



democratic efficacy and the varieties of populism in europe

# ANNUAL REPORT

D1.2: Periodic Report for Partners and Stakeholders

**2020/2021**

September 2021



## MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT LEADER

Zsolt Boda

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During the past year, COVID-19 has forced us to cope with strict lockdowns, follow the developments of a worldwide health crisis, await the roll out of vaccines and try to make sense of the implications of the pandemic. Governments were required to respond and communicate with citizens abruptly confined at home. Politics and policy also had to adapt.

The DEMOS H2020 project on populism and democracy could not miss the opportunity to investigate how populist politics, on the ascent in recent years, would fare amid the most challenging societal crisis of the past decades. Populism, research has already shown, thrives in political crises. It did so when the financial markets crashed in 2008 and again when migrants fled to Europe in 2015. It is only logical to assume that populist actors would politicise the coronavirus crisis to gain political leverage.

The project veered off research on important past events of populism towards current new challenges posed by COVID-19 – the project itself, having had to adapt and being extended by five months given the unique circumstances, is now set to complete its work by April 2022.

This edition of the DEMOS annual report, covering the past year of research, explores those links between populism and COVID-19. Preliminary findings show that, at least during the first wave of the crisis, populist actors failed to achieve the political support they sought. That, however, does not suggest that populism is coming to an end in today's politics.

The new studies in this report show these links. They remain relevant for understanding how governments and parties across Europe, under the premises of populist politics, exert influence over the judiciary and citizens with peculiar policies. New insights into populism remain relevant for understanding the future of liberal democracy even when new and unexpected events unfold, such as COVID-19. To that end, the DEMOS team hopes you will

find the research below not only insightful but also meaningful.

*This edition of the DEMOS annual report also explored the links between populism and COVID-19. Preliminary findings show that, at least during the first wave of the crisis, populist actors failed to achieve the political support they sought. That, however, does not suggest that populism is coming to an end in today's politics.*

Finally, the DEMOS team, comprised by 15 reputable and dedicated partners

across Europe, thanks the scientific community, the media, policy advisors, and citizens for keeping up to date about our research and providing us with their insights and interest since we kicked off two years and nine months ago. We are particularly grateful for the project experts who reviewed and validated our work, including the distinguished external scholars that are a part of the project's Advisory Board. DEMOS wouldn't have achieved its results without them and you, readers.♦



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>Populism and the pandemic</b> . . . . .	<b>.4</b>
<b>Populism and governance</b> . . . . .	<b>.5</b>
Populist governance and policies in governments led by populist parties . . . . .	6
Populism in Regional and local governments . . . . .	7
Policy patterns of populist parties . . . . .	7
Populist policies and the European Union . . . . .	8
<b>The impacts of populism</b> . . . . .	<b>.9</b>
Populism and the judiciary . . . . .	10
Populism and democracy: Exploring manifestos of populist parties . . . . .	11
Citizens targeted by populists . . . . .	12
Populist networks on social media . . . . .	14
Populism and the party systems . . . . .	15
<b>About the project</b> . . . . .	<b>16</b>
<b>About the consortium</b> . . . . .	<b>17</b>
<b>Advisory board</b> . . . . .	<b>18</b>
<b>Sister projects</b> . . . . .	<b>20</b>

## POPULISM AND THE PANDEMIC

Populism thrives in crises, but European populist parties failed to turn the coronavirus pandemic into political support. Populist actors could not blame anyone for the causes of the pandemic, something they have done during the financial (2008) and migration (2015) crises to obtain voters' support.

The coronavirus breakout was accidental and beyond human control. As a result, society paid more attention to the serious implications of COVID-19 and ignored populists' polarising tactics.

This is the key conclusion of DEMOS H2020 research exploring how populists politicised the pandemic in eight European countries. The results have been recently published in print and ebook by Palgrave Macmillan. All book chapters are available for free download (see side box).

*Citizens were more wary of a deadly pandemic and its evolving and uncertain consequences. The urgency of the crisis left no space for populist strategies targeting health-protection measures, as bitter as they could be.*

According to the publication, populists in opposition, in countries like Germany, France, and the UK, tried blaming governments' responses to contain the virus. In power, populists in Hungary, Poland, and Czechia had no choice but push the virus beyond the political arena, calling for national unity instead.

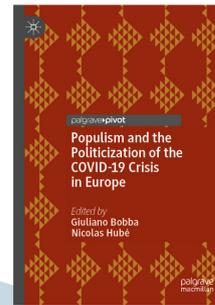
It worked better. Citizens were more wary of a deadly pandemic and its evolving and uncertain consequences. The urgency of the crisis left no space for populist strategies targeting health-protection measures, as bitter as they could be.

The evidence from the populist experiment during the pandemic is preliminary. But the impacts of the pandemic are yet to be seen.

