until 2015, using various scaling methods (W-Nominate, Optimal Classification, MDS). Since 2015, a shift has occurred. The pro-/anti-EU dimension is becoming as important as the left-right dimension, if not the main dimension of conflict.

3.3. Changes in voter attitudes

To what extent do changes in the importance of populist parties in elected legislative assemblies and observed changes in the dimensionality of policy space reflect changes in voter attitudes and preferences? To answer this question, scholars have increasingly used the European Social Survey (ESS), which is a methodologically rigorous cross-country dataset (De Vries 2018b, Otjes and Katsanidou 2017, Guiso et al. 2017).

Cantoni et al. (2019) document the emergence of AfD as an extreme right party in response to a reshuffling of German politics that has been taking place, but this reshuffling is uncorrelated with changes in voter attitudes. In other words, the emergence of the AfD does not correspond to any observed change in attitudes of voters as reflected in opinion surveys. In contrast, Hix et al. (2019) do find a link between changes in dimensions of politics and voter attitudes using ESS data on voter choices for the European Parliament. Just as can be seen in MEP voting, the left-right dimension of politics has been losing salience over time among voters while trust or distrust towards the EU has become more salient. Seen this way, the change in dimensions of politics observed in the European Parliament reflects shifts in voter preferences.

Hobolt and Tilley (2016) argue that both sanctioning and selection mechanisms can help to explain the flight from centrist parties to more extremist parties. First, voters who were adversely affected economically by the crisis punish mainstream parties both in government and in opposition by voting for challenger parties. Second, the shift in voting behavior was shaped by preferences on three issues that directly flow from the euro crisis: EU integration, austerity, and immigration. Analyzing both aggregate-level and individual-level survey data from all 17 Western EU member states, they find strong support for both propositions.

Using the 2014 wave of ESS data, Otjes and Katsanidou (2017) examine the impact of the European crisis on the national policy space across the EU. They focus on the effect of a country's level of economic development on the link between economic issues and the attitude toward EU integration. They distinguish different effects for different parts of the EU. In Southern Europe (generally debtor states), economic and EU issues tend to be merging into a single dimension. This is similar to findings reported by Katsanidou and Otjes (2016) for Greece, where citizens who were opposed to austerity measures also contested EU integration. In contrast, in Northern Europe (mostly creditor states), a second dimension has emerged that focuses on cultural issues. They conclude that EU integration is not associated with the same issues across Europe and has different meanings in different places.

3.4. Political parties' responses to changes in voter attitudes

Political parties may react in one of two ways to changes in voter attitudes and preferences: either by adjusting their programs or by ignoring these changes, which risks leading to the entry of new parties catering to these new issues, possibly leading to changes in the main political cleavages. It is well known that existing political parties tend to have an interest in maintaining control over the dominant lines of conflict (Mair 1997, Schattschneider 1960). In contrast, political entrepreneurs have, instead, an interest in creating a new dimension of politics, where existing parties disagree with their traditional constituencies. This can be the case for immigration, EU integration, or globalization (Costello et al. 2012). The PVV in Holland wants to leave the EU to take back immigration issues into "Dutch hands." The UKIP party similarly argued that the UK has no control over immigration as long as it remains a member of the EU. Piketty (2018) documents how the left parties that were associated with lower education and lower-income voters gradually became a "Brahmin left" representing the educated intellectual elite facing the "merchant right" representing the economic elite. The result is a multiple-elite party system that pits two coalitions against each other. Consequently, those constituencies that feel unrepresented in the current political system are drawn to populism and identity politics. Hooghe and Marks (2018) note that traditional parties did not respond adequately to the economic shocks related to globalization. The consensus of traditional center-right and center-left European parties on German-inspired austerity policies has led to the emergence of new parties, usually with a populist program characterized by distrust towards Brussels and the elites. Hix et al. (2019) show that there is a hiatus between party programs and voter attitudes on some issues, particularly on the issue of immigration. Arguably, the relative reluctance of traditional center-left and center-right parties to embrace populist themes, in particular on immigration, has favored the emergence of new populist parties on the extreme right. Dal Bó et al. (2018) analyzed the emergence of Sweden's extreme right Democrats Party and found that it over-represents losers from liberalization and the crisis whereas these groups are underrepresented among traditional parties. Thus, distrust of the losers from the crisis towards traditional parties is a big factor at play here.

