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Populism and Civic Engagement

PaCE

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Content

Introduction

The rise of populist parties in many European countries and beyond raises important questions on the future of democracy. Is populism a severe threat that must be averted or is populism a needful corrective to liberal democracy? The PaCE projects explores the state of contemporary populism, the reasons for its rise, and possible counter-reactions against negative consequences attributed to this phenomenon. In this report we review recent research on risk factors to the quality of democracy. Doing so, we first identify external factors, mainly on the macro-level, that have been associated with the rise of populism. In a second step, we discuss how populism might impact on the quality of democracy before we finally present first results of our ongoing engagement with computer simulation modelling. Agent-based models allow for new ways of assessing the impact of causal factors on the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels and for conducting counterfactual analyses that provide new insights into the development of populism and thus – at least indirectly – into risk factors to the quality of democracy.

Risk Factors Leading to an Increase of Populism

Extant research as well as findings by the PaCE project have identified several risk factors that contribute to an increase in populist attitudes in the mass public and a rise of populist parties (e.g., Smilova et al. 2020).

In this report, we aim to explain in a first step, which factors lead to an increase of the success of populists in a given context. The debate on what explains the rise of populism is still a comparatively recent strand of research and competing and complementary mechanisms are still being analysed both with regard to contextual factors and the individual level. On the contextual level, the debate on the origins and reasons for the success of populism is mostly concerned with providing economic and sociocultural explanations or both. While both factors most certainly interact, research on demand-side explanations for the success of populists and populist parties has thus far not sufficiently recognized this. Berman (2021) provides an overview of the mixture of explanations and concludes that mechanisms leading to populist success need to be analysed by taking all factors into account rather than by searching for a single variable that explains populism.

We discuss the risk factors identified in the literature one by one in the following sections. However, the interaction of the variety of influences on voting for populists is what makes it complex to grasp the full picture.

Contextual Factors

Not surprisingly, a main reason for the increase in populist vote share is attributed to socioeconomic changes. The causal mechanism established here is that economic factors such as increasing globalization, technological modernization progress and the financial crisis have led to changes in the labour market and a perceived or objective feeling of economic deprivation and insecurity (e.g., Margalit 2019; Smilova et al. 2020). While not completely separable from economic grievances, cultural anxiety, such as in the context of immigration, seems to trigger a somewhat different mechanism causing to vote for populist parties. However, the relationship between these causes affecting populist voting is not yet fully established (Shehaj et al. 2021). This is also because sociocultural and economic factors cannot be completely separated. Economic factors are also linked to cultural identities. For example, the closure of a mining area not only affects a region economically, but also affects a culture of practice and an identity that is affected (Alexandre, 2021). In addition, economic scarcity intensifies competition for resources and increases hostile reactions to immigration and cultural outsiders.

In the following, evidence for contextual factors enabling an increase in populist attitudes among citizens and in populist vote share, such as the (perceived) country’s and own economic situation and changes in the number of immigrants is discussed. These situations often develop to a status

of a crisis (Pappas and Kriesi 2015; Hawkins et al. 2017). This also means that the effect of the respective contextual factor is dependent on how a country is affected by the crisis (Pappas and Kriesi 2015) as well as how the individual is affected or perceives to be affected personally. Perceptions about the economic situation in a country matters more than economic hardship per se (Rico and Anduiza 2019). Additionally, the country-specific context has an effect on the types of populism that are more likely to succeed. For example, the interlocking of three crises, a political crisis, an economic crisis, and a migration-driven crisis in Italy, led to a victory of the M5S and the League, thus of a populist party positioned in the middle of the political spectrum and a right-wing populist party, respectively (Caiani 2019). While crises can be able to catalyse attitudes in a society that were already there before, the relationship is not necessarily seen as being a causal one by authors who regard populism in the sense of the ideational approach, such as Mudde (2007) and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012). This is shown in an exemplary way also by Pappas and Kriesi (2015) who compare the effect of the severity a country is hit by an economic crisis on the increase of populist discourse. The country chapters in their edited volume (Kriesi and Pappas 2015) show different trajectories: While being affected by the economic and financial crisis around 2009 more than most other European countries, Ireland, for example, showed almost no trace of a populist party (O'Malley and FitzGibbon 2015). Austria, by contrast, was by far less affected but still features a strong populist party (Luther 2015). In the UK, UKIP's vote share increased following the crisis (Goodwin 2015). Hence, instead of just analysing the objective criteria of a crisis, the perception of the subjective positions combined with a feeling of status loss is seen as a more precise analytical category, also as the concept of a crisis is seen as being rather vague (Mudde 2007).