In a post-COVID-19, populist forces in Europe might have enough of ammunition to fire at mainstream politicians in power which struggled to contain new variants or deploy efficient health measures – even if populists in opposition helped lay out the very same policies.♦



### MORE ON THIS TOPIC



#### Book

- ▶ “Populism and the Politicisation of the COVID-19 Crisis in Europe”, by Palgrave Macmillan. Editors: Giuliano Bobba (University of Turin) and Nicolas Hubé (University of Lorraine). [Download here.](#)

#### Press Release

- ▶ “COVID-19 freezes support for populism, new book claims”. [Read more here.](#)

#### Blog Posts

- ▶ “Populism and Covid-19 in Europe: What we learned from the first wave of the pandemic”, by Giuliano Bobba (University of Turin) and Nicolas Hubé (University of Lorraine). [Read here.](#)
- ▶ “Fear of COVID-19 and Populism”, by David Abadi and Agneta Fischer (University of Amsterdam). [Read the post today.](#)

#### Podcast

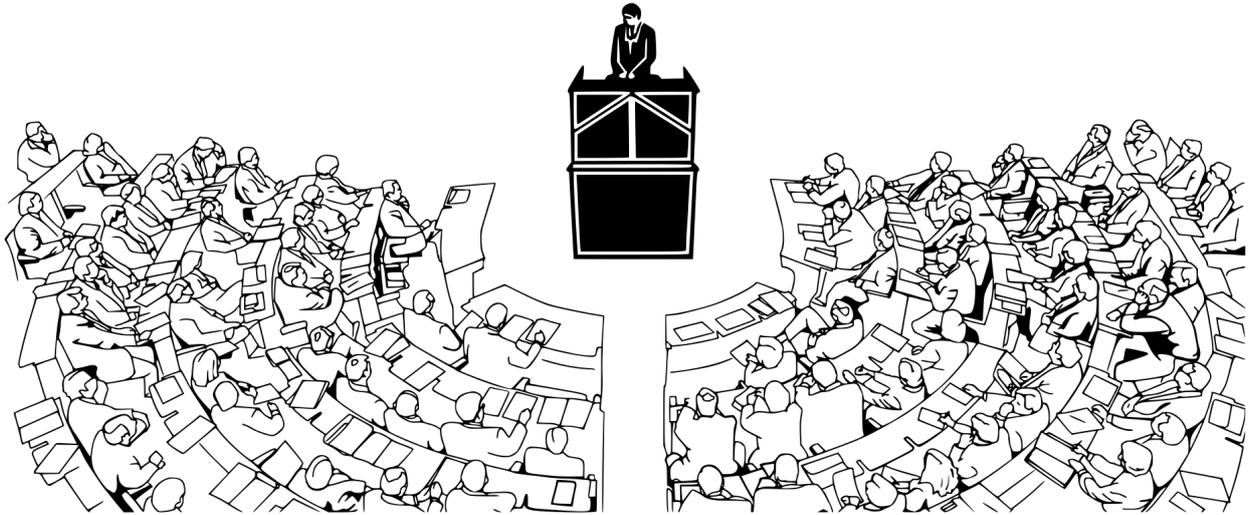
- ▶ “Not as Predicted? The Curious Case of European Populism During the COVID-19 Pandemic. [Listen to the episode today.](#)

#### Conference Video (in French)

- ▶ Follow the [discussion here.](#)

#### Paper

- ▶ “Anxious and Angry: Emotional Responses to the COVID-19 Threat”, by David Abadi, Irene Arnaldo, and Agneta Fischer (University of Amsterdam). [Download the paper.](#)




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## POPULISM AND GOVERNANCE

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**D**EMOS has dedicated a work package to examining populist governance and policymaking, an understudied topic in the literature about populism. That included assessing patterns of populist leaders' policies in governing positions at different levels of decision making as well as populist parties'. Results reveal how populist actors make policy as well as the implications of these actions in comparison to mainstream politics.

While in the literature it is a widely accepted view that populism, being a 'thin ideology' does not have general policy positions, DEMOS researchers identified a number of structural features of populist governance along the three dimensions of policy content, policy process and policy discourse and constructed an ideal-type model.

Policy content: while it is true that the positions of populist actors show a great degree of variation in terms of policy proposals, they are typically ideologically heterodox; often challenge the established policy paradigms; generally reflect majoritarian preferences, and show hostility towards minority concerns; and imply radical and large-scale policy reforms.

*DEMOS researchers identified a number of structural features of populist governance along the three dimensions of policy content, policy process and policy discourse and constructed an ideal-type model.*

Policy process: the anti-institutional, anti-elitist stance of populist leaders combined with their anti-pluralism leads to circumventing the

institutional venues of policymaking, and downplaying veto players; limiting the participation of experts, advocacy groups as well as the political opposition in the policy process; and communicating directly with the electorate about policy issues.

Policy discourses: populist leaders tend to employ a highly emotional, tabloid communication style with negative valence; a Manichean discourse; and a frequent use of discursive governance (trying to achieve policy goals through communicating about them).♦

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## POPULIST GOVERNANCE AND POLICIES IN GOVERNMENTS LED BY POPULIST PARTIES

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In investigating populist policymaking at the national level, the DEMOS teams in Europe elaborated the above-described new theoretical framework – the ideal type of populist policymaking – in contrast to usual policymaking patterns of liberal democracies.

The study involved applying a congruence analysis (pattern-matching analysis) to test the conformity of policymaking patterns of governments dominated by populist parties with the ideal type in seven countries and three policy areas (economic policy, criminal justice policy and family policy).