Abou-Chadi and Krause (2018) have investigated how the success of radical right parties causally affects the policy positions of mainstream parties. They use a sample of 23

European democracies between 1980 and 2014. Based on a regression discontinuity design, they show that the mainstream parties, both on the left and on the right, are affected by the success of the radical right parties. The positions of mainstream parties on immigration (but also on multiculturalism) between election at time t and at time $t-1$ change in the direction of the radical right parties.

4. Explanations for the emergence of populism

Scholars have invoked different factors to causally explain the emergence of identity politics and populist parties. Among the economic causes, the most important are the effects of globalization and trade openness, the rise of inequality, and adverse income shock generated by the Great Recession. Cultural factors have also been noticed, such as opposition to multi-culturalism, and a backlash against cultural evolution of the last fifty years (gender equality, laws against discrimination of ethnic and sexual minorities, etc.) Some factors are both potentially economic and cultural. This is, for example, the case for opposition to immigration. Immigration flows are an economic phenomenon, and economic opposition to immigration stems from the idea that it creates competition for jobs with domestic workers. Opposition to immigration can also be cultural, because of the fear that migrants will not adapt to local cultures, thus creating social tensions. Below, we discuss immigration together with cultural causes. Studies on each particular topic are relatively sparse but worth reviewing. Let us discuss them in turn.

4.1. Economic explanations: Globalization and rising inequality

Various studies have highlighted the effects of globalization on the growth of wages and employment among blue-collar workers. Hakobyan and McLaren (2016) have highlighted the negative effects of NAFTA on blue-collar wage growth. Autor et al. (2016a, 2016b) have studied the negative effects on jobs and wages in regions competing more with imports from China. The Chinese imports have also had serious political impacts in Europe (Colantone & Stanig 2018a, Colantone & Stanig 2018b). Rodrik (2018) has surveyed international evidence on the effects of globalization on the rise of populist parties. In contrast to Latin America, where populism is mostly a left-wing phenomenon, in Europe, Rodrik argues that it is mostly a right-wing one. Right-wing populists have been exploiting economic shocks and anxiety to push for anti-immigration and nationalist programs.

Colantone and Stanig (2018a) found that support for Brexit was higher in regions hit harder by economic globalization. Using an instrumental variable approach, they focus on Chinese imports as a structural driver of divergence in performance across UK regions. However, they find weak evidence for the role of immigration. In contrast, Clarke et al. (2017) did find an effect of immigration using survey data.

Aksoy et al. (2018) use the instrumental variable method to examine the causal effect of trade shocks on the support of skilled versus unskilled workers for incumbent

politicians.² Using the Gallup world poll, they find that support increases among high-skilled workers when skill-intensive exports increase, but decreases when skill-intensive imports increase. Surprisingly, they find no statistically significant effects of high-skilled intensive trade on low-skilled workers (see also Milner (2018) on the political consequences of globalization).

Tavits and Potter (2015) argue that as inequality rises, politicizing economic interests becomes more electorally beneficial to the left, and more detrimental to the right. As a result, the right-wing parties have an incentive to draw voter attention away from interests altogether and focus on values, particularly in places characterized by identity-based social cleavages such as ethnicity, religiosity, and nationalism. They find cross-national empirical support for this reasoning. Piketty (2018), on other hand, argues that the abandon of the working class by the traditional left implies less democratic response to fight the higher inequality generated in the context of globalization. This leads to the emergence of populist parties representing low-educated (and low-income) voters.

Burgoon et al. (2018) emphasize the role of positional deprivation, i.e., income growth for particular income groups that is lower than income growth among other parts of the income distribution. According to them, deprivation relative to high-income deciles leads to support for populists on the extreme left whereas deprivation relative to the lowest decile leads more to support for the extreme right.

