Conceptualising Populism

Analysing the level and type of populism of four European Parties

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Abstract

In this paper we present our method for analysing the extent to which party programmes reflect the populist type of democracy-critique, as well as to distinguish between different types of populism. We define populism as a particular democratic ideology, thereby viewing it as more than just political tactics or communication. Populism is operationalised and analysed on the basis of party programmes of Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Netherlands), Vlaams Blok (Belgium), Die Republikaner (Germany) and Die Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Austria). The results of our analysis lead to the preliminary conclusion that we can distinguish between several varieties of populism, depending on the way 'the people' are defined, the character of anti-establishment statements and the type of proposals for creating a direct link between citizens and government. Hence we reject the undifferentiated and promiscuous use of the concept populism. Although the quantitative character of part of our analysis enables us to draw conclusions about the extent of populism witnessed in party programmes, further research and refinement of our analytical model are necessary.

Introduction

With the increasing turmoil in European party systems over the last two decades, populism has become an often-used concept and a frequently studied phenomenon in political science. Focusing on new challenger-parties such as the Dutch Lijst Pim Fortuyn, the Flemish Vlaams Blok and the French Front National scholars try to explain the success and nature of these parties by using the concept of populism. However, more often than not this is done without much consideration for national and inter-party differences. We argue that the term populism, if it is to be used in an analytically useful way, should be defined *and* operationalised.

After a brief overview of the ongoing populism-debate, we conceptualise and operationalise populism, by means of three dimensions that we hold to be representative of the core of populism: the sovereignty of the people. We detach the concept of populism from the political parties that are often – in an unfounded fashion – labelled populist. We do not state beforehand that Western Europe's radical right wing parties are not populist, we rather emphasise that we should investigate and conceptualise populism systematically before we can assess whether parties may be labelled as such. By analysing party-programs we assess whether four of these 'usual suspects' can indeed be called populist. By doing so, we want to make an empirical contribution to an otherwise highly theoretical debate.

In the literature populism is sometimes considered to be a tactical device, mere a form of rhetoric or style of communication (Jagers and Walgrave 2003). We hold that it is more fruit-

ful to follow an opposite line of reasoning and understand populism as an ideology, i.e. as a specific form of democracy-critique. We follow Margaret Canovan in understanding populism 'as an appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society' (1999: 3). In this populist appeal to the people we not only recognise a call for removal of the establishment and their values, but their replacement by a leadership that wants to restore the direct link between people and government as well. We argue that populist parties adopt this view of the political other not necessarily in an opportunistic attempt to gain electoral support but primarily as part of a wider ideologically founded critique, arguing against a perceived crisis of democracy and those by which it was caused, and for institutional changes to break down the intermediaries that stand between the sovereign people and the populist leader.

A contested concept

In spite of the frequently uttered cri-de-coeur that populism is a vague term, most studies consider parties populist or not according to conventional wisdom (see for example Matt Golder 2003). This is somewhat problematic for it is not the task of a scientist to simply reproduce the (self) image of political parties. Yet we could agree with Canovan (1999: 3) who states that 'there is a good deal of agreement on which political phenomena fall into this category but less clarity about what is it that makes them populist'. So from the outset we are left with the paradoxical situation that we think to know clearly who to call populists but not what to call populism. One essential difference with ideologies such as liberalism and socialism is that no contemporary European party calls itself populist, or would like to be labelled as such (although some parties and politicians in the US are happy to characterise themselves as populists).

Populism is often used as an analytical concept and is, for lack of a clear scholarly consensus on the exact meaning, a contested concept. The fussiness of the concept, however, is not solely caused by the analytical problem of generalisation; it is further due to the promiscuous use and pejorative meaning of the word, both within and outside of the scientific debate. Any single scientific definition one propagates for this political concept is a political act in itself; there seems to be hardly any political neutral territory from which one can assess how populism should be understood scientifically. Attempts to use it as an ideal type concept will always be problematic one way or another, which makes it all the more necessary to assess what one means with it.

Populism: political tactic, tool or style of political communication?

In order to use populism as an analytical concept with empirical validity, it is necessary to distinguish between other possible approaches to the concept. A main distinction is the understanding of populism as tactics vis-à-vis populism as an ideology. Here we ignore other important aspects such as party organisation (or lack thereof), party-goals, the social structure of the electoral support, or party system developments. We do not deem these aspects to be irrelevant for the understanding of populism but we do claim that they are less relevant for understanding the core ideological elements of populism.

A variety of scholars see (or saw) populism as a tool or a certain style of politics (Canovan 1981; Taggart 2000; Jagers and Walgrave 2003). The approach of populism as mere tactics is problematic however. As Taggart (2000) puts it: 'often populist style is confused with a style that simply seeks to be popular', i.e. an attempt to appeal to a wide range of people. And if populism is understood to be saying what people want to hear or to be simplifying political matters, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that populism is not the monopoly of just one group of parties. And as Mudde (1998) rightfully points out, political populism then basically comes down to nothing more than political campaigning techniques; populism is lost as an analytical concept. In order to circumvent non-analytical vagueness of this kind, one needs to differentiate populism from general attempts to win support, which is essential to democracy. This is also problematic about Taggart's definition of populism as 'an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis' (2000: 5). Populism in Taggart's view has been 'a tool of progressives, of reactionaries, of democrats, of autocrats, of the left and of the right.' (2000: 3). So there it is again; populism is a tool. The notion of populism as being anti-political means that populists are hostile to institutions in general and representative democracy in particular. Shils argues in a similar way that 'populism is characterised by oppositionalism' (cited in Berlin et al. 1969: 12). And Kitsching states that 'populism is essentially a reaction to rule' (cited in Taggart 2000: 14). Taggart's definition combines and integrates some important aspects to understand populism, but in the end he denies it to have any substance, though still leaving room for another approach when he states that populism is 'a negative reaction to representative politics, it does have a more positive side to it' (2000: 8).