Results point to a high degree of conformity between the ideal type of populist policymaking and the selected cases, especially in the policy discourse dimension. That constitutes the tendency of using crisis frames and polarising narratives to legitimise policy decisions.

The analysis also confirms that populist actors are effective policy reformers because they bypass usual governance mechanisms in the policy process. An unmediated form of governance boosts polarisation in reforms pertaining to justice policy, economic policy, and family policy – features that are rarely present in policymaking in liberal democracies.

Not only do these findings support understanding of why populists survive in power even in the longer run. They also point to likely negative outcomes for ‘unpopular’ societal minorities such as LGBTQ communities, the poor, the Roma, and civil society groups with weak lobbying power.

These findings have policy implications. Preliminary assessment shows that policymakers in liberal democracies need to connect their messages with citizens’ needs more effectively. Promoting professional and independent media, as well as fact-checking initiatives in several policy areas in Europe, should also improve the environment against harmful populist narratives.♦



### MORE ON THIS TOPIC



Hungary’s Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Hungary is examined in the paper “When Populist Leaders Govern: Conceptualising Populism in Policy Making”. Credit: [EPP Official](#).

#### Paper

- ▶ “When Populist Leaders Govern: Conceptualising Populism in Policy Making.” *Politics and Governance* (2020). By Attila Bartha, Zsolt Boda, and Dorottya Szikra (Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest). [Download the publication.](#)

#### Press Release

- ▶ “DEMOS Elaborates on How Populist Policies Work.” [Read more today.](#)

#### Video

- ▶ “DEMOS Explains How Populist Leaders Make Policy.” [Watch now.](#)

#### Working Paper

- ▶ *Upcoming*: “Populist Governance and Policies in Central Governments Led by Populist Parties”, by Attila Bartha (Centre for Social Sciences) et al. [Follow updates here.](#)

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## POPULISM IN REGIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

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Besides zooming in on populist policies at country levels across Europe, DEMOS assessed governing populist parties and leaders at regional and local levels. It compared case studies in five European countries. Ten local governments and one regional government were selected for analysis based on legal and policy documents. More knowledge on populism at the local level offers a unique opportunity to understand how populist parties fare – and how voters react.

Key takeaways are that populist parties seek electoral support by mixing strategies and ideologies and defending symbolic actions. When they come to positions of power, populist parties stumble on governance and institutional limits at the local level. As a result, conflicts may flare up. For instance, when local and national populist actions are misaligned within the party

*Populist actors value traditional morality and see democracy as a practical opposition issue. But evidence shows that populist parties approach the profiles of established parties through experience in government.*

at different levels. In these cases, populists may pursue institutional change to push for the implementation of their political programmes. But, in general, populist politicians fail to meet voters' expectations.♦




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### MORE ON THIS TOPIC

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#### Working Paper

- ▶ “Populist governance in regional and local government”, by Esther Pano (University of Barcelona) et al. Download [here](#).

#### Podcast

- ▶ Episode #2: What triggers populism? [Listen to the episode here](#).
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## POLICY PATTERNS OF POPULIST PARTIES

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DEMOS performed a quantitative cross-country analysis on party manifesto data to find out how populist programmes shift over time and once in power. One important conclusion is that populist actors do not switch policy goals between ‘hot’ topics: they stick to their goals. But they do not place priority on their core policies like other political groups, such as the Greens do. Also, populist policy priorities are less clear-cut than those of all other non-populist parties.

Some data suggests that populist governance is linked to corruption and political authority. In investigating this aspect, the research found that this opportunistic behaviour is a by-product of populist forces' experience in power.

Furthermore, results show that populist actors value traditional morality and see democracy as a practical opposition issue. But important evidence shows that populist parties approach the profiles of established parties through experience in government. When they are not in power, populist actors and parties usually become more populists than their counterparts in governing parties. These differences are evident in both socio-cultural and socio-economic terms.

Strikingly, populists in Central Eastern Europe have been found to be more pragmatic politicians than those in Western Europe.♦




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### MORE ON THIS TOPIC

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#### Working Paper

- ▶ “Mapping Policy Patterns of Populist Parties. A Quantitative Cross-Country Analysis”, by Oliver W. Lembcke (RUB). [Download here](#).

#### Press Release

- ▶ In power, populist leaders establish governance style of mainstream politicians. [Read here](#).
-

## POPULIST POLICIES AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

DEMOS looked into EU (im)migration policy, an area of conflict between populism and the European Union. Results show a strong correlation between the ideological profile of the parties and their approach to the immigration crisis and the proposed EU response.

Right-wing parties, which score high in the populist index, took a strong stance against immigration and the EU. Centre- and left-wing parties took a more moderate approach.

Researchers also analysed populist parties in the context of the European Parliament. Two key debates were scrutinised: the migration policy debate and the policy debate about the Eurozone crisis.