Based on original survey data from the United Kingdom and the United States, Gest et al. (2018) measure people's subjective perceptions of relative deprivation (not just income and economic status, but also social and political status) and their evolution over time. They show, in particular, that nostalgic deprivation among White respondents drives support for the radical right in the United Kingdom and the United States, but more generally the impact of these deprivation measures on support for the Radical Right among Republicans (Conservatives), Democrats (Labour), and Independents.

Pastor and Veronesi (2018) develop a political economy model linking globalization and inequality to populism. Risk aversion and inequality aversion among the poor lead to more votes for populists, especially among those who feel left behind by globalization. In the Pastor-Veronesi model, it is not the crisis that drives populist support but a strong economy with high inequality. This is at odds with a large number of studies attributing the roots of populist support to crises (see for example Margalit, 2019, Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). They predict that voters who support populists are those who have more to lose from globalization, namely those who are more inequality-averse, and more risk-averse. They also predict that countries will have a higher share of populist votes if they have high inequality, are more financially developed, and are experiencing a current account deficit. Pastor and Veronesi (2018) and Grossman and Helpman (2018) are examples of

² They use as instrumental variables time-varying air and sea transport costs, which should reasonably be exogenous to measures of political support for politicians.

theoretical contributions to the emerging literature on identity politics and populism that is dominated primarily by empirical research.

4.2. Economic explanations: The crisis, uncertainty and economic anxiety

Populism is intrinsically linked to perceived crises in democratic regimes. Not only is crisis a precondition to populism, but populists actively perpetuate the perception of a sense of crisis (Kriesi 2018, Moffitt 2016). A popular explanation for Brexit and Trump is thus given by the “economic anxiety” thesis, which is closely related to the “losers of globalization” thesis. It maintains that unfavorable economic conditions for individuals lead to more support for extreme parties on the left or on the right (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). Rooduijn and Burgoon (2018) focus on factors moderating the relationship between economic well-being and voting for populist parties. They explore whether the effect of one’s individual economic well-being on voting for a radical party depends on country-wide contextual factors. They argue that the relationship between well-being and radical voting is likely moderated by national socio-economic and socio-cultural conditions, such as the performance of the national economy, social policy protection, and levels of immigration. They propose two contrasting hypotheses: a deepening hypothesis where economic hardship can deepen voting for radicalism, and a dampening hypothesis where the negative effect of economic well-being on voting for radical parties might have, instead, become dampened by unfavorable conditions and, at the limit, might even disappear. Using seven rounds of ESS data, they find support for the latter but not the former. Rooduijn and Burgoon (2018, p. 1720) argue that “economic hardship leads to radical right voting when the socioeconomic circumstances are favorable, and to radical left when net migration is modest.” They call this a *paradox* of individual and aggregate economic well-being in the politics of radical voting. Although individual hardship stimulates radical left and right voting, this is the case mainly when aggregate conditions are favorable, thus suggesting the importance of relative deprivation.

Rovny and Rovny (2017), also using data from the ESS (2002 to 2010), find that what they call “occupation-based outsiders” (people working in sectors or jobs that have a higher risk of unemployment) tend to support radical right parties whereas “status-based outsiders” (currently unemployed or in jobs with low protection) tend to vote for radical left parties.

Becker et al. (2017) find that the Brexit vote was driven by low education, income, and employment and dependence on manufacturing, not by higher exposure to trade and immigration. This is not inconsistent with the results by Colantone and Stanig (2018a). Indeed, they find that regions dependent on manufacturing employment are also often exposed to higher trade intensity. Essletzbichler et al. (2018) analyze recent election results in Austria, the US, and the UK and emphasize the role of economic variables (unemployment, rising immigration, old industries, smaller regions) in explaining the rise of populist parties.

Moving beyond the Brexit case, Colantone and Stanig (2018b) investigate the impact of globalization on electoral outcomes in 15 Western European countries. They find that, at the district level, a stronger Chinese import shock leads to increased support for nationalist parties, radical-right parties, and a general shift to the right in the electorate. Guiso et al. (2019) emphasize the role of Eurozone institutions in increasing economic insecurity. The Eurozone has created a “policy straightjacket” where devaluation is impossible, but also where policies of fiscal stimulus are prohibited. They insist on the economic causes of populism and reject cultural causes. In reviewing the recent literature on globalization and the rise of populism, Helen Milner (2018, 2019) asks whether extremist parties have gained vote shares as globalization has advanced. She argues that globalization, associated with rising inequality and migration, imposes costs on low-skilled workers in the developed world. Those costs drive support for extreme political movements, such as right-wing populism. Neither protectionism nor a traditional welfare state seem to offer adequate solutions.