A clear and credible conceptualisation of populism as a strategy has been done by Jagers and Walgrave (2003). The defining element of a populist appeal is an appeal to the people ('populus'), with which populist parties identify and legitimise themselves. Populism, considered

by them to be essentially a political style of communication, consists furthermore of two dimensions: an anti-establishment and an inclusive/exclusive dimension. These two dimensions give room for four different kinds of populism. An analysis of broadcasting time reserved for political parties leads Jagers and Walgrave to conclude that substantial differences exist between the political communication style of the Vlaams Blok and other parties, the difference being: populism. This is an interesting notion, and it formalises the intuitive plausible idea that there are differences in discourse between populist and non-populist parties; the problematic aspect of this approach remains that it virtually denies populism to have any substance. Populism has constituent elements to it – the people, their sovereignty and a particular view on democracy – which makes it into more than just a tool: populism is an ideology.

The nemesis of democracy

A suitable way to define an ideology in a general way is 'a more or less coherent set of ideas that provides a basis for organised political action [...] intended to preserve, modify or overthrow the existing system of power relationships' (Heywood 2002: 43). It follows from this definition that ideologies present (i) ideas about the present order, (ii) about an ideal-typical situation and (iii) about ways to move from the current to the desired situation. We argue that populism meets these criteria of an ideology as it presents thoughts on the present order, proposes an alternative as well as a road to reach this perceived ideal world.

The first element of an ideology is found in the populists rejection of the establishment. Critique is the raison d'être of every oppositional party, but populist parties develop a unique set of arguments about the malfunctioning of representative democracy. Whereas 'normal' democratic politics treats the other as a 'contender' (alter ego), anti-political-establishment-politics [and populists among them] treats him or her as an "adversary" (alien)' (Schedler 1996: 300). Populism, as understood here, is not anti-democratic, it does not attack the idea or principle of democracy as such. Democracy is not challenged in principle, but in it's organisational form. Populists criticise the intermediary organisations that stand in the way of the true and uncorrupted expression of the will of the people. Populism is not anti-political either; it is highly political, but it sees itself as anti-political in its dismissal of politics as usual. Hence their call for new politics vis-à-vis the establishment, the traditional political class. Anti-system is also not what is at hand: populist parties do not propose an alternative to the political-economic organisation of society, as radical left once did. In the populist mind representative democracy needs redemption, not replacement.

Precisely this is what is under siege: representative democracy as it is and the elite that perverted it. It is important to note that populists do not reject representative democracy all the way (they operate in it); they are not radical democrats, but democrats who are mugged by reality. The disapproval of representative democracy is a disapproval of elitist democracy and its institutional framework. Representatives do not represent anyone but themselves. Democracy as it works is attacked in the name of democracy as an ideal. Populism is then, in the words of Kitschelt (2002: 179), 'an expression of dissatisfaction with existing modes of organisation of elite-mass political intermediation'. This dissatisfaction comes with a certain vocabulary and discourse, which can be analysed in isolation but doing so has the constant risk of analysing a side-aspect which is not exclusive to populists. The populist critique on representative democracy focuses on parties as partes pro toto; parties are the heart of representative democracies. An interesting notion in this respect is the contribution of Peter Mair (2002). Mair argues that the real distinction to be made is the one between populist democracy and party democracy. Therefore, he argues, Blair is populist because he bypasses his own party. Politicians as Blair and perhaps Dutch Labour leader Wouter Bos try to circumvent the intermediaries in their own parties and establish a direct link with the members; however it seems more appropriate to call these kind of politicians political entrepreneurs. They remain within established parties and if we call them populist, we should stop viewing populist parties as by definition challenger parties, outside the state.

Besides a anti-party and anti-establishment appeal populists can also be expected to formulate critique against societal intermediaries such as trade unions and other interest organisations as well as against bureaucracy, not mitigating but obstructing the will of the people. They simply stand in the way of the direct link between the people and the leader. And the will of the people is both the beginning and end of the legitimatisation of any political action.

The second element of our definition of an ideology – a sketch of the ideal type situation – is the idea that governing should happen on the basis of the 'volonté general'. Democracy demands that political decisions are made under full popular control, and should be a vocation of the will of the people. The people are seen as united and one and a reference to the people is not (only) understood as some rhetorical claim, but as part of a consistent ideology. The notion of the people sharpens the distinction between the sovereign people and those ruling in their name. Populists construct two cleavages: between the people and the establishment, and between 'the political class' and the populist leader himself (Schedler 1996). For popu-

lists differences between opposition and the government are without meaning. Populists 'recode the universe of political actors as a homogeneous political class' (Schedler 1996: 295). After all, the entire political establishment, whether in government or not, is recruited through the same corrupting mechanisms and takes part in a corrupt system through which the will of the people is betrayed.

This brings with it a certain notion of the people, perceived as one, united and organic. No cleavages exist but one: elite versus mass. The former has hijacked representative democracy, and populists will bring it back to the people. As Mudde highlighted, elite and mass are moral categories that do not need to exist in reality (2002). This still leaves room for different connotations of the people, who can be defined ethnically, civically or as the common people ('the silent majority') .