*Populist actors in the European Parliament relied on their country's sovereignty to object to mainstream and EU policy proposals. Their debates can be characterised by the use of historical parallels (Nazi/ Soviet dictatorships).*

When it comes to migration policy, preliminary findings suggest that populist parties have had very little impact on policymaking in the European Parliament. Belonging to a smaller party in the European Parliament seems unsuccessful, while belonging to a larger political party (such as the EPP) could guarantee some success. Co-sponsorships of amendments typically come from the same political groups; there is no co-sponsorships between different party groups.

Research has also found a significant overlap between the policy preferences and discourses among parties in the right-wing spectrum, as well as some centrist groups.

On the Eurozone crisis, research teams examined how populist views shaped the voting behaviours of the Parliament's members (MEPs) during the Parliament's management of 2008-2009 financial crisis. Topics of interest included assessing how populist policy positions were articulated in the debates, and how these discussions affected proposed reforms about economic governance.

Results suggest that populist actors relied on their country's sovereignty to object to mainstream and

EU policy proposals, and their plenary debates can be characterised by the use of highly emotional language and a frequent use of historical parallels (Nazi/ Soviet dictatorships).

Despite appealing to sentiments that might work with voters, populist MEPs produced high-flown arguments, missed offering alternative solutions, or generated utterly heterodox proposals.♦



### MORE ON THIS TOPIC



#### Working Papers

- ▶ “The Populist Challenge of Common EU Policies. The Case of (Im)migration”, by Lukasz Gruszczynski (Centre for Social Sciences, CSS, and Kozminski University) et al. [Download the study here.](#)
- ▶ “Populist Parties: Migration Policy and Discourses in the European Parliament”, by Lena Karamanidou (Glasgow Caledonian University, GCU). [Download the study.](#)
- ▶ “Populist policy positions in the European Parliament”, by Balázs Horváthy and Viktor Szép (Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest). [Download the study here.](#)

#### Blog Posts

- ▶ “Populist Parties and Migration Policy: Evidence from the EU Parliament”, by Lena Karamanidou (Glasgow Caledonian University). [Read the post.](#)



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## THE IMPACTS OF POPULISM

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DEMOS has explored the impacts of populism on democracy, including on political parties, the judiciary, citizens, and the media. Research shows that populists tend to hold illiberal views concerning check and balances, including the independent judiciary. Their policy proposals and measures often aim at undermining the independence of courts, weaken the protection of human rights and the rule of law.

At the same time, populist actors uphold proposals on strengthening direct and local democracy, although they have largely failed to implement those proposals. Populism also has a strong impact on ‘unpopular minorities’, targeted by adversarial populist discourses.

DEMOS research reconstructed the coping strategies of populists’ target groups, like immigrants, civil activists and LGBTQ+ people to the populist challenge. They include self-censorship, echo-chambers, emigration and resistance.

DEMOS research has also studied populist communication on social media and the way it uses other media outlets. It was found that populist political leaders intensively use the social media and have a larger followership and effect than other politicians. Populists tend to build large and dense networks thus potentially creating echo-chambers for their followers.

Finally, DEMOS conducted research on the effect of populism on the party system. Evidence was found that populist politics represent new issues, and its ‘contagion’ effect on mainstream party politics is limited. However, populism seems to lead to the polarisation and fragmentation of party systems.♦

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## POPULISM AND THE JUDICIARY

What are the consequences of populism for European democracies and the European project as well as its implications for legal procedures? Project research in this area focused on three important areas that have had little scientific input: that of constitutional democracy, representative democracy, and the European Union. DEMOS analysed the role of counter-majoritarian institutions, in other words, that of independent authorities, the judiciary, and constitutional courts.

The key message is that populist leaders reform the judiciary to exert more power. Often, they justify those changes to democratic institutions and norms as a means to affirm the primacy of the people's will. As a result, populist intervention in the judiciary has weakened the role of counter-majoritarian institutions particularly in Eastern European countries.

Populist-led governments in Hungary and Poland have appointed government-friendly judges to courts. Under these circumstances, the demarcation lines between the executive and the judiciary blur, the rule of law loses effectiveness, and what remains is democratic backsliding. Stronger populist control over the judiciary may result in less political freedom and fewer guarantees that the law is upheld and the rights of citizens are safeguarded.

The EU has had to face a regional populist trend. Extensive research shows that a common effort between the European Commission and the EU

*Populist-led governments in Hungary and Poland have appointed government-friendly judges to courts. Under these circumstances, the demarcation lines between the executive and the judiciary blur, the rule of law loses effectiveness, and what remains is democratic backsliding.*

Court of Justice in using infringement proceedings has been the most effective legal resource to protect the judiciary from further populist interference. Experience shows that resorting to Article 258 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union is more effective than invoking Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union. Article 7 was used against the populist governments of Hungary and Poland without effect.♦



### MORE ON THIS TOPIC



#### Working Paper

- ▶ “Populist constitutionalism. Its impacts on the Constitution, the Judiciary, and the Role of the EU”, by Josep Maria Castellà Andreu (University of Barcelona) et al. [Read the study now.](#)

#### Press Release

- ▶ “Populist Leaders Change the Judiciary to Increase Power”. [Read more today.](#)

#### Conference Videos

- ▶ Follow the DEMOS event with Venice Commission on populism and the law: [day one](#) and [day two.](#)

#### Podcast

- ▶ “Episode #3: Populism and the Rule of Law”. [Follow the discussion here.](#)

#### Blog Post

- ▶ “Populist Challenges to Constitutional Interpretation in Europe and Beyond”, by Fruzsina Gárdos-Orosz and Zoltán Sente (Centre for Social Sciences, Budapest). [Read the post today.](#)

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## POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY: EXPLORING MANIFESTOS OF POPULIST PARTIES

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Part of DEMOS's research involved studying populist parties' manifestos in Europe. The research zoomed in on whether populist parties' pledges as presented in electoral party manifestos of selected populist political parties did comply (or not) with established democratic policies and rule of law principles.

