



demos

**DEMOCRATIC EFFICACY
AND THE
VARIETIES OF POPULISM
IN EUROPE**

ANNUAL REPORT: 2019

Project highlights for partners and stakeholders

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DEMOS: A Year of Innovative Research on Populism

The spread of populist sentiments and politics across Europe may have brought about potentially negative impacts on society. Populism fosters social polarization by nurturing an essentially “Manichean” world view, dividing the society into ‘Us’ and ‘Them’—which is prone to weakening social cohesion. The political logic of populism is about unmediated, un-institutionalized support from the people toward the leaders—populism tends to undermine the institutions, the legitimacy of liberal democracies, and the rule of law.

Besides, populism creates distrust toward mainstream politics and uncovers conspiracy theories—therefore damaging social cooperation and the ideal of informed citizenship. Yet, the impact of populism should not be conceived only in negative terms. It should be rather regarded as an alarm, something that signals problems about how politics work and why social integration is at risk. Analyzing populism should be an exercise of shedding light on how our societies function; what social problems are to be addressed and how. Since it started in December 2018, DEMOS has aimed at doing that.

Funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, DEMOS has investigated populism through the lenses of democratic efficacy, which combines attitudinal features (political efficacy), political skills, knowledge, and democratic opportunity structures. Democratic efficacy is a new concept, to be understood as a condition of political engagement needed to address the challenges of populism.

In this report, we highlight eight major research outputs conducted throughout the past year—and offer related readings we have produced about them. These include hyperlinked blog posts and concepts, which we explain on our website. A review set up by the European Commission has just approved our first set of academic outputs. Which is an opportunity to disseminate them publicly and gradually on our website as working papers. Below, hyperlinked and provisory titles for those outputs are given. The goal is to support further research on populism and policymaking. Ultimately, DEMOS intends to raise society’s awareness; not only on the issues pertaining to populism but also the solutions—all with science-based scrutiny.

You can find more about us and DEMOS at the end this report, from where we will take you to several of our online platforms: besides the website, DEMOS has profiles on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. We also intend to continue to circulate newsletters and produce more podcast episodes—available in several platforms such as Spotify or Apple Play—to boost your understanding about populism and democracy.

Research Results

Since the project kicked-off in December, 2018, DEMOS has produced eight major research outputs involving 15 consortium partners across Europe; each team comprising different scientific disciplines. Although we have already started sharing results through blog and social media posts as well as a podcast episode, project key research outputs will become fully open-access working papers on our website. For now, we provide a summary of these researches, the tentative title of their respective working papers, and a link to the project website section where these will become available (we also highlight which one of them is already available for download). Some of the preliminary results discussed below may be further refined prior to publication on the website. Further, we compile a list of readings and terminologies, so that the reader can better understand the concepts and issues that DEMOS is investigating.

Conceptualizing democratic efficacy

Populism has long been studied. And yet vaccines against the negative manifestations of populism, which brought about “illiberalism” and other anti-democratic behavior across Europe, remain largely under-researched in academia. DEMOS has tried to fill this gap with the new concept of “democratic efficacy”. Stemming from the idea in political behavior research named “political efficacy”, which was originally formulated to capture citizens’ subjective attitudes toward politics and more specifically their notions about their role and position within the political system, democratic efficacy supplements political efficacy with a democratic quality component. We understand that as key to enabling society against populist ideas and appeals. DEMOS built a typology and tested the concept empirically. Democratic efficacious people follow political news regularly, embrace democratic values such as tolerance, equality, and autonomy, have certain political skills, and are non-intensive partisans. The research found a direct relationship between people being democratic efficacious and their ability to react against populist attitudes. DEMOS is now elaborating ideas and research that promote democratic efficacy.

Measuring democratic efficacy

This research stream analyzed the state and trends of democratic efficacy in democratic polities around the world. Democratic efficacy was measured following two conceptualizations: 1) more extensive (holistic) coupling political efficacy with citizens’ democratic capacities, and 2) less extensive (narrow) coupling political efficacy with only citizens’ support for important democratic values. The project collected survey data from 15 EU countries to carry out the analysis, with interesting

results. The key one is that 41.8% of respondents across these countries have low level of political efficacy; only 24.7% of them are efficacious.