The third element, how to get from perverted reality to ideal, consists of proposals to break down intermediary structures and to construct the direct link between the people and the leader. Populists will propagate more direct forms of democracy, in casu referenda, popular consultations and direct election of office-holders. By election of the populist leader (or in the pure populist mind, by his natural selection), and through the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, the ideal of supremacy of the will of the people will be restored.

Operationalisation of populism as an ideology of democracy

Departing from our understanding of populism as an ideology of democracy, we developed quantitative and qualitative indicators for examination of the extent to which populism can be observed in party programmes, as well as to distinguish between potential different types of populism. In our view party programmes reflect the populist democratic ideology when three indicators are present: (1) references to 'the people' in the sense of 'common people' or the 'ordinary man'; (2) proposals to create a direct relationship between the people and the power holders; and (3) anti-establishment and anti-elite statements. We hold these three indicators necessary in order to be able to speak of populism as we understand it. Only if a political party through its programme taps into all three characteristics it can be labelled populist. Hence we can isolate populist parties from those that are 'merely' proposing instruments of direct democracy or that are 'simply' opposition parties.

Part of our analysis of party programmes is of a quantitative nature. We will count the number of references to 'the people', the number of anti-establishment and anti-elite statements and we will code proposals for instruments of direct democracy too. On the basis of these

figures we can draw preliminary conclusions on the level of populism. Through content-analysis we will further assess the nature and intensity of these statements, since our model does not provide for more detailed analyses based on empirical findings alone. At this stage of our research such supplementary qualitative assessment is necessary for a proper understanding of populist statements and the context on which they bear so heavily.

References to 'the people'

Our first indicator of populism consists of defining 'the people' as the monolithic entity of common men. For populists, the people are 'one and indivisible' (Schedler 1996: 294), but also 'ordinary' (Canovan 1999: 5). Central to populism is further the accusation that the establishment acts in the interest of particular groups at the detriment of the public good. 'Although reference to the people is common to several political languages, not any appeal to them is coupled with the denunciation of the illegitimate power of a small clique of elites' (Papadopoulos 2000: 5). When speaking about the people, we expect populists to employ a general terminology, indeed using terms such as 'the people' or 'the citizens'. That is not to say however that references to 'the people' cannot be expressed in more specific terms. In their attempt to appeal to a broad public, populists may speak for example of car owners or teachers too. These groups are presented as representative for the people in general, victims of the establishment and their self-interested politics. This underlines the populist idea of people as 'ordinary men' or 'common, tax-paying civilians', as an illustration of their connection with and understanding of the people and their will. After all, 'all virtue resides in the people, one and undivided, and all hope resides in its saviour, one and incorruptible (Schedler 1996: 294). We thus consider statements in party programmes populist if references to 'the people' indicate an understanding of a single entity without internal cleavages, and if references reflect an understanding of the people as 'common and ordinary'.

Proposals to create a direct relationship between the people and the power holders

The terminus of the populist democratic ideology is the supremacy of the will of the people as the legitimation of decision making. The road to that ideal-typical situation consists of creating a direct connection between the people and those in power. Only then, the voice of the people can truly be heard (Barney and Laycock 1999). The remedy for the problem of democracy that is diagnosed by populists is 'the abolishment of any mediations between the citizenry and the rulers' (Papadopoulos 2000: 7).

The most evident indicator for this element of the populist democratic ideology lies in concrete proposals for direct democracy such as binding referenda, recalls and popular initiatives, popular consultation and direct elections, or electoral system reforms. For the quantitative part of our analysis we will take into account proposals for direct election of heads of state and mayors, binding referenda and public consultation. We will simply apply the rule that if these relatively universal instruments of direct democracy are proposed or supported in a party programme, the second quintessential element of populism is present. In the qualitative part of our analysis we will also take into account more abstract pledges for change and legitimacy, and promises of 'political reform' that we assume to be typical for the populist rhetoric. As Papadopulos (2000: 7) puts it, 'populists [...] have [...] a ready made solution to present: more transparency to preclude informational asymmetry, or better more cleanness'. We will further assess references to the own party and its leadership possessing the virtues that both distinguish them from the establishment and can guarantee the restoration of 'government by the people, for the people'. This serves to portray the populist party as the legitimate alternative to the establishment. Here we may think of populists referring to their party as a 'movement' and an emphasis on the party's leadership and cadre as 'common men and women', sensitive for the people's preferences.

Anti-establishment statements

Our third indicator of the populist ideology consists of statements directed against an establishment of intermediary institutions and non-representative elites that are recruited through and can survive thanks to those intermediary structures. In the populist mind, the sovereignty of the people is harmed by intermediary institutions as they cut the direct line between the people and their true advocates, i.e. the populist leader(ship). Against the populist ideal stand formalised structures such as political parties and government formation, as well as – and probably even more so – informal habits that represent bargaining processes between political elites driven by self-interest. Oratory of this kind can take many forms. It may be directed at specific institutions, policies or individual politicians, or formulated in a more general and explicit fashion, against a 'system of old parties', 'political class', or 'the establishment'. It may thereby be concentrated not only at political institutions and actors alone since cultural elites, media, trade unions, bureaucracy and intellectuals are in the populist imagination suspicious of disturbing the direct link between the people and the leaders too. They all diffuse the will of the people into particular or individual interests. Populists, in the words of Margaret Canovan, 'direct their challenge to both the political and economic establishments *and* elite values of the type held by opinion-formers in the academia and the me-

dia' (1999: 3). The primary goal of these statements is to 'delegitimise established structures of interest articulation and aggregation' (Barney and Laycock 1999: 321). This potentially wide range of statements will first be approached in a quantitative manner. We will count statements directed against a perceivably corrupt and self-interested elite of politicians, 'established parties', 'politics' and press as well as pejorative references to institutions, bureaucracy and intermediary organisations. We assume that the higher the overall number of anti-establishment statements, the safer it is to conclude that the party under investigation is populist. In detailed descriptions of each party we will go into the nature and intensity of the anti-establishment statements we found.