While the relationship between populism and liberal democracy is generally seen as problematic, there are authors and interpretations arguing that populism is an essentially democratic phenomenon. Researchers analysed party manifestos and pledges assuming that they express basic ideas and policy proposals that the given party upholds. The analysis included the following countries with the following populist parties: Greece (GS and Syriza), France (RN), UK (UKIP), Turkey (AKP), Poland (PiS and Konfederacja), Slovakia (We are a family, OĽaNO), and Italy (Lega and M5S).

*The relationship of the populist parties to liberal democracy is ambiguous: as illustrated above, the party manifestos contain a number of elements which, if implemented, would seriously affect the rule of law and the system of human rights.*

The findings reveal that, indeed, the relationship of the populist parties to liberal democracy is ambiguous: as illustrated above, the party manifestos contain a number of elements which, if implemented, would seriously affect the rule of law and the system of human rights. At the same time, populist parties propose various measures to develop direct democracy, local democracy, government accountability and anti-corruption measures. Several of them have proposals to reform the judiciary with a potentially positive effect on court effectiveness.

Another conclusion is that policy proposals are multi-faceted, even across the ideological spectrum. Of course, as expected, nativist, right-wing populist parties have stronger proposals in terms of restricting human rights, especially those of immigrants or other minorities. But some ideas cut across ideologies and give a strange profile to the parties. The reasons for these variations need further research, but the role of (national and political) context is certainly important.♦



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### MORE ON THIS TOPIC

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#### Upcoming

- ▶ Results will become available at the publications page of the [project website](#).
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## CITIZENS TARGETED BY POPULISTS

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Populist discourse in countries such as Hungary, Poland, and Turkey have forced minority groups to socialise less, impose self-censorship, and move abroad. Only LGBTQ+ minorities have adopted a reactive strategy by taking to the streets and joining civil society groups against exclusionary populist policies. These are the key takeaways of new DEMOS H2020 research looking into how populism affects vulnerable citizens across Europe.

DEMOS experts across Europe conducted interviews with over 80 people targeted by populism, including LGBTQ+, Roma, academics, migrants, and UK citizens opposing Brexit, in five European countries.

Populism builds on society's perceived or imagined threats against its own traditions or culture, dividing society between a majority of 'good' people and a minority of 'foes' that it considers as a threat. But this is the first time that research casts light on how one group of foes – the minorities rejected by populism – copes with populist tactics.

*DEMOS research has studied populist communication on social media and the way it uses other media outlets. It was found that populist political leaders intensively use the social media and have a larger followership and effect than other politicians.*

A quantitative analysis of Facebook posts in eight European countries also revealed important information about the ways in which populist parties and politicians communicate on social media and how the public receives their communication.

Populist actors in all countries, except Poland and Turkey are more likely to talk about immigration as an issue. In Germany, France and the UK, populist actors also frequently discuss EU-related issues. 'Democracy and legitimacy' is another important topic populist parties often referred to. Populists talk more frequently about 'democracy and legitimacy' than mainstream parties in Germany, France, Italy and the UK do while they talk about these issues less than mainstream parties in Greece, Hungary and Turkey do.▶

Facebook users respond well to populist communication. Analysed data shows that populist actors' posts obtain more reactions, shares and comments than mainstream political actors. Posts about ethnic minorities, including immigrants or asylum seekers, as well as country-specific minorities like Roma in Hungary or Kurds in Turkey, trigger more reactions, and these posts are shared more. They obtain even more popularity than posts about other issues such as COVID-19, education, elections, and culture.♦



## MINORITIES' COPING STRATEGIES

### ECHO CHAMBERS

Minorities have avoided speaking with people with different opinions on sensitive issues. Their goal is to avert conflict. Turkish citizens opposing the Islamist-populist AKP government or British citizens against Brexit have adopted this strategy.



### SELF-CENSORSHIP



In Hungary, the populist Fidesz government has opposed gender studies and liberalism, claiming that it clashes with Hungarian values. Scholars of gender studies have been changing research topics.

### EMIGRATION

Moving abroad has become a coping strategy in five European countries. Polish women considered that option after the country had restricted abortion.



### DEMONSTRATIONS



Targeted by populist discourse, LGBTQ+ groups have taken to the streets to protest. It is the only group of minorities that have actively opposed populist tactics.