More on that:

Working papers:

- **AVAILABLE:** **Conceptualizing democratic efficacy**, by Márton Bene and Zsolt Boda
- **UPCOMING:** **Measuring democratic efficacy**, by Vaidas Morkevičius et al.

Blog Posts:

- **How Can ‘Democratic Efficacy’ Counter Populism?**, by Márton Bene
- **What Shapes Political Efficacy in Europe?**, by Eglė Butkevičienė and Vaidas Morkevičius

Terminologies:

- **Political efficacy**
- **External political efficacy**
- **Internal political efficacy**
- **Democratic efficacy**

Socio-Economic or Emotional Predictors of Populist attitudes

This research analyzed the roots of populism in different economic and political contexts and examined the emotional and social psychological roots of populism. The research tested the core assumption that populist arguments are grounded in sentiments about one’s position in society. And that someone’s social identity shapes the type of emotions that he feels for refugees, immigrants, and other groups; these emotions are the basis for populist attitudes. The report also laid down the methods and theoretical assumptions for an EU-wide survey to detect populist emotions that can guide further work on the topic within the project.

Further, the research started studying whether emotions can predict populist attitudes beyond socio-economic factors. For that, the DEMOS team at the University of Amsterdam conducted a cross-national survey in 15 European countries, measuring emotions toward the government and the elites, perceptions of threats about the future as well as socio-economic factors and populist attitudes. Their deductive research design tested the role of emotional factors in predicting populist attitudes based on causal modeling. Results show that negative emotions, such as anger and anxiety, are closely related to populist attitudes.

More on that:

Working papers:

- **UPCOMING: Socio-Economic or Emotional Predictors of Populist Attitudes across Europe**, David Abadi et al.

Blog post:

- **What is the Role of Emotions in Populism?**, by Agneta Fischer, David Abadi, and Jan Willem Duyvendak

Populist Parties

The DEMOS analysis of populism focuses on several dimensions of populism, including party politics. This research output analyzed party populism in contemporary Europe. Besides consolidating the approach to verities of populism, it divided 17 populist parties and movements represented in 14 national reports. This exercise was useful in pointing out what types of populism should raise concerns, such as illiberal or anti-democratic, and which forms of populism do not necessarily yield negative consequences for democracy. Better understanding of these forms prompts more effective reactions against “negative” populism. This and the following three reports, all based on empirical research, consolidate the idea that populism is not a uniform phenomenon. Because of that, the EU’s responses to the challenges of populism should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach. Read our policy brief at the annex for more.

Working paper:

- **UPCOMING: Populist Parties in Contemporary Europe**, by Michal Kubát and Martin Mejstřík

Populist communication on social media

This research analyzed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, selected populists’ communication on Facebook, widely used in countries where the analysis was conducted. One of the findings is that, overall, the countries with the highest percentage of posts including any indicators of populist discourse were Hungary, Turkey, and Italy, followed by the UK, Poland, and France. Another is that there is no single online populist strategy: reasonably, the frequency, tone, and topic of social media usage varies across European countries, over time, and national contexts (such as local elections), have an impact on populists’ strategy on Facebook.

Working paper

- **AVAILABLE! Populist Communication on Social Media**, by Samuel Bennett et al.

Blog post:

- **Why media populism matters and how to measure it**, by Giuliano Bobba and Antonella Seddone
- **One populist communication strategy or many?**, by Artur Lipinski

Terminologies:

- **Populism by the media**
- **Populism through the media**

Populism and institutions

This research is based on an expert survey on the linkages of populism and the institutions of liberal democracy. It found that populism seems to enhance, in a first moment, democracy by spurring participation and resourcing to democratic tools such as referenda. However, populism also conceives representative democracy as the rule of the majority, disregarding other basic democratic features—above all, pluralism and respect for minority rights. Electoral laws that boost vote representativeness and provides better support for political parties are some of the ways through which democracies could effectively react against populism.

Working paper:

- **UPCOMING: On the institutional context of populism**, by Josep Maria Castellà et al.