These individual-level attitudes regarding a crisis were also investigated qualitatively by the PaCE project in "Democracy Labs". These events were carried out (remotely) in Italy, Iceland, Spain, and Scotland, with a focus on the COVID-19 crisis. Citizens were invited to express their views on how the government handled the crisis and what could be improved for future pandemics or other crises with regard to communication, economic interventions, and societal consequences. "The public should be treated with respect and intelligence, nuanced guidance and policing according to different types of population" (Cziker et al. 2021) stated one participant reflecting on the perceived relationship between government and citizens.

This interrelationship of causes and the heterogeneity in both how strongly a country is affected by contextual changes and how individuals perceive it, means that a single factor does not automatically lead to an increase of populist voting. But if certain contextual factors emerge and become salient in the citizens' opinion and the supply of populism is realistically available, the probability of populist success increases. This also explains the heterogeneity of assumed reasons for populist success across different countries as well as the variety of forms of populism that emerge from it. While in most Western European countries, the successful populist parties, such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), owe their success to making anti-immigration policies their trademark, parties like Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece reacted to a demand for economic policies in the economic and financial crisis

(Halikiopoulou 2020a). How the current Corona pandemic will affect the various types of populism is an open question.

The prominence of the immigration issue in the minds of citizens, which was particularly evident in the context of refugees arriving in Europe in 2015, may increase the likelihood of voting for populist parties. This occurs either for reasons of perceived economic competition and fear of unemployment or as a threat posed by the cultural identity of mostly Muslim immigrants (Shehaj et al. 2021). Both combinations are exacerbated by a perceived lack of integration into the country and society, for which populists blame the elite (Zaslove 2004). What all contextual factors, the economic situation, immigration, and most recently the pandemic, have in common is their status as a form of crisis (Smilova et al. 2020). The financial and economic crisis that began in 2007, the refugee crisis in 2015, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 were all seized upon by populist actors as issues of great importance to gain support by pitting "the corrupt elite" against the interests of "the common people" and presenting simple solutions to each crisis, usually with the help of strong leadership (Moffitt 2015; Halikiopoulou 2020b; Margalit 2019; Shehaj et al. 2021).

Individual Level Factors

The rather complex interrelationship between predictors of success of populism calls for an analysis on the individual level of citizens to establish the mechanisms of interactions of individual-level perceptions of the developments on the contextual level. Being a much more straightforward task, assessing the degree of populism of political parties as well as the parties' behaviour have been in the focus of contemporary research on populism for a long time. Only recently, measuring populism on the demand-side became possible by the development of a new set of survey questions measuring populist attitudes (Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018; Akkerman et al. 2014). The number of expert surveys including measures of supply-side populism continues to increase and so do survey items that measure populist attitudes in the mass public. The latter are already included in many national election studies but so far, unfortunately, hardly in Europe-wide surveys (Dolezal and Fölsch 2021).

That populist attitudes can be measured separately does not mean that they exist in a vacuum, but instead can be viewed as an expression of voters' preexisting attitudes and characteristics (Hawkins et al. 2017; Habersack et al. 2021). Thus, populist attitudes are rooted in emotional predispositions (Rico et al. 2017) as well as in their specific (nativist) political preferences (Ivarsflaten 2008; Rooduijn et al. 2021), sociodemographic characteristics (Rovira Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert 2020), and conceptions of democracy, as well as in interactions among these factors (Heinisch and Wegscheider 2020).

