

Socioeconomic, political, and cultural implications of populism



ECONOMIC POLICY OF POPULIST GOVERNMENTS

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POPREBEL



LONG SHADOW OF THE PAST

- **A strong association between populism and *bad* economics**
 - Economic populism (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991, Sachs 1989)
- **The idea of economic populism is still alive both in public debates...**
 - Bernie Sanders, Barack Obama (redistribution) vs Donald Trump (economic nationalism)
- **...and in scholarly works too**
 - Excessive and/or myopic redistributive policies
Acemoglu et al (2013), Ball et al (2019), Doviš et al (2016), Funke et al (2020)
 - Trade protectionism, anti-multilateralism
Autor et al (2017), Dustmann et al (2017), Guiso et al (2018)

THE PUZZLE

- In EU member states (e.g. CEE countries):
 - Strict numerical policy rules (e.g. Stability and Growth Pact)
 - Single market (no tariffs, no NTMs)
- “[T]here is no such thing as *economic populism*”
Rovira Kaltwasser (2019: 3).
- So, what about the economic dimension of populism then?

A NEW PERSPECTIVE (FROM A MACRO APPROACH TO A MICRO VIEW)

- **Adopting the ideational definition of populism (Mudde 2004)**
 - Instead of class/sectoral conflicts: true people vs corrupt elite
 - Majority rule
- **The consequences of populism in the economy**
 - (1) redistributive policies favouring “our” people against “others”
 - who gets what?
 - (2) critical attitude towards autonomous organisations, professionals and institutions
 - (3) antagonistic relationship with the competitive market mechanism
 - regulation, market entry, property rights etc.

POLICY RELEVANCE

- *By thickening the ideational definition of populism (Kubik 2018), we need to move away from checking the macroeconomy only and to keep a critical eye on the microeconomy too*
- Contemporary right-wing populism
 - respects the budget constraint of the state,
 - but ignores the institutional constraints of economic decision-making.
 - It emphasises short-term benefits only and hides long-term costs (Pareto inferior policies)
- “Politics is about respecting popular sovereignty *at any cost*”
Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018: 1669)



Constitutional policy of populism

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822590. Any dissemination of results here presented reflects only the author's view. The Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

01

Objectives

- comparative research on the populism's impacts on constitutional policies;
- empirical test of the theory of populist constitutionalism;
- policy recommendations

03

Results Analysis

- empirical test of the primary and secondary criteria of populist constitutionalism