As we stressed above, all three characteristics of the populist ideology need to be discernible in a party programme in order to label a political party populist.

Varieties of populism

Our analytical scheme leaves quite some room for variation among political parties, since the categories on the basis of which we assess party programmes are relatively broadly formulated. In the potential differences between the political parties under investigation we see an opportunity for classification of populist parties though. If, for example, 'the people' a political party refers to is defined in a regional, ethnic, or civic sense we might consequently speak of regional, ethnic, or civic populism. If a party programme contains many abstract proposals for the restoration of the sovereignty of the people whereas concrete proposals for instruments of direct democracy are absent, we might introduce the term 'theoretical' populism, being the opposite of 'instrumental' populism. And if the establishment-critique a party expresses in its programme is directed at political actors and institutions only, it may be called political populism, whereas statements against economic elites, the media or academia or all may call for a different name. These examples should be read as preliminary typologies based on hypotheses. We would like to reserve the opportunity here to come to a classification on the basis of our quantitative and qualitative findings.

Party Analyses

In the following paragraphs we will present the results of our analysis of four European political parties: Lijst Pim Fortuyn from the Netherlands, the Flemish Vlaams Blok, Austrian FPÖ and the Republikaner from Germany. These parties were selected on the basis of our observation that they are often called populist, whereas it is our assumption that they should be approached with more scrutiny, leaving room for potential differences among them (in

both level and type of populism). This makes these parties into obvious 'usual suspects', reason for us to make them subject to our analytical model.

Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF)

During the 2002 elections the LPF caused a landslide in Dutch politics, winning 26 of the 150 seats available in parliament. LPF's turbulent rise and the behaviour of its flamboyant leader – Pim Fortuyn, assassinated just before the elections – caused several scholars to draw on the concept of populism in an attempt to classify this newcomer (see Van der Brug 2003; Keman and Pennings 2003). We have analysed LPF's election programme 'Hier gaan we voor! Verkiezingsprogramma 2003' (LPF 2002).

(1) References to the 'people'

The number of references to the people (*'de burger'*) in a positive sense vis-à-vis the government equals 46 times. (Representative quotes being *'De overheid is er voor de burger en niet andersom'* or *'De zorg bij de burger brengen'*). If we include associated references such as the patient, the entrepreneur, but also phrases such as *'gezond verstand'* and *'cultuur met een kleine c'*, which were used in the same rhetorical way, we counted 62 references. The *absolute* number of references and the context in which the references are made leaves almost no room for doubt: the vocabulary of the LPF is one of appealing to the (common) people.

(2) Anti-establishment statements

The number of times bureaucracy, intermediary structures, subsidies and the like were mentioned in a pejorative way equals 69 times (examples being '*De bezem moet door de overheidsbureaucratie*' and '*Snoeien in tegenstrijdige en overbodige regelgeving*'). Anti-bureaucracy is not ipso facto anti-(political)-establishment, and if we count the number of pejorative statements about the elite, parties and the (political) establishment, they are very few although explicit ('*Vriendjespolitiek bij het benoemen van functionarissen als burgemeesters moet tot het verleden gaan behoren*' and '*De politieke partij heeft nauwelijks nog voeling met de wortels in de maatschappij*'). Content analysis shows that the LPF scores high on a sort of anti-bureaucracy and anti-intermediaries dimension but not an anti-elite one; its anti-establishment rhetoric is practically uniquely directed against an allegedly overbearing bureaucracy and law system, whereas we found only one instance of the LPF questioning the integrity of politicians.

(3) People-leadership relations

The LPF pleas for concrete issues such as the direct election of office-holders, in casu mayors and the prime-minister, public consultations and referenda, specifically about entering the EU. These statements are embedded in a general democratic inspired call for transparency (*'Parlementair taalgebruik moet duidelijk en begrijpelijk zijn voor iedereen'*), and a proposal to reserve speaking time in parliament for citizens (*'de burger'*). The party manifesto has a clear democratic vocabulary, calling for citizens to have access to government again (*'Het openbaar bestuur moet weer toegankelijk worden voor de burger'*).

A preliminary conclusion would be that the LPF scores on all three aspects. The party propagates direct democracy, makes many (explicit) references to the people and many negative statements about bureaucracy and the like. Although anti-party statements were explicit they were few, and it is debatable whether the LPF scores on this sub-dimension. A cautious assumption would be that the LPF can reasonably be called populist.

Die Republikaner

Die Republikaner are not a significant player on the German federal level, since long failing to clear the five percent hurdle. Die Republikaner were formed in 1983 as a right-wing split-off from the Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU). Their initial electoral success brought them seats in many local councils, the state legislature of Badem-Württemberg, and, in 1989, the European Parliament. In the latter they formed a 'technical faction' with 'party family members' Flemish Vlaams Blok and French Front National. In several studies Die Republikaner have been labelled (neo-)populist (Betz and Immerfall 1998; Scharsach 2003).