Algan et al. (2017) show that the increase in unemployment during the Great Recession had a causal impact on the rise of populism in Europe. They track the change in unemployment and the vote for populist parties before and after the Great Recession in 240 subnational regions in 26 European countries between 2000 and 2017. Unlike other studies (Dustmann et al. 2017, Guiso et al. 2017, Inglehart & Norris 2016, Norris & Inglehart 2019) that analyze self-reported voting from individual-level survey data, Algan et al. (2017) look at actual region-level voting outcomes. They find that, controlling for regional fixed effects, an increase in unemployment is associated with a rise in the populist vote. They show that the increase in unemployment leads to a decline in trust in European and national political institutions and alienation from existing parties. To understand the role of identity politics, they also study the change in attitudes to immigration. An increase in unemployment results in a more negative attitude to immigrants for economic reasons, but there is no impact on the attitude to migrants for cultural reasons. Foster and Frieden (2017) use the Eurobarometer survey data to analyze the economic, cultural, and political factors contributing to the rapid decline in trust towards the government across Europe since the Great Recession. They find the change in trust is mostly as a result of economic factors. They nuance the findings of Algan et al. (2017) and Dustman et al. (2017) by showing the decline in trust has been more pronounced in countries that have fared worst during the crisis.

4.3. Cultural Explanations

One criticism of the pure economic explanations of populism is that some countries that have suffered heavily from the 2008 crisis have been relatively sheltered from populism. This is, for example, the case of Ireland and Iceland. Conversely, Poland did not suffer much from the crisis, but a populist party with very conservative values (PiS, the Law and Justice Party) has been in power since 2015. An alternative explanation is provided by cultural factors. Bornschieer (2010) argues that the rise of right-wing populism is attributable to a new cultural dimension of conflict. The populist right succeeded in framing the question of identity and community in terms of “us” and “the other.” He explains that in this new cultural conflict, those who hold universalistic conceptions of

community and advocate autonomy are opposed to those who emphasize the right to preserve traditional communities seen as under threat by multicultural society.

The most well-known cultural explanation of the emergence of populist parties comes from Inglehart and Norris (2016) and Norris and Inglehart (2019), who argue that the emergence of populism reflects an authoritarian cultural backlash. Following the important cultural changes of the last 50 years, many citizens, mostly older voters, in Western countries wish for a return to more conservative values in society and vote for populist parties on the extreme right who fight for such values. The emergence of populism reflects this “culture war.” According to Inglehart and Norris (2016), the rise of Authoritarian-Populists is a long-term consequence of the *silent revolution* that has taken place in affluent post-industrial societies in the 1960s and 1970s. This intergenerational value shift took place mostly among young and college-educated people in the West. It has eroded materialist values, bringing a gradual rise of post-materialist values (focus on the environment and world peace, sexual liberation, gender equality, and respect for the rights of minorities). The recent change is the result of a tipping point. Those holding traditional conservative values have long been in the majority in the population, but over time, they have become a minority. This has triggered an authoritarian reflex among the older and less educated voters who were more resistant to cultural change. They then seek strong leaders to defend socially-conservative values. This is a *silent counter-revolution* that is taking place, according to Inglehart and Norris. While they try to separate the economic factors from the cultural ones, and admit that the two may be linked, they claim that cultural cleavage dominates. In the same vein, Kaufmann (2018) emphasizes the role of immigration-led ethnic change as a key factor behind the rise of the populist right in Western Europe. He also argues that ethno-demographic shifts are rotating the main axis of politics in Europe away from a dominant economic left-right orientation to a globalist-nationalist cultural axis.