02

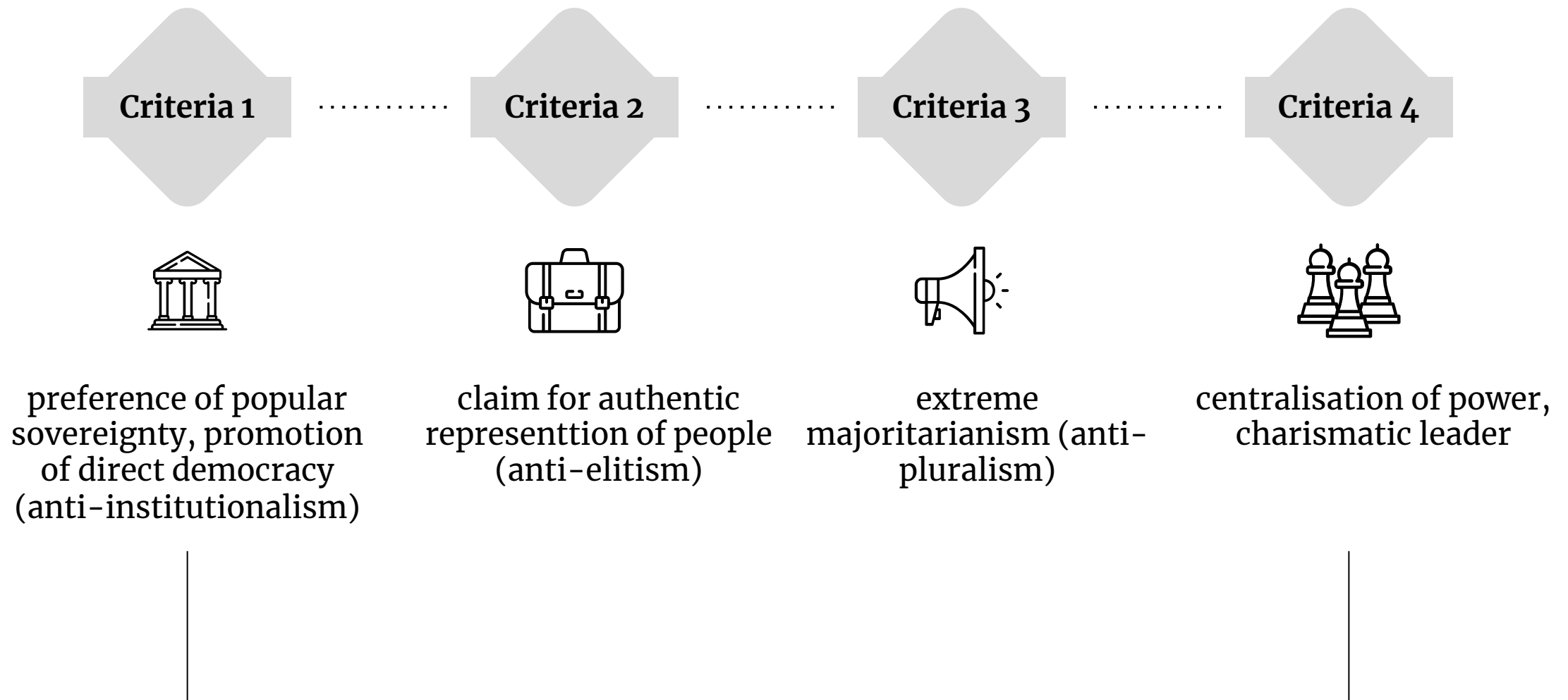
Methodology

- survey on the constitutional changes of the EU Member States and the UK;
- legal method

04

Conclusions

Major characteristics of populist constitutionalism



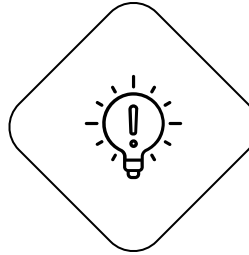
Secondary criteria

Constitutional identity



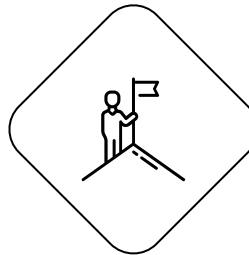
Abusive legal borrowing

Crisis management



**Rights restrictions,
discrimination of minorities**

Anti-globalism, nativism



Clientelism, state capture

Constitutional changes reflecting populist aspirations

	Popular sovereignty/direct democracy	Antipluralism/Authentic representation	Extreme majoritarianism/packing of countervailing institutions	Strong leader	Constitutional identity	Abusive legal borrowing	Restriction of rights	Anti-globalism/EU skepticism/nativism
Austria								
Bulgaria								
Czech Republic								
Greece								
Hungary								
Italy								
Poland								
Romania								
Slovakia								
Slovenia								
Spain								

No uniform pattern of constitutional changes

Some characteristics emerge in non-populist systems too

Certain features are not transformed into law

Authoritarian rather than populist constitutionalism in the most affected countries





Populist Information Strategies Social Media and the Commercialization of Modern Media

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Problem & questions

The ease of communicating and interacting with the ‘people’ in an immediate and low-cost manner has made social media popular among politicians and especially among populists.

In the last decade Donald Trump in the US, along with dozens of European populists have shown an ‘elective affinity’ with social media.

Why this success can be a problem for Western democracies?