Bakker et al. (2016) and Fatke (2019) show that voting for populist parties is partly influenced by psychological causes, in particular by individuals' emotional predispositions. The causal mechanism is hypothesized to be an extreme political response to pressures to conform by

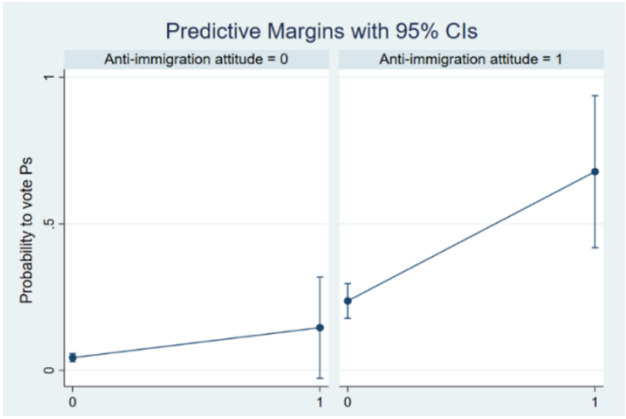
individuals who are unable or perceive themselves as unable to cope, which in turn triggers stress and a likely politically radical response (Betz 1993; Decker 2004; Ignazi 2003; McGowan 2002; Minkenberg 2000). More specifically, low levels of agreeableness have been associated with distrust of others, intolerance, and unwillingness to cooperate with others (Bakker et al. 2016). However, Fatke (2019) found that the effects of personality traits on voting decisions differ across countries, and the strength of the associations varies. Thus, there is evidence of psychological roots associated with voting behavior, but they should not be overinterpreted at the current stage of their measurement.

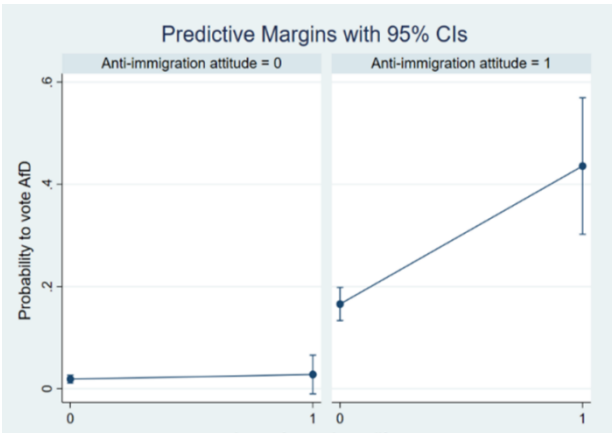
At the individual level, the mechanisms of populist activation are thought to be emotions such as resentment, anger, and fear. A number of studies have documented the affinity between extreme positions and extreme emotional states (Betz 2002; Cramer 2016). In this context, anger, resentment, fear, and lack of trust are typically considered emotional and psychological states that increase the propensity to support radical politics, including populism (Demertzis 2006; Magni 2017). The role of economic anxiety has been the focus of recent literature (Capelos and Katsanidou 2018). The protests against austerity policies in Spain and Greece that gave rise to social populism (Podemos, Syriza) were also driven by social outrage (in Spain, *Indignados*).

Another strong emotional driver of support for populist parties is fear, which is associated with radical populism in different ways (Betz 2002). On the one hand, there is the fear of "the (cultural) others," the outsiders to the community. By claiming to protect "the people" from the threat of outsiders, be they the cultural other or corrupt elites, populists appeal to voters. The other way fear comes into play is a person's fear of a perceived or experienced lack of status or lack of one's social and economic position (Hochschild 2016).
In this context, new research by Heinisch and Jansesberger (2021) conducted for PaCE, found evidence that respondents' claims of "no control," understood as people's subjective feeling that they no longer have control over their lives and thus insufficient ability to influence what happens to them, significantly increases the propensity to vote for populist parties. Such voters become receptive to political messages that promise order, stability, less diversity, protection, economic fairness, and redistribution for ordinary people. This echoes Bauman's (2001) argument that populism promises a place "where it is crystal clear who belongs and who does not, where there is no confusion and no reason for confusion". Populism appeals to this sense of certainty and clarity. While proposing radical change, it simultaneously frames the restoration of a familiar but long-lost state of affairs – for example, "Make America great again." Thus, it is not a promise of revolutionary chaos, but a return to the "right" order of community. This entails the certainty that "being in control" ultimately means regaining dominion over one's own life (Basile et al. 2020; Basile and Mazzoleni 2020; Kallis 2018).

The findings show that the effects of emotions do not have to be direct but can in fact be indirect and interactive. Heinisch and Jansesberger’s (2021) research suggests that a lack of control has a conditional effect, by making voters with anti-immigrant attitudes significantly more likely to vote for a populist party such as the German AfD and the True Finns (PS) party. In short, emotions can have a reinforcing effect by making latent preferences more acute.