According to Krastev (2017), the cultural element of populism in Europe reflects mostly the opposition between Western and Eastern Europe. People in Eastern Europe view cosmopolitan values, on which the EU is based, as a threat to their national identity for which they fought when they were oppressed by the Soviet Union. The hostile reaction to the refugee crisis in Eastern Europe is thus, following Krastev, an expression of this opposition to multiculturalism.

Bhambra (2017) argues that the vote for Brexit had deep cultural roots and reflected delayed resentment about the loss of empire and the privileges and feeling of entitlement associated with it. In the same vein, based on Eurobarometer data, Polyakova and Fligstein (2016) find that in countries most seriously hit by the Great Recession, national identities have been strengthened while European identity among citizens has been weakened. The multiculturalist stance of the left seems to be irritating the losers of globalization more than the orthodox economic stance of the right (Kriesi et al. 2012, 247).

In contrast to those studies that stress the role of cultural identity and ideology (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Polyakova and Fligstein 2016), Foster and Frieden (2017) find little

evidence that a rise in exclusively national identities or extremist ideology have caused the decline in trust. For Kriesi (2010), however, it is difficult to separate the cultural from economic factors, as the increasing conflict between winners and losers of globalization is mainly fought in cultural terms. Gidron and Hall (2017), on the other hand, argue that economic and cultural developments interact to generate support for populism. Status effects provide one pathway through which economic and cultural developments may combine to increase support for the populist right. They argue that part of the answers may lie on the ‘supply side’ of political competition, where recent movements in party platforms have made the populist right more attractive to many voters (cf. Guiso et al. 2017). To explain Brexit, O'Rourke (2019) envisages a catalog of structural explanations such as Anglo-centric versus international mindset, economic versus cultural emphasis, and the systematic use of the internet by Russia to destabilize Western democracies as well as the spread of fake news. He suggests that, although it is too soon to give a definitive answer, all those reasons seem likely to matter given that Brexit is complicated.

The literature on migration and support for radical right parties is growing (Goodwin & Heath 2016, Harteveld et al. 2018, Stockemer 2016, Stockemer et al. 2018). Hangartner et al. (2019) find that direct exposure to the refugee crisis has substantial effects on natives' exclusionary attitudes, preferences over migration policy, and political engagement. Jankowski et al. (2017) use the German Longitudinal Election Study and find that, after the 2015 migration crisis, AfD took a distinct radical right position in the party system in Germany. They also find that between 2013 and 2017, almost all parties moved to the right on the cultural left-right dimension but not on the economic left-right dimension. In analyzing the causal effects of migration, Dustmann et al. (2018) exploit the exogenous refugee allocation in Denmark. They find that more refugees allocated to rural areas drive people more to the right, whereas in urban areas, it is exactly the opposite effect.

4.4. The role of fake news

The current media landscape can be characterized by developments that pose serious challenges to democracy (Hameleers & van der Meer 2019). The growing importance of social media and the rise of fake news leads to skepticism and distrust; in an era of postfactual relativism, people are more motivated by identity concerns than fact-checking (Van Aelst et al. 2017); in a high-choice and fragmented media context, selective exposure results in confirmation biases and polarization.

The diffusion of populist ideas through the news media, as well as the emergence of the fake news phenomenon, have been seen as explanatory factors for the growing success of populists. An increasing number of researchers argue that the news media play a crucial role in the emergence of populism (Müller et al. 2017; Krämer 2014; Mazzoleni 2008; Reinemann et al. 2017; Rooduijn 2014). Mazzoleni (2008) highlights the complicity between mass media (tabloid press) and populists, as the former has a natural affinity for

sensationalism and scandals, which are then used by the latter (see also Zhuravskaya et al. (2019) for a recent survey of the political economy literature on the effect of the internet and social media on politics).

Populist messages appeal to social identity and are often aimed at triggering emotions (Hameleers et al. 2017, Krämer, 2014). Engesser et al. (2015) show that social media gives populist actors the freedom to articulate and spread their ideology. Müller et al. (2017) explore how news messages carrying parts of the populist ideology contribute to a polarization of public opinion about populism.