Because it encourages the **spread of narratives discrediting democratic institutions, weakens checks and balances mechanisms and bypasses the journalistic filter**, making it difficult for citizens to distinguish information from communication.

Problem & questions

The main questions we addressed as DEMOS researchers were:

- Are social media platforms actually a fertile ground for populist communication?
- Do populist parties and leaders use social media more effectively than non-populist parties and leaders?
- What are the implications of this phenomenon for political game and more in general for the democratic life?

Main findings & implications for democracies

Demos research has shown that on social media:

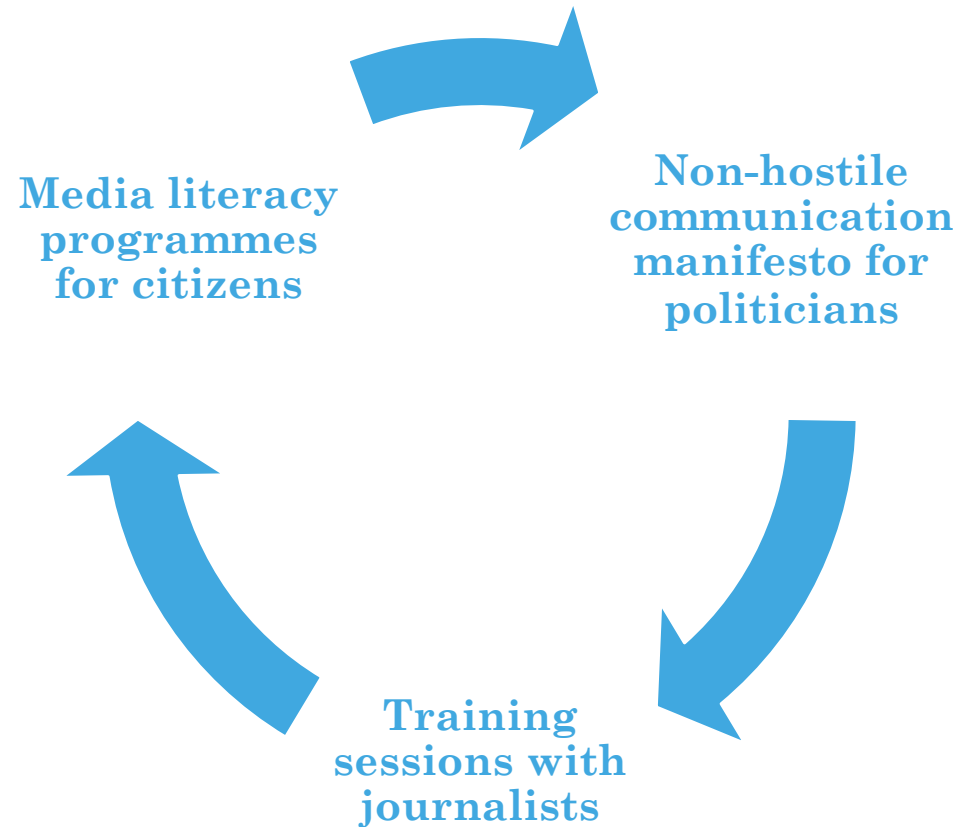
- populist actors regularly post more than non-populist actors
- populist actors regularly get more engagement than non-populist actors
- users commenting on the posts of populist actors are more likely to use populist language than users commenting on the posts of non-populist actors.

Main findings & implications for democracies

- The success of populism (on social media) leads to a **process of normalisation of the populist style in political communication and political news.**
- At the same time, the content of populist message - and in particular the us vs. them dichotomy - fosters the **process of polarisation of political opinions and behaviour between parties and voters.**

Possible solutions

This is a **systemic problem** that should be tackled through **joint and coordinated actions** aimed at **citizens, journalists and politicians**.