## MORE ON THIS TOPIC

### Working Paper

- ▶ “Citizens’ reactions to populism in Europe: How do target groups respond to the populist challenge?”, by Osman Sahin (Glasgow Caledonian University) et al. [Read the study now.](#)

### Press Release

- ▶ “Reacting to Populism, Minorities Impose Self-Censorship and Move Abroad”. [Read more today.](#)

### Further Reading

- ▶ “Socio-Economic or Emotional Predictors of Populist Attitudes across Europe”, David Abadi (University of Amsterdam) et al. [Download now.](#)

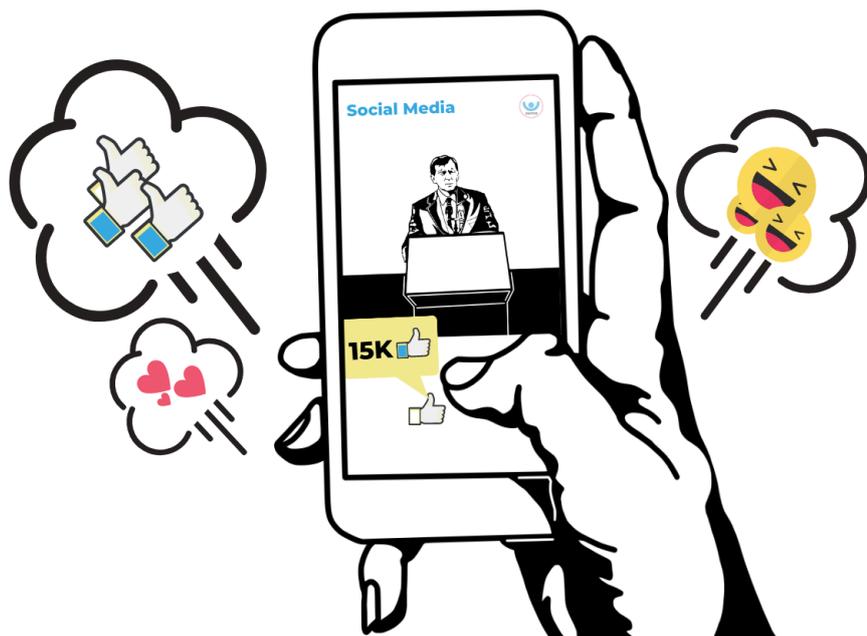
### Podcast



Dimitri Sotiropoulos  
(ELIAMEP, Greece)



- ▶ “Episode #4: Populism Versus Anti-Populism”. [Listen to the episode now.](#)



## POPULIST NETWORKS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Populist leaders and parties have turned Facebook into an amplifier of right-wing political views. New DEMOS research found that populist actors in six out of eight European countries mostly share party propaganda and news associated with the right or far right. Political allies and thousands of loyal fan groups’ users share these posts, and what remains is a network of echo chambers reinforcing radicalised beliefs and populist attitudes in cyberspace.

To reach this conclusion, DEMOS research teams examined several news sources that populist parties and leaders share with their followers on Facebook, Europe’s favourite social media platform. These links included content produced by populist actors, professional media outlets, or alternative media such as blogs or fake news sites.

The study also mapped public pages sharing these posts, casting light on how populist content spreads on Facebook.

Seventeen populist actors and parties’ content in eight European countries were examined between April 2019, before the European Parliament elections, and April 2020, the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Selected populist leaders included well-known figures such as Marine Le Pen in France, Matteo Salvini in Italy, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey.

Over 50% of Marine le Pen’s media posts led users to radical right-wing content such as the French weekly “Valeurs Actuelles”. In Poland, right-wing views comprised over 60% of the links shared by the Confederation party.

Considering the enormous fan base of populist pages on Facebook – Marine Le Pen has over 1.5 million followers – populist views spread far and wide, finding their mark among users prone to developing populist attitudes.♦