According to Moffitt (2016), populists extensively use social network services (SNSs) and the internet to reach out to “the people.” Populist protectionism depends on the rhetoric of “crisis.” In this context, using SNSs, populist leaders accuse the media of broadcasting fake news and disinformation, despite the fact that fake news is closely related to the rise of social media because it has substantially reduced editorial quality control in news distribution (Alcott and Gentzkow 2017).

Social media has seen the development of “fake news” spreading like wildfire and being difficult to control. Facts are often rejected as fake news and fake news are presented as truths. Sadly enough, research has confirmed the existence of this troubling phenomenon. Survey evidence from randomly selected German voters suggests the subpopulation of far-right voters is more likely to believe in fake news than the full population of voters, but the extent of fake news during the German general election was at a rather low level as compared to the recent US presidential election (Reuter et al. 2019; Sänglerlaub, 2017; Scott, 2017). Barrera Rodriguez et al. (2017) have conducted experiments whereby French voters see quotes from Marine Le Pen that are then “fact-checked” by independent experts to reveal her lies. One might think this might have a somewhat sobering effect. Unfortunately, when these voters learn the true facts, they are still even more likely to vote for Marine Le Pen. In this sense, populists can indeed win against facts, experts, pundits, and journalists. Schradle (2019) documents, in the US context, that rather than democratizing and opening up information, the internet and digital activism favor conservative parties. She argues that because conservative activists believe that their views are not reflected in the mainstream media, they use and value the internet more than the progressive groups. As a result, the digitization of news, coupled with a growing conservative media ecosystem of right-wing news and resource-rich institutions, benefited conservative activists.

5. Discussion and Conclusions

In this article, we reviewed the rapidly expanding literature on the rise populism and identity politics in Europe, where there is a close connection between populism and nativism. In addition to the role played by social media and fake news, the two main families of explanations put forward in the literature are economic versus cultural explanations. A striking observation in this survey is that the use of economic variables as independent variables tends to confirm the economic causes of populism whereas

survey results among voters tend to emphasize more the role of cultural factors. How do we understand the role of these two types of explanations? Research on cultural change tends to show that it is generally slow (see, e.g., Roland, 2019). Aggregate survey results do not show big shifts in cultural values, only gradual changes, as well as some correlations between voter attitudes and preferences and vote shares for populist parties. On the other hand, the big rise of populist parties pushing for nationalist and conservative values came mostly after the crisis. It is quite possible that economic variables as the ones outlined in this survey played a key role in the emergence of identity politics and populism in Europe. Populist parties, especially on the right, exploited the economic trauma and anxiety of large parts of the population to push forward their own ideas: hostility to immigration and to international trade and support for nationalist conservative values. There could thus be a complex interaction between the economic causes underlying the surge of identity politics and the cultural backlash evidenced by survey data. One hypothesis is that the political clientele of populist parties who blame existing elites for their economic woes are particularly receptive to the cultural backlash promoted by these parties, but in the absence of the 2008 crisis, this backlash might not meet as much success. Further research should clarify this interaction between economic and cultural variables.

Despite the mushrooming nature of research on populism, several questions remain to be answered. First, how do populist parties behave once they are in power? Do they soften their discourse when they are in office? It is possible to empirically investigate this question given that populists have been governing in several European countries such as Austria, Italy, Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary. Second, is the change in dimensions of politics a result of the rise of populist parties, or are this change and the emergence of populist parties both responses to the changes in voter attitudes? Third, is right-wing populism a temporary or a permanent phenomenon? If it is driven by economic crisis, then it is likely to be temporary and fade as the economy improves. On the other hand, if it is linked to culture and identity, or if populists change the existing democratic institutions, they may have more long-term and widespread effects. Arguably, the effect will depend on political systems. In systems with proportional representation, where populist parties tend to be part of a larger coalition, they may develop a corrective force. In winner-takes-all majoritarian systems, their impact may be different. Finally, while scholars have come to the conclusion that both supply and demand are important drivers of right-wing populism, most studies still focus either on the demand-side (voters attitude) or the supply-side (use of social media by populists). A key question to address would be how supply and demand interact.

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Figure 1. Change in Vote Share After-Before Crises