Possible solutions: citizens

Media literacy programmes for citizens

aim: to improve competence and the ability of discerning reliable from unreliable sources

targets: schools, civil society BUT also ordinary people

Possible solutions: journalists

Training sessions with journalists

aim: to strengthen and enforce professional and ethical standards against oversimplification, hyperdramatisation, and misinformation

target: national journalist orders/associations

Possible solutions: politicians

Adoption by politicians of the non-hostile communication manifesto

aim: to establish a shared communication standard to counter possible forms of uncivilised behaviour by politicians (e.g. Parole O_Stili, <https://paroleostili.it/en/cambiostile/?lang=en>)

target: members of the European Parliament, members of national parliaments



JAGIELLONIAN UNIVERSITY
IN KRAKÓW

POPREBEL

POPULIST CULTURAL POLICY: DELEGITIMISING LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND UNDERMINING OF THE EU'S POSITIVE IMAGE

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research material: Interviews (2021-2022) with heads and managers of cultural institutions in Poland, analysis of cultural policy

Case: Poland after 2015 – populists in power

Conclusions:

- Neo-traditionalist turn in cultural policy
- Focus on the nation and gradual disappearing of the European dimension
- Distribution of funds based on ideological criteria
- Less autonomy for directors of institutions
- Still, many strong liberal voices among those who are not dependent solely on public funds (e.g. Polin Museum, European Solidarity Centre etc.)

POPULIST CULTURAL POLICY: RESPONSES

- Centralisation → Decentralisation
- Nationalism, isolationism → Transnationalisation
- Ideology → Expertise
- Relativisation of truth → Affirmation of truth

DECENTRALISATION

Mixed funding for cultural institutions

- ❖ Direct funding from EU
- ❖ Funds for culture for city mayors
- ❖ Funds for culture for NGOs
- ❖ Simple and effective funding procedures

TRANSNATIONALISATION

Tightening the connections between cultural institutions across Europe

- ❖ The „European University” model for cultural institutions (similar to the Una Europa Alliance of 10 universities): a supranational umbrella structure allowing for better and long-term networking and mutual support (thematic hubs, joint initiatives, seedfunding, support for emerging cultural entrepreneurs etc.)
- ❖ Joint Curatorship Programme – interdisciplinary, intersectoral connections
- ❖ Job Shadowing Programme – cultural institutions staff visits to their counterparts in a different country; twinning between cultural institutions

EXPERTISE

Cultural institutions as part of a European knowledge-based society:

- ❖ Tighter interconnections with expert institutions (think-tanks, academia, quality journalism etc.)
- ❖ Certification of cultural institutions by experts
- ❖ Closer links between culture and science
- ❖ Responding to contemporary societal challenges and raising awareness (climate change, global inequalities, polarisation, digital threats etc.)

AFFIRMATION OF TRUTH

Affirmation of truth in a post-truth era as an important mission for cultural institutions:

- ❖ Combatting disinformation in alliance with academia and experts
- ❖ Fact-checking and open source intelligence trainings for staff of cultural institutions
- ❖ Digital literacy training included in the educational mission of cultural institutions
- ❖ Increased social media presence for educational purposes

HOW DO TARGETS OF RIGHT-WING POPULISM IN EUROPE NEGOTIATE THEIR IDENTITIES WITH IT? TURKEY, UK, POLAND, HUNGARY AND GREECE

- Populist movements create their others, narrate them as outsiders, and set discourses to exclude them. Yet we do not know much about how their others feel facing populism. Demos studied the process that the “others” go through and looked at how they negotiated their identities vis-à-vis what populist movements demand from “people”.
- This situation indicates a mainstreaming of hate speech, which we define as the normalization of such speech forms. Targets range from gender and LGBTI+ activists to liberal academics and the affiliates of ancien regimes.
- Populist movements can be studied as either power holders or leverage holders, affecting the way they target their “others”. There are four dissidence possibilities available for the targets: (i) stoic behaviour, (ii) self-censorship, (iii) emigration, (iv) active resistance.
- There is a need for the active resistance of the informed. All countries studied are well-embedded in western institutions. People living in Turkey, Hungary, Poland with higher education, good communication skills and international connections can document abuses, organise protest movements and alert world opinion rather than becoming stoic.
- While the war in Ukraine has given Europe a new momentum, the EU should not forego its criticisms on the rule of law clause to Hungary and Poland and should reach out to pro-EU coalitions particularly in Turkey but also in the UK.
- Particularly for LGBTI+ and gender activists, diplomatic representations have been of great support but such support should extend beyond big cities and there remains a need for more diversity and equality consideration -