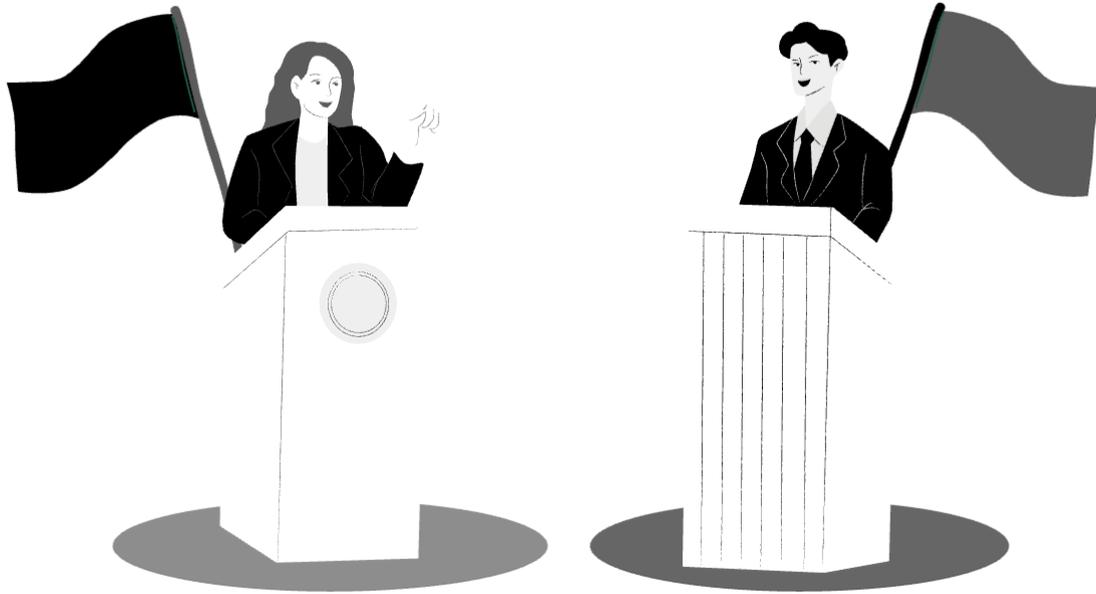
### MORE ON THIS TOPIC

#### Working Paper

- ▶ “Populism and the Media. A comparative analysis of populists’ shared content and networks on social media”, by Adina Marincea (School of Communication and Media) et al. [Download the research.](#)

#### Press Release

- ▶ “Populist Leaders Thrive on Social Media”. [Read more today.](#)



## POPULISM AND THE PARTY SYSTEMS

DEMOS disentangled the influence populist parties exert on other political parties and the party system in Europe. Undertaking two parallel methodological venues (national qualitative case studies, on the one hand, quantitative analysis of MARPOR data on party manifestos and policy proposals, on the other) research teams tested four hypotheses: representation gap hypothesis (populist parties pursue a strategy that is designed to exploit gaps of representation by means of emphasising new or re-vitalising old conflicts); contagion hypothesis (the rise of populist parties is accompanied with an overall diffusion of populist ideas in the policy agenda of non-populist parties); polarisation hypothesis (the rise of populist parties makes party systems more acutely polarised) and elective affinity coalition hypothesis (populist parties enter governing coalitions with other populist parties and also with non-populist parties if the latter also employ at least one of the typical themes of populist discourse, e.g. nationalist, nativist, anti-establishment, Eurosceptic themes).

The two methodologies yielded partly overlapping results. Both provided evidence supporting the representation gap hypothesis: with the populists' electoral success, they represent new issues in Parliament. Concerning the contagion hypothesis, case studies offered mixed results: in some countries contagion can be observed, but not in

others; while the quantitative analysis did not offer robust results that would warrant confirmation of the hypothesis.

As for the polarisation hypothesis, the two methods offered somewhat different results: polarisation was identified as a clear tendency in the case studies, while quantitative data did not provide evidence for a general tendency towards polarisation. However, conform the case studies, at the country level we could gather several indications supporting a growing polarisation and fragmentation. Evidence supporting the elective affinity hypothesis was also mixed.♦



### MORE ON THIS TOPIC

#### Working Papers

- ▶ “Impacts of Populism on the Party Systems”, by Martin Mejstřík (Charles University, Prague) et al. [Download](#).
- ▶ “Mapping Policy Patterns of Populist Parties. A Quantitative Cross-Country Analysis”, by Oliver W. Lembcke (RUB). [Download now](#).

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## ABOUT THE PROJECT

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DEMOS (Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe) is a research and innovation project studying populism and its impacts on democracy. Funded by the EU Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, the project is carried out by 15 partner institutions in Europe and involves 10 scientific disciplines. DEMOS investigates the phenomenon of populism through the lenses of democratic efficacy. The idea combines attitudinal features (political efficacy), political skills, knowledge, and democratic opportunity structures. A novelty, democratic efficacy is understood as a condition of political engagement needed to address the challenges of populism.

Specifically, DEMOS addresses under-researched aspects of populism at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels: its socio-psychological roots, social actors' responses to the populist challenge, and populism's effects on governance. DEMOS focuses not only on the polity, but equally on citizens' perspectives: how they are affected by, and how they react to populism. Politically under-represented groups and those targeted by populist politics are of particular concern. Examples include youth, women and migrants.

As populism has varying socially embedded manifestations, DEMOS aims at contextualising it through comparative analysis on the variety of populisms across Europe, including their historical, cultural, and socio-economic roots, manifestations, and impacts. DEMOS develops indicators and predictors of populism and elaborates scenarios on the interactions of populism with social actors and institutions both at the national and the EU levels.

*DEMOS addresses under-researched aspects of populism at micro-, meso-, and macro-levels: its socio-psychological roots, social actors' responses to the populist challenge, and populism's effects on governance.*

DEMOS combines in-depth research on populism and democratic efficacy with action research and pilot projects in order to develop lasting tools and timely policy recommendations. Project methods include experiments, deliberative polling, text mining, surveys, and legal analysis. DEMOS places strong emphasis on communication and productive interactions with a variety of stakeholders throughout the project, including policymakers, journalists, students, and the general public.♦

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## ABOUT THE CONSORTIUM

### COORDINATOR



DEMOS is led by the Centre for Social Sciences, an Excellence Centre of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, in Budapest, and carried out in partnership with 15 institutions in Europe. Principal Investigator: Prof Dr Zsolt Boda.

### PARTNERS



**University of Hamburg**  
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**European Citizen Action Service**  
Co-investigator:  
Assya Kavrakova



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**Hellenic Foundation for European & Foreign Policy**  
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**University for Business Engineering and Management**  
Co-investigator:  
Prof Dr Dragan Mitrović

**University of Lorraine**  
Co-investigator:  
Prof Dr Nicolas Hubé



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## ADVISORY BOARD

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The DEMOS H2020 Advisory Board (AB) is comprised of invited external scientific experts and representatives of governmental and civil society organisations with an interest in populism and democratic efficacy. The AB works with the project management to ensure quality assurance for project activities. The Board, which has validated previous DEMOS research, is comprised of the following experts:

### PROF TANIA GROPPI

*Chair of the Advisory Board*

Professor of Public Law at the University of Siena (Italy). Groppi is a former legal advisor at the Italian Constitutional Court and a member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government of the Council of Europe. She has expertise in comparative law, constitutional justice, federalism, local government, and constitution building.



### DR ITIR ERHART

Associate Professor, Erhart completed her M.Phil. at the University of Cambridge and PhD at Bogaziçi University in philosophy. She is the author of the book “What Am I?” and several articles and book chapters on gender, sports, human rights, social movements and media. Itir Erhart is also long-distance runner, a social entrepreneur and an Ashoka Fellow. She is the co-founder of Adim Adim, Turkey’s first charity running group.



### DR THOMAS MARKERT

Markert was Secretary of the Venice Commission (Council of Europe) between 2010 and 2020. He obtained a Doctorate of Law at Tübingen University in 1989. Following his work as a practising lawyer in Germany, he joined the Council of Europe in 1989 and worked for the Venice Commission as from 1992. The main focus of his work was on issues of the rule of law and state organisation in Central and Eastern Europe and Turkey.



### DR KESI MAHENDRAN

Senior Lecturer in Social Psychology at the Open University, UK. Founding member of the Public Dialogue Psychology Collaboratory (PDPC) and Chair of the British Psychological Society, Political Psychology Section. She is section editor on the Journal of Social and Political Psychology and is on the board of the IMISCOE Standing Committee on Reflexive Migration Studies. Her work topics include migration-mobility, non-mobility, integration citizenship, and public narratives.▶

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## ADVISORY BOARD

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**PROF GIANPIETRO MAZZOLENI**

Professor of Sociology of Communication and Political Communication at the University of Milan. Fellow of the International Communication Association (ICA). Member of the editorial board of the European Journal of Communication and other international journals. Founder of the Italian scholarly journal *Comunicazione Politica*. Editor-in-Chief of the International Encyclopedia of Political Communication (Wiley 2016). His research focuses on political communication, especially on the relations between media and populism, and between pop culture and politics.

**PROF MIROSLAW GRANAT**

Full professor of Public Law at the Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana Wyszyńskiego w Warszawie. Professor Granat is a head of the Department of Constitutional Law. His main research topics are constitutional law (among others, theory of constitutional law, principles of law, constitutional values, constitutional change, constitutional identity, the origins of the constitutional judiciary), human rights, budget balance. He has published around 200 scientific works. Granat is a former judge of the local Constitutional Court (2007 – 2016).



**PROF VLADIMÍRA DVOŘÁKOVÁ**

Professor of Political Science. Director of Masaryk Institute of Advanced Studies, Czech Technical University. She is a former member of Executive Committee of IPSA and president of the Czech Political Science Association (2000-2006). Her fields of interest are comparative transitions to democracy, civil society, populist and radical right wing parties and movements, corruption. In November 2003, Professor Dvořáková became the first woman among the professors of political science appointed in the Czech Republic.

**DR ROSARIO AGUILAR**

Associate Professor in the Political Studies Division at the Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (CIDE). Currently she is a Research Excellence Fellow at the Central European University (CEU) and a Visiting Researcher at the Institute for Political Science at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Her main research interests are the effect of different social contexts on political behaviour, authoritarian and populist predispositions in comparative perspective, and the improvement of measurement and meaning of partisanship in new democracies.♦

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## SISTER PROJECTS

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DEMOS has two sister projects. This means projects funded by the Horizon 2020 framework programme with the same goal: use innovative research to understand and help address the populist challenge in Europe.

# POPREBEL

## POPREBEL

POPREBEL (Populist Rebellion Against Modernity), comprised of seven institutions in Europe, aims at taking stock of the recent rise of populism – in its various forms – in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Western Balkans. Its trajectory is not only interesting in and of itself: it is also the harbinger of a possible future for the whole continent. POPREBEL describes the phenomenon, creates a typology of its various manifestations, reconstructs trajectories of its growth and decline, investigates its causes, interprets its meanings, diagnoses its consequences, and proposes policy solutions. [More about POPREBEL here.](#)

## PACE

PaCE (Populism and Civic Engagement), comprised of nine institutions in Europe, aims to combat the negative tendencies of populist movements, to build upon the lessons of positive examples, and play a part in constructing a firmer democratic and institutional foundation for European citizens. PaCE analyses the type, growth, and consequences of these movements, looking at both their characteristics and context. It will also propose responses to challenges associated with populism and develop risk-analyses. More information about the [PaCE project here.](#) ♦