Terminologies:

- **Populist constitutionalism**
- **Populist Legalism**
- **Abusive constitutionalism**
- **Judicial populism**

Populism and public policies

The main goal of this research was to investigate the relationship between public policies and populism. Emphasis was placed on policymaking patterns that preceded the rise of populism. Using both data from international surveys and databases to explore the policy-populism nexus and country case studies, the research found that the content of applied policies are, in general, weak predictors of populism. Also, crisis in itself does not strongly predict populism, unless societies become extremely vulnerable to macroeconomic imbalances. Examples would be extremely high unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion. On the other hand, crisis management policies carried out by non-elected policy experts (in other words, technocratic governance) are likely to trigger populism.

More on that:

Working paper

- **UPCOMING: What kind of public policies trigger populism?**, Attila Bartha with Bálint Schlett

Podcast:

- **What triggers populism?**

Blog posts:

- **The populist policy conundrum**, by Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos

What is coming up next within the DEMOS research project:

- DEMOS gathered a large number of case studies on populist parties across Europe, dividing them into different political categories. Further analysis is to be done.
- DEMOS conceptualized populist governance and started to empirically validate the model through a series of case studies.
- DEMOS started to analyze the institutional context of populism and how populism may affect constitutional and juridical concepts and processes. DEMOS is elaborating the idea of constitutional populism.
- DEMOS will further study the role of emotions in spurring populist sentiments.
- DEMOS will research the motives of the supporters of populist parties.

DEMOS in a Glimpse

The consortium

DEMOS, funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, is a large research project with 15 consortium members from 10 scientific disciplines, 11 work packages, and many complex tasks. During this first project year, we spent considerable time and energy on setting up the administrative and organizational framework of the project. Besides our internal communication, DEMOS laid out a website and social media channels, an internal quality management process, data management policies, and ethical monitoring systems to ensure high academic standards, data protection as well as quality research outputs.

You can read more about our consortium at: <https://demos-h2020.eu/en/the-consortium>

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The research

DEMOS ambitions to expand research on populism in different fields and add new contributions to debates on populism, its implications, and adequate policy and societal responses. Research-wise, these include:

The political psychology of populism: Political psychology is an emerging field and studying the role of emotions in grounding populist sentiments is new.

Populism in governance and policy-making: Political science has largely neglected to study how populist politicians and parties govern; what is their distinct governance style; what is the content of their policies; and what are the effects of their governance. DEMOS will provide new models and empirical findings of populist governance and policy making at both the national and subnational levels; and, also, the policy conflicts at the EU level.

Populism in law; constitutional populism; the effects of populism on the judiciary: Populism is an under-researched topic in legal studies. DEMOS will provide an account of the populist influence on law and legal procedures at different levels.

Democratic efficacy and populism: DEMOS has elaborate a new concept, 'democratic efficacy', which may help better understand the interactions between populism and democratic discontent; and provide new insights into democratic action.

You can have an overview of our research packages at: <https://demos-h2020.eu/en/about-demos>.

Keep up to date with our research

DEMOS seeks to actively communicate with stakeholders and society at large. This report and our activities throughout the past year, both off-line and online, demonstrate that. DEMOS has just finished one third of its expected duration, so our direct societal impact is maturing. Still, we estimate that our first messages have reached a public of around 5,000 people since we launched communication and dissemination in May, 2019. DEMOS is available on a variety of online platforms. Follow us to keep up-to-date on research results, conferences, publications, news, and more.

WEBSITE

Sign up to the project *scientific communication platform* for news, events, research outputs, a forum, publications, podcasts, and more:

<https://demos-h2020.eu/en/>

NEWSLETTER

Sign up to our newsletter:

<https://demos-h2020.eu/en/newsletter-subscribe>

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Follow the DEMO podcast on your favorite platform:

<https://anchor.fm/demos-h2020>

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Follow our updates and events on our Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/DEMOSH2020/>

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Engage with us on Twitter and follow our interactions and research at:

https://twitter.com/DEMOS_H2020

YOUTUBE

Subscribe to our channel and learn more about multiple manifestations of populism from renowned scholars at:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCjkqp0IEGUbdqK7AZP9gZsA>