HOMOPHOBIA AND POPULIST POLITICS IN POLAND, CZECHIA AND GERMANY

- All populists seek to limit the definition of 'people' in whose name they claim to speak, thereby delegitimising oppositional voices. For Polish populists, to be a 'true Pole' is to be Catholic, heterosexual and 'nationalist'.
- Polish homosexuals are constructed as a threat to the Polish nation's reproduction and its shared norms (especially Catholic values) and are seen as more loyal to Brussels than Warsaw.
- We argue it is counterproductive for activists to attack nationalism in general → need to differentiate between 'National in-group satisfaction' [pride in nation → pro-sociality and intergroup tolerance] and 'National collective narcissism' [nation is exceptional and entitled to privileged treatment → narrow definition of who is a 'true' Pole].
- We show that it is 'National collective narcissism' that best predicts homophobia at the level of the individual but that the effect is weakened if the individual believes homosexuality to be immutable and not a choice.
- **Recommendations for activists:** (i) do not dismiss people's nationalist feelings but emphasise the importance of national in-group satisfaction / deemphasise national collective narcissism in definitions of Polish national identity; (ii) emphasise LGBTQ rights as a **Polish**, not European or international, issue (not Western import); (iii) incorporate national symbols into LGBTQ events to show that queer Poles are queer **Poles**; and (iv) emphasise homosexuality is not a choice - through study of sexology.



Populism and COVID-19 crisis

The (non-)politicization of the COVID-19 crisis in Europe by ruling populist leaders

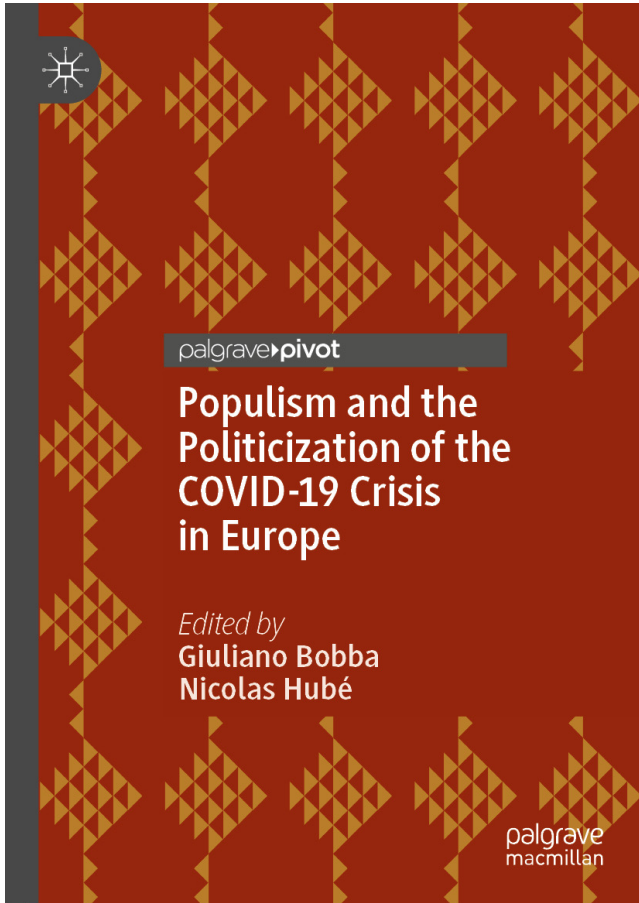
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Research Assumption & Methods