(1) References to 'the people'

Die Republikaner refer thirteen times to the people or clearly related concepts. If we broaden our category to include related but different notions (such as *'Opferschutz'*, *'Unternehmer'*, *'gesundes Mittelstand'*) they score 36. This does not seem very high, and if we look beyond the numbers – we note that we left out references which have a pure nationalist connotation such as *'Patriotismus'* and *'Herrschaft des Volkes'* – it is not at all obvious that the references are clearly populist. The reference have a strong liberal (*'Staatsburger'*, *'Burgerrechte'*) or nationalist (*'Patrioten'*) connotation.

(2) Anti-establishment statements

Our broad anti-category is clearly dominated by anti-party and anti-elite statements, numbering respectively 13 and 10 (an example being: *"Monopolisierung politischer Macht bei wenigen Parteien"*). Die Republikaner see a conspiracy of the elites against society, expressed by statements such as '*Denkverbote'*, and a plea for *'wissenschaftliche Objektivität'* in order to avoid *'politischer Indoktrination'*. A qualitative assessment would leave no doubt as to how Die Republikaner scores here, a quantitative approach, on the other hand, could leave room for doubt, as it remains to be seen how other German parties score here.

(3) People-leadership relations

Die Republikaner call for a general strengthening of democracy ('*Starkung der direketen Demokratie')*, which materialises in a call for referenda (*'Volkabstimmungen'*) and elected officials (Head of State, but not mayors). They also plea for *'Chancengleichheit fur noch nicht in den Parlamenten vertretene Parteien'* and denounce big companies for lack of democratic legitimisation. There is a clear and concrete call for democratic reforms, although Die Republikaner do not propose the introduction of popular consultation and directly elected mayors.

Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ)[1]

The FPÖ has been on the Austrian political scene since the 1970s, presenting itself as a liberal party. During the last decade however, the rise of Jörg Haider as its political leader and a seemingly consequent radicalisation of the party's stances on immigration led many to label FPÖ radical right wing and populist (Betz and Immerfall 1998; Papadopulos 2000; Scharsach 2003).

(1) References to 'the people'

Within this category we coded a total of 27 references, 13 of which refer to the people vis-à-vis the establishment and 14 to different subgroups. The majority of the 13 general references carry the word citizen ('*Bürger'* and '*Bürgernähe'*, the latter can be translated as 'close to the citizens'). Two references refer to 'the people' ('*Das Volk'*), understood as the Austrian nation, which is constituted of different historic, German-speaking, '*Volksgruppen'*. Besides this nationalist notion of the people, many statements refer either to different occupational groups

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[1] It should be noted here that we analysed the 1997 FPÖ program, which is actually not an election manifesto but a document containing FPÖ's principles on a large array of issues. However, since the document is so pertinently present on the FPÖ website we assumed that this document is directed at potential voters and therefore comparable to the election manifestoes of other political parties we analysed. It is thereby our aim in further research to include this type of documents, as well as speeches and other sources.

such as farmers ('*Bauern*'), employees in so-called unprotected sectors ('*Erwerbstätige im nichtgeschützten Bereich*'), artists ('*Künstler*'), or to members of the working – i.e. tax-paying – population. The latter are referred to in terms of 'the insured' ('*Versicherte*'), 'the contributing' ('*Beitragszahler*') and 'economic effort-makers' ('*Leistungsträger*'). 'The Freedomite movement sees itself as the advocate of those employed in the unprotected fields' (FPÖ 1997b: 21). Such unprotected fields are opposite to the public sector and state enterprises, the media, the bulk of non-profit organisations, semi-public companies and banks, and subsidised non-profit organisations, which are all protected and politicised. Here FPÖ draws a distinction between 'the unprotected as opposed to the privileged economic sector' (ibid.).

(2) People-leadership relations

The FPÖ speaks of 'an ongoing commitment to develop and preserve democracy for the people' ('*Aufbauen und erhalten bürgernaher Demokratie*', FPÖ 1997a: 6). In the chapter on reform of democracy, it is stated that 'Austria's political system needs on the one hand more free competition between democratic forces within the framework of a multi-party system and the reduction of influence by parties and lobbies' ('*Abbauen von Parteien und Verbänden durchdrungenes staatliches System*', FPÖ 1997a: 13). This statement, although two-headed in its formulation, should be viewed as a manifestation of the populist democratic ideology. The demand for a reduced influence of political parties and lobbies fits in the populist idea of no (or less than in representative democracy) intermediation of the will of the people. The argument is further developed in article 5.2 of this chapter, where FPÖ calls for a reduction of political parties' influence in the appointment of administration staff, of advisory committees concerned with the allocation of subsidies and court committees.

In its chapter on democratic reform, the FPÖ calls for complementation of parliamentarism by instruments of direct democracy. The FPÖ would introduce plebiscitary rights in all fields of provincial and federal legislation. The FPÖ proposes the following instruments of direct democracy: extended possibilities for referenda and public questionnaires; direct election of the members of the Federal Council, whose power should be restored in relation to extra-constitutional (illegitimate) institutions; direct election ('direct ballots by the people') of the highest organs of the state (president, ministers, governors, mayors and administrative heads) and premature removal of such organs through a referendum (FPÖ 1997b: 18-19). For the FPÖ, 'dependence on an overbearing bureaucracy, on a chamber state or on a state apparatus dominated by parties should be reduced according to the principle of freedom' (FPÖ 1997b: 3). These statements can be interpreted as supporting the populist thought of un-

intermediated links between the people and their leader. An implicit promise to reduce bureaucracy and the influence of political parties in order to restore the sovereignty of the people can be identified in this statement.