Figure 1: The Interactive Effect of Control Anxiety on the Relationship between Immigration Attitudes and Electoral Support for Populist Radical Right Parties as exemplified by the propensity to vote for the German AfD and the Finnish PS

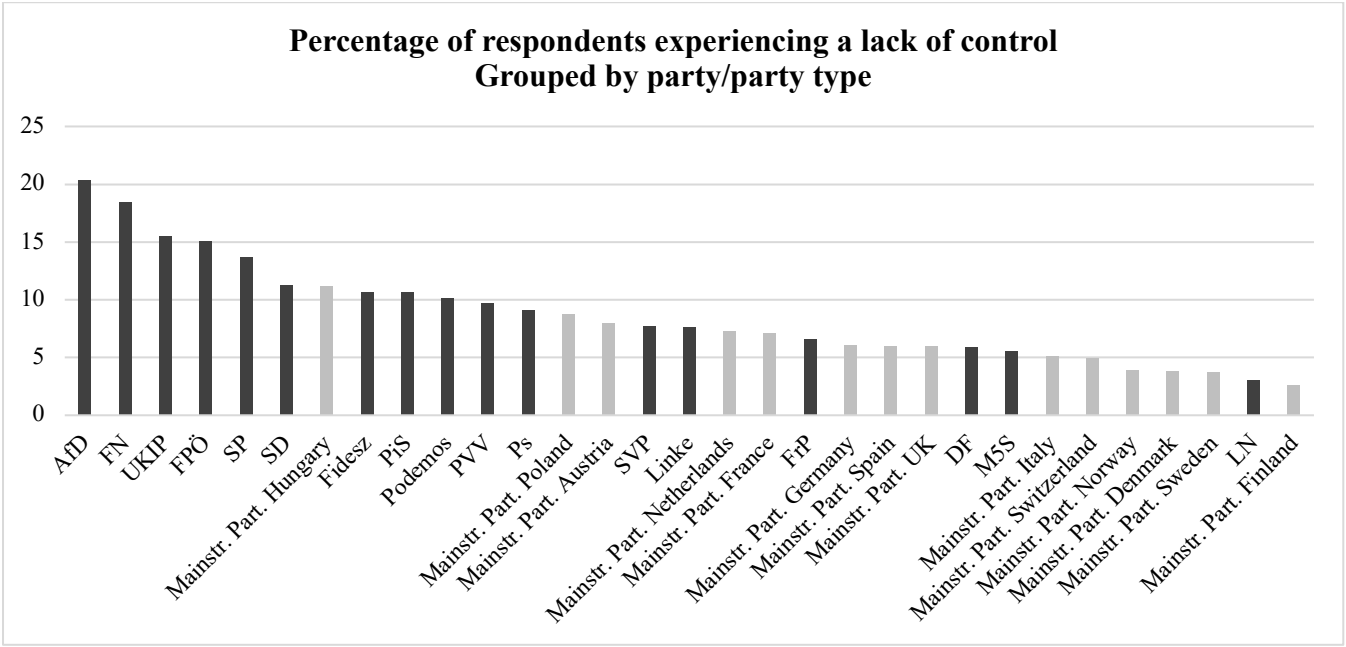




Source: EVS2017 from: Heinisch & Jansesberger 2021

If, as shown in Figure 2, we line up the radical populist parties and the established parties in Europe according to their share of voters who say they lack control, 13 of the 16 largest shares are found among the radical populist parties. It can also be seen that of the people who say they have no control, the proportion of supporters of radical populist parties is always larger than the proportion of supporters of the established parties.

Figure 2: Comparison of Populist Party supporters vs. mainstream party supporters, ordered along extent of lack of control and country



Source: EVS2017, party types: radical rightwing and leftwing populist, mainstream party (average of all other parties in parliament not classified as radical populist) (source: Heinisch & Jansesberger 2021)

The subsequent regression analysis in Table 1, based on data from the European Values Study (2017), also shows that the propensity of individuals to vote for right-wing populist parties is ostensibly driven by sociocultural attitudes such as fear of immigration. However, we also see that lack of control remains a robust factor in all six countries listed in Table 1. Also noteworthy is the fact that left-wing economic attitudes are influential even in the election of right-wing populist parties, at least in this case in Germany (voting for the AfD) and Sweden (voting for the Sweden Democrats). This underscores our earlier point that the impact of socioeconomic change and modernization can be both direct and indirect, representing a rejection of the liberal economic mainstream.