- Although populism would normally benefit from crisis situations (e.g., political representation or economic crises), the peculiar nature of COVID-19 crisis does not make the benefit obvious.
- Several authors agree that this particular kind of political crisis is at the root of any populist mobilization (see Canovan 1999; Roberts 1995, 2015; Kriesi 2015; Mouffe 2005). Among them, Hanspeter Kriesi (2015) links the current rise of populists in Europe to long-term trends in political representation.
- Populists can, therefore, intervene in those situations that Hay has called failure, catastrophic equilibrium and tipping point, and, through their action, ensure that these contradictions are clearly perceived among citizens and push the system towards the moment of decisive intervention

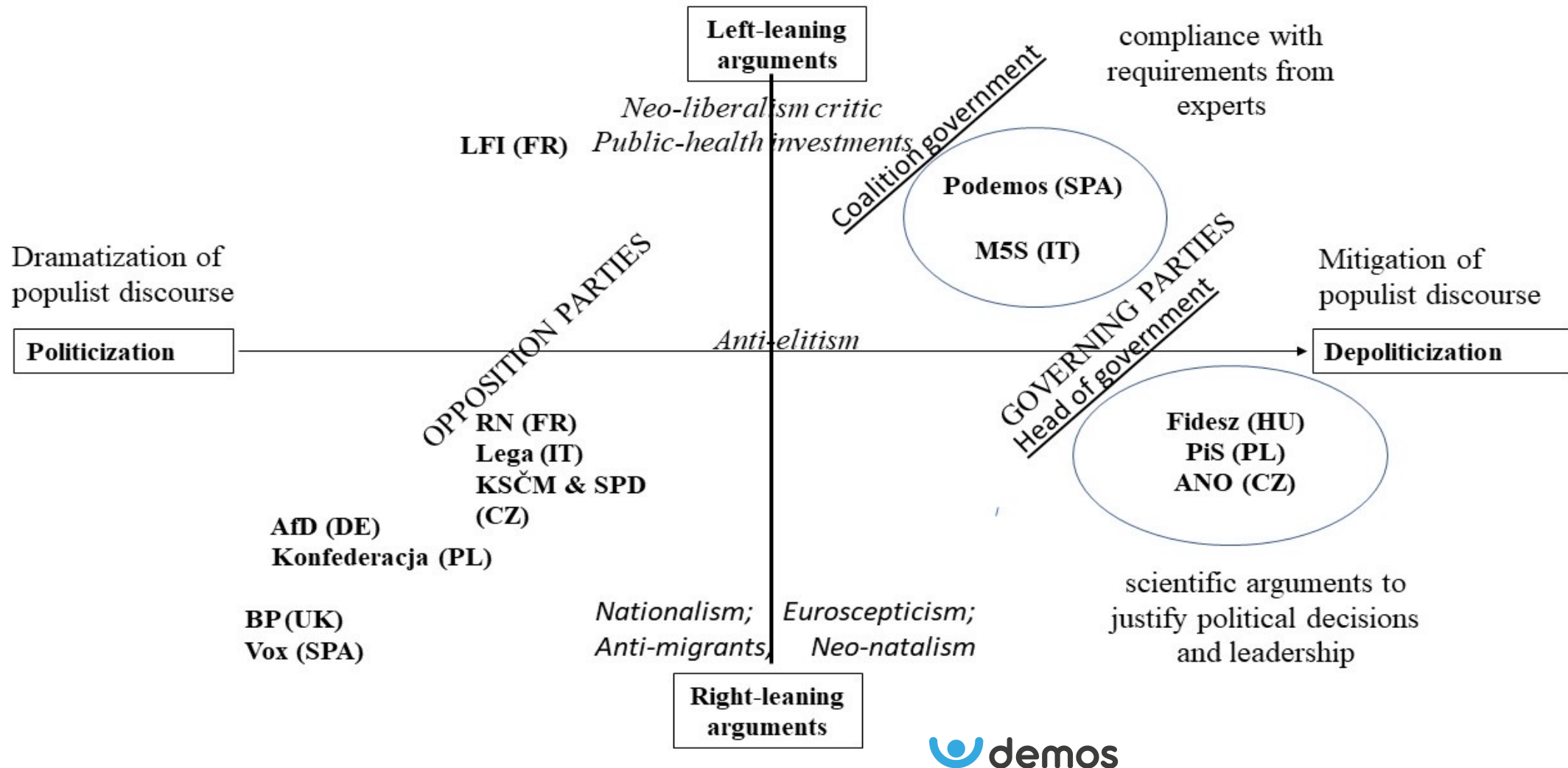
Research Assumption & Methods

- We propose to combine the process of politicization with the three actions identified by Felstiner, Abel and Sarat (1981) in order to define a framework for the analysis of the politicization of issues (table 1). We argue that an issue, to be politicized, should follow three stages in which distinct processes, actions, objects of contention, and outputs follow one another. In the phase of the emergence of a problem, the action of ‘naming’ brings a