(3) Anti-establishment statements

We coded 31 anti-establishment statements in FPÖ's programme, 16 of which are directed against an elite of political parties, politically dependent journalists and interest groups, NGO's, 'privileged groups' and their perceived influence in the banking sector and the 'state-system'. 15 statements are directed against institutions, specifically against an over-sized bureaucracy and a non-transparent, citizen-unfriendly law system.

For the FPÖ, a 'fair market economy precludes privileged groups and monopolies, party-political control of whole branches of industry, domination of officials in the fields of social insurance, of public economy and of the politicised banking sector' (FPÖ 1997b: 21). The FPÖ criticises the system of granting subsidies to media as well as ownership concentration in that sector which have perceivably led to 'reporting influenced by instructions [...] and a massive distortion of political competition'(FPÖ 1997b: 14). We suspect this criticism to be founded in FPÖ's frustrations about the negative way in which the party has been portrayed in national (and international) media. The FPÖ argues against the perceived development of professional organisations into a 'para-government', resulting from their strong position in social partnership. 'The state under the rule of law shows a tendency to produce a multiplicity of laws, to complicate citizens' access to law and even to deny it' (ibid.). For the FPÖ both 'unbridled capitalism and failed socialism' (FPÖ 1997b: 23) are the enemies of common men, as they respectively exploit man and nature and degrades its 'workers' into administrative units.

Vlaams Blok (VB)

Flemish regionalist party Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block) originates from the end of the 1970s when two Flemish parties – the Flemish National Party and the Flemish People's Party – formed a coalition in reaction to, in VB's own words 'the too left course of the People's Union and the humiliating communitarian agreement' (VB 2002: 8). Since the beginning of the 1990s VB has been a successful political party with around 15% of the electorate supporting it, although it has been kept our of government through a 'cordon sanitaire'.

(1) References to 'the people'

In *'Een toekomst voor Vlaanderen'*, Vlaams Blok's party programme of December 2002 we counted a total number of 100 references to 'the people', 78 of which refer to 'people-against-establishment' and 22 to particular groups. With 18 references 'we' (wij/we) is the term most often employed, followed by 'our/the people' (26 times). The latter is the English equivalent of two Dutch terms: *'Volk'* and *'Mensen'*. The former to be understood in a regionalist context, the latter as 'common' or 'ordinary' people. Many of the VB's references refer explicitly to the Flemish part of the Belgium population, so that becomes clear what definition of 'the people' is envisaged by VB. VB obviously defines the people in regionalist terms. Remarkable is that VB equates itself oftentimes with the people, when 'we' in one sentence refers to the party whereas in the next it relates to the Flemish people. We coded references to subgroups within the Flemish community too: shop-owners, handicapped and small entrepreneurs. In our view VB mentioned these groups of 'common men' as illustrations of the entire Flemish population that perceivably is the victim of an illegitimate and unrepresentative establishment, of crime, of unfair financial contributions to the Walloons and of immigration. These subgroups are partes-pro-toto for the 'ordinary people' that deserve to be freed from the yoke of Belgian federalism and a self-interested and corrupt establishment.

(2) People-leadership relations

With regard to our second quintessential dimension of the populist democracy-critique, proposals for the (re)creation of an un-intermediated link between the people and government, we found that the VB both employs abstract rhetoric and proposes the introduction of concrete instruments of direct democracy. With regard to the latter, VB argues for direct elections of the head of state and mayors as well as for the introduction of binding referenda and plebiscites. In more general terms VB calls for 'revaluation of parliament' (VB 2002: 9: *'het parlement […] herwaarderen'*), 'more democracy' (p.: 9: *'meer democratie'*), and 'more involvement of the people in decision-making' (p. 8: *'het volk meer betrekken bij besluitvorming'*). VB's statement and theme of its 1996 party congress 'the people decide' (p. 9 – 11: *'het volk beslist'*) should further convince voters of the VB's populist project of bringing back democracy to the people.

(3) Anti-establishment statements

The VB is specifically critical of the federal state of Belgium, which – according to the VB – favours the Walloons (or *'Francophones'*) at the expense of the Flemish people (VB 2002: 2: *'ons volk'*). Equality before law for both Flemish and Walloons is said to be inexistent in that