Table 1 also draws our attention to the gender dimension of radical populist voting, which we will revisit further below. We note that except for the UK, men were significantly more likely to vote for the radical populists. This deserves further exploration as women are found not to differ significantly from men in their overall sociocultural attitudes on immigration and are by and large not any more liberal but show a lesser propensity to vote for radical populists than men.

Table 1: The Effect of Lack of Control on RRPP and RLPP Appeal (Country-Level Logistic Regression Models)						
VARIABLES	**FPÖ**	**Ps**	**FN**	**AfD**	**SD**	**UKIP**
Lack of control over life	0.608***	1.853***	0.695**	1.258***	0.917**	0.887**
	(0.234)	(0.541)	(0.285)	(0.289)	(0.445)	(0.407)
Anti-immigration attitude	1.711***	2.154***	2.216***	2.544***	1.557***	1.769***
	(0.156)	(0.255)	(0.204)	(0.241)	(0.254)	(0.296)
Socio-economic orientations Baseline = Middle category						
Left-wing	0.0541	-0.743**	-0.00997	0.600**	0.676*	-0.697*
	(0.170)	(0.360)	(0.242)	(0.259)	(0.376)	(0.396)
Right-wing	-0.129	0.0660	0.299	0.203	0.664**	-0.189
	(0.206)	(0.295)	(0.244)	(0.236)	(0.276)	(0.325)
Male	0.264*	1.030***	0.444**	0.826***	0.545**	0.447
	(0.151)	(0.276)	(0.203)	(0.216)	(0.253)	(0.289)
Age Baseline = 18-34						
35-49	-0.328	0.0325	-0.546*	0.746**	0.115	0.109
	(0.206)	(0.351)	(0.296)	(0.309)	(0.441)	(0.494)
50-64	-0.566***	-0.411	-0.214	0.170	0.267	0.197
	(0.217)	(0.342)	(0.271)	(0.302)	(0.420)	(0.469)
65+	-1.265***	-1.889***	-1.002***	-0.693**	0.675*	-0.358
	(0.238)	(0.445)	(0.299)	(0.350)	(0.389)	(0.496)
Higher education	-0.149	-0.973***	-0.387	-0.00450	-0.967***	-0.763**
	(0.222)	(0.367)	(0.250)	(0.303)	(0.300)	(0.304)
Constant	-1.667***	-2.256***	-2.548***	-4.899***	-3.480***	-3.377***
	(0.276)	(0.479)	(0.353)	(0.451)	(0.502)	(0.507)
Pseudo R^2	0.1326	0.2455	0.1967	0.2346	0.1450	0.1259
Observations	1,247	988	1,176	1,778	1,015	1,465
Standard errors in parentheses – source: EVS2017 *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1						

Our discussion of emotions and trust as important individual level factors fits well with ongoing research, also undertaken in the context of PaCE, about the connection between the effects of COVID-19 pandemic and radical populism and vice versa. Since populists are skeptical toward the medical establishment while feeling unrepresented and alienated from those in power, they are likely to view government policies as meaningless or indefensible (Caramani 2017). At the same time, people with populist orientations find themselves nonetheless in a crisis situation caused by the pandemic or by society's reaction to it. Since populists, by definition, feel vulnerable, isolated, and distrustful of decision-makers, these individuals may therefore feel particularly affected by COVID-19. When public policy is connected to such imminent individualized threats, self-interest and experience become dominant factors in individuals' decision-making (Chong et al. 2001). This feeling may be exacerbated by the perceived lack of a comprehensive scientific consensus on the proper way to deal with the coronavirus outbreak (Katsambekis and Stavrakakis 2020).

Recent research has shown that there is a strong link between populism and people's experience of the pandemic (Every-Palmer et al. 2020; Huber 2020). The following regression analysis by Heinisch and Werner (2021), based on a special survey conducted in Austria as part of the PaCE project, accounts for the extent to which individuals felt negatively affected in their health due to the COVID pandemic. In doing so, it also tests whether political attitudes can affect experiences even if these are seemingly physical or physiological.