given issue into the political field and allows political agents to earn a place as legitimate players in the crisis-solving process; in the confrontation phase, the attribution of accountability and ownership of the issue is determined through the ‘blaming’ action; finally, in the managing phase, the action of ‘claiming’ refers to the confrontation of issue-specific solutions.

PHASE	ACTION	CONTENTION	OUTPUT
EMERGENCE	Naming	Political vs. non-political status of the problem/issue	One or more political or social actors identify a specific problem/issue as a problem/issue with a public scope and political nature. The issue becomes a new political divide or opposition.
CONFRONTATION	Blaming	Attribution of accountability and ownership of the problem/issue	One or more political or social actors blame other actors for not facing the problem, or not facing it with the necessary urgency and effectiveness
MANAGING	Claiming	Alternative problem/issue-specific solutions	One or more political or social actors proposes a solution and claims the ability to solve the problem/issue

Main findings & implications for democracies

CHANGING RELEVANCE OF THE KEY ELEMENTS OF
POPULISM IN THE LIGHT OF (DE)POLITICIZATION OF THE
COVID-19 ISSUE



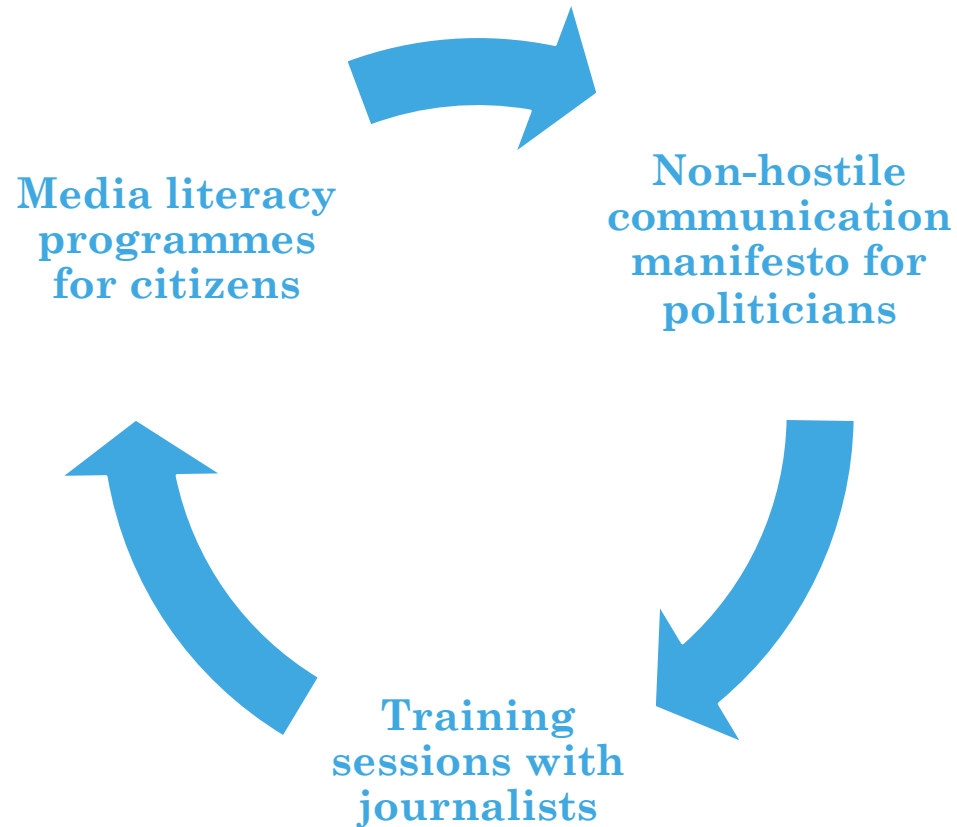
Main findings & implications for democracies