system. VB argues against extensive and 'perverse' money flows running from Flanders to the Walloon provinces (p. 3). The federal system (p. 2: *'de Belgische constructie'*) itself is claimed illegitimate and so opaque that 'even specialists cannot find their way through its labyrinths' (p. 2: *'een doolhof waarin zelfs specialisten hun weg niet vinden'*). The multi-cultural society is deemed utopian and its perceived advocates (p. 17: *'de progressieve multiculturele lobby'* and p. 15: *'Guy Verhofstadt […] profeet van het multiculturele geloof'*) accused of working against the ordinary man (p. 15: *'De multiculturele verrijking is […] uitgedraaid op een dagelijkse nachtmerrie'*). The VB speaks literally of 'behind-the-scenes politics' (p. 9: *'achterkamertjes[politiek]'*), which is claimed to have replaced parliament as the primary and legitimate arena for decision-making. According to the VB, decisions are made 'in castles, in government (p. 9: *'kernkabinet'*), in headquarters of political parties and under illegitimate pressure of trade unions, insurance companies, the church and the monarchy' (VB 2002: 9). Further, governing parties are accused of denying recommendations made by parliamentary investigation committees. These are all, in the words of VB, 'undemocratic and dictatorial practices' (VB 2002: 9, 11). Stances of 'the ruling political class' (p.9: *'de heersende politieke klasse'*) are alleged to often diverge from those of the people, especially with regard to drugs issues, immigration, crime and ethical issues. This leads the VB to claim that 'parliamentary democracy runs short with respect to democratic legitimacy' (VB 2002: p. 9). The crooks in this corrupt system are the Walloons, the government parties (especially the Flemish liberals – which are said to have forgotten their earlier pro-Flanders stance – and the Walloon PS blocking pro-Flanders policies), the media (specifically the Flemish public broadcasting association VRT, which is claimed to have started 'a dirty and holy war against VB', see p. 11 'media and democracy'), the French speaking community, 'Flemish' political parties, 'traditional parties and the media', politics (p. 15: *'de politiek'*), 'democratic' political parties (p. 9: *'zelfverklaarde democraten'*), and established political parties (p. 4, 9, 27: *'de traditionele partijen'*). The greens and the socialists are blamed to strive for voting rights for immigrants for electoral reasons and to block 'further electoral successes of the VB' (see p. 18-19 on *'vreemdelingenstemrecht'*). When speaking of crimes (perceivably) committed by immigrants, the establishment as an integrative cluster of the government, journalists and scientists, is explicitly placed opposite to 'the people' (p. 28: *'de mensen op het terrein, magistraten en agenten'*) and the VB. 'Whereas the establishment wrongly focused on low-quality scientific reports related to the subject, the people and VB knew better all the time' (VB 2002: p. 28). And, 'what government calls petty crimes often leads to huge traumas for the people involved' (p. 26: *'wat voor de overheid "kleine criminaliteit"is, leidt voor de betrokkene vaan tot grote trauma's'*). VB's anti-establishment statements are thus directed against a wide range of both elites and institu-

tions and practices. The VB sketches the establishment in a broad sense, including political parties and individual politicians, the media and scientists. Trade unions, insurance companies and even the church are accused of illegitimately influencing decision-making processes, thus of disturbing the democratic process.

Results of party analysis

In table 1 we present the empirical results of our analysis of the LPF, Der Republikander, FPÖ and VB, on the basis of which we drew our preliminary conclusions, which are outlined in this paragraph too. We can conclude on the basis of our analysis that the four parties are populist as they all score on each of the three indicators. However, the inter-party differences are inviting enough to go into more detail hereunder.

Table 1: Overview of coding results for four European political parties

	No. of references to 'the people'		Direct Democracy				No. of anti-intermediary statements	No. of anti-elite statements
	Narrow	**Broad**	**Binding**	**Consulting**	**Mayor**	**H-o-G**		
LPF	46	62	-	Y	Y	Y	69	3
Republikaner	12	35	Y	-	-	Y	10	13
FPÖ	13	27	Y	Y	Y	Y	15	16
VB	78	100	Y	-	Y	Y	11	54

Narrow: references to the people in a general sense vis-à-vis government.

Broad: references in the narrow category and references to subgroups, as partes-pro-toto for the entire people.

Binding: Proposing binding referendum.

Consulting: Proposing public consultation.

Mayor: Proposing directly elected mayors.

H-o-G: Proposing directly elected Head of Government.

When references to the people and the number of anti-establishment statements are taken into account, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn scores comparatively high. The party also proposes institutional changes for direct democracy, which are combined with more general democratic vocabulary such as 'bringing back democracy to the people'. LPF does not propose a binding referendum though. In comparison to the other parties LPF scores low on the number of anti-elite statements. The comparatively many statements about cutting back bureaucracy and laws and regulations, decreasing the number of subsidies and the influence of NGO's

leads us to conclude that the nature of LPF's populism is highly anti-institutional, while not being so anti-elitist.

Although they score relatively low on the dimensions of references to the people and proposals for a direct people-leader link, Die Republikaner can be labelled populist as they tap into all three dimensions of populism. Particularly on the number of references to the people (in the broad sense) Die Republikaner focus clearly on popular sovereignty in their party platform. In terms of presenting an alternative model for democracy however, they have only a limited number of proposals. In addition they also score relatively low on the overall number of anti-establishment statements, although these are divided equally over statements against the incumbent elites and against intermediary structures.

For the Vlaams Blok we can without much doubt conclude that it is populist, scoring on each dimension of our model. The VB scores high on the quantitative dimensions of the model, referring many times to the people and expressing a radical anti-elite attitude. The VB shows itself an advocate of direct democracy, through concrete and abstract proposals to create a direct link between the people and the leaders. One of the peculiarities of VB's populism is that it is regionalist. 'The people' in VB's mind are clearly the Flemish, more specifically the Dutch-speaking. The 'anti-people' are the Walloons, criminals and immigrants. The VB further sees the corrupted elites not only in politics, but in the media and among politically dependent researchers too. All of them are perceivably acting in their own self-interest, and even more: against the interest of the people. In comparison to the other parties, the VB scores extremely high on anti-establishment statements, whereas its critique of institutions and bureaucracy is comparatively modest. It is not so much the system that is attacked in this party programme – although the Belgian federal 'construction' is criticised severely – but more the corrupted elites, both in politics and other sectors. Tentatively, we might propose that the radical and diffuse anti-elite character of the VB's populism is part of its strategy of presenting itself as the underdog that is kept out of government through the 'cordon sanitaire'.

On the basis of the empirical results, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich would fall into the category 'populist' too, although its anti-establishment and anti-institution statements are by far outnumbered by the VB and the LPF. The same goes for the number of references to the people, which is overall the lowest of the four parties. On the other hand FPÖ scores highest at the direct democracy dimension, where it concerns institutional proposals: all four catego-

ries are fulfilled. In the description it was already outlined that the FPÖ proposes a range of institutional changes in order to create a closer link between the citizens and government, and calls in general terms for 'democracy near the people' ('*Bürgernahe Demokratie*'). A close look at the people-references reveals FPÖ's liberal-conservative origins, calling many times for the protection of employees in 'unprotected fields' (read: private and unsubsidised sectors), of farmers and families, and agitating against an overbearing public sector.

Varieties of populism

Close examination of each of the three quintessential dimensions of our model of populism as a democratic ideology leads us to a preliminary typology of populist parties. Our typology is based on the specific character of rhetoric that political parties display in their election programmes. For the dimension of references to 'the people' we found that parties either hold a regionalist/nationalist notion of the people they represent (FPÖ, VB and Republikaner), or leave such an explicit view unmentioned (LPF). This distinction would call for an (initial) typology between ethnic versus civic populism. Further on the 'people' dimension, parties either tend to speak of the people in a general 'vis-à-vis government' way most of the times (LPF and VB), or refer relatively often to occupational groups, the working population, and tax-payers (FPÖ and Die Republikaner). A (preliminary) division between communitarian versus liberal/conservative populism seems in place here. As for our second dimension – proposals to create a direct relationship between the people and the government – we found differences with regard to the nature of statements too. Some parties (FPÖ, LPF and VB) score high on the number of 'concrete' proposals for the introduction of instrument of direct democracy, whereas the proposals of Die Republikaner remain rather abstract. The LPF and the VB score high on both types of proposals, whereas the FPÖ party programme shows a particularly high number of instrumental initiatives. Here, the preliminary typology would consist of 'pragmatic' populists (FPÖ) versus 'ideological' populist (Die Republikaner) and a category in between (LPF and VB). We did split up our third category, anti-establishment statements, into anti-elite and anti-intermediaries statements. This division provides for the last typology we can make on the basis of our findings, between anti-elite populists (VB) and anti-system populists (LPF), as well as a category of populists that divide their statements relatively equally (FPÖ and Der Republikaner). We present these typologies of populism in table 2 (page 22).

Table 2: Varieties of populism, preliminary typology.

	References to 'the People'				Direct Democracy		Anti-establishment	
	Ethnic	Civic	Communi-tarian	Liberal	Pragmatic	Ideological	Elite	Interme-diaries
LPF	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
VB	X	-	X	-	X	X	X	-
FPÖ	X	-	-	X	X	-	X	X
Republikaner	X	-	-	X	-	X	X	X

Conclusion

It was our observation that there is a stark contrast between the advanced theoretical debate about populism and the unfounded manner in which parties are labelled populist, without much sensitivity for differences between parties. In this paper we therefore set off to develop our own understanding of populism, based on an analysis of the theoretical debate on populism, as well as to construct an analytical tool to assess whether political parties can be called populist. It was our aim to detach the term from those parties with which it is so often equated, formulate a definition of populism, and operationalise it in order to put the 'usually suspected' parties to the test.

We view populism an ideology of democracy, calling for the supremacy of the will of the people and against the intermediary structures and elites that pervert the direct link between the people and the leader(ship). We hold that the populist ideology contains – in line with Heywood's (2003) definition of an ideology – three aspects: (1) criticism of the current situation, (2) a sketch of an ideal situation and (3) proposals to arrive from the current to the ideal situation. Understood as such, we deemed three aspects to be at the heart of populism: critique of the elites that act out of self-interest and the intermediary institutions that make them live and survive, an understanding of 'the people' as a the sovereign and monolithic entity that needs protection against this establishment, and a direct connection between the people and the government as the populist solution that should restore the sovereignty of the people.

We operationalised these three aspects for our analysis of party programmes. We label political parties populist on the basis of three elements: (1) the number of references to 'the people'; (2) proposals for a direct link between the people and government; and (3) anti-establishment statements. Subsequently, we analysed party programmes of four European

parties: Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Netherlands), Vlaams Blok (Belgium, Flanders), Die Republikaner (Germany) and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Austria).

Our conclusions were twofold. In the first place, we found that the four political parties score on each of the three dimensions, giving us reason for classifying them as populist. Secondly, we found that these parties scored differently on the three dimensions. We thus proposed that these parties should not be lumped together under the heading of populism without further differentiation to extent and type. As for the extent of populism our model does not yet allow for a conclusive differentiation of political parties, although Die Republikaner scores least on the three dimensions. Divergence between the parties could further be witnessed in the way how 'the people' are defined as well as in the direction of the anti-establishment statements and the nature of the proposals for the creation of a direct link between the people and government. Whereas the Republikaner, FPÖ and Vlaams Blok formulate their 'people' in nationalist or regionalist terms, the LPF lacks such an exclusivist vision of the people. Based on that distinction we tentatively concluded that the three former parties display an ethnic type of populism, whereas the LPF's populism can be described as ethnic. Further typologies that were made are: 'communitarian' (LPF and VB) versus liberal (FPÖ and Republikaner) populism, pragmatic (FPÖ) versus ideological (Republikaner) populism (and in a mixed category: LPF and VB), and anti-elite (VB) versus anti-system (LPF) populism (in between category: FPÖ and Republikaner). All of these observations strengthened us in our idea that populism can indeed be used as a useful concept, but only if one takes into account the differences among political parties that one analyses.

We would finally like to propose the following issues as a guideline for discussion:

1. Definition and operationalisation of populism;
2. Combining quantitative analysis and content-analysis;
3. Classification of populist parties into *types*;
4. Ways to assess the *extent* of populism.

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