Demos research has shown that on the first covid-crisis phase:

- populist actors had no policy ownership on the issue
- populist actors leaders in charge have been challenged to perform as effective rulers
- the populists in the opposition had difficulty finding a classic "populist" argument and were rather overtaken by extra-parliamentary movements (anti-vax, conspiracy), which they sometimes ended up joining over the duration of the crisis, but without much electoral success.

Possible solutions – in line with UNITO

This is a **systemic problem** that should be tackled through **joint and coordinated actions** aimed at **citizens, journalists and politicians**.



Possible solutions – in line with UNITO

This is a **systemic problem** that should be tackled through **joint and coordinated actions aimed at citizens, journalists and politicians concerning scientific facts.**

- **Trainings** dedicated to understanding scientific data and scientific information.
- Promoting **scientific fact-checking** and understanding **science literacy**.
- Train scientific experts to **communicate scientific information** to journalists and to disseminate it to the public at large

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Anti-vaxx and other emerging issues



Populism and
Civic Engagement

e.g. anti-vaxx, extinction rebellion, QAnon, etc.

- When things are going well, fringe groups tend not to have wider traction for their views
- But in a crisis then there will be the discontented who will be more open to these views
- People tend to believe what confirms their own status, emotions, beliefs and identity
- Authority figures (politicians, medics, scientists etc.) are not enough to counter misinformation

Anti-vaxx and other emerging issues



Populism and
Civic Engagement

- It **is** worth rebutting any factually incorrect claims (even if it does not feel like this has an impact)
- But messages can be better received if they come from people in their own communities...
- ..that respects their worries, emotions and identities
- Media, polling, politicians etc. often do not identify these issues until they have grown
- New online media filtering and analysis tools may help notice these earlier:

<https://pace-dashboard.citizens.is>

*PaCE issue
dashboard*



Populist adjacent movements:

QAnon



Populism and
Civic Engagement

- There is a connection between conspiracy theories and populism in terms of beliefs about authorities and Manichean worldview
- Like populist parties, participation in conspiracy theories appears to be activated by triggered by background conditions and triggers, and have emotional content.
- This type of movement can create extreme political shadow within democracies, lurking in online forums and eroding institutional and scientific authority during crises like COVID-19.

Credits



**Populism and
Civic Engagement**

<http://POPandCE.eu>

Bruce Edmonds' summary research in the
[PaCE](#) project by:

- [Sven Engersson](#) and [Teresa Lindenauer](#), Technical University of Dresden
- [Róbert Bjarnason](#), Citizens Foundation
- Matthew Hall, Trilateral Research

Also research coming from the “[ToRealSim](#)” ORA-net project
(<https://sites.google.com/view/social-influence-wiki>)

The views are those of the project members, not of the EU commission.



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 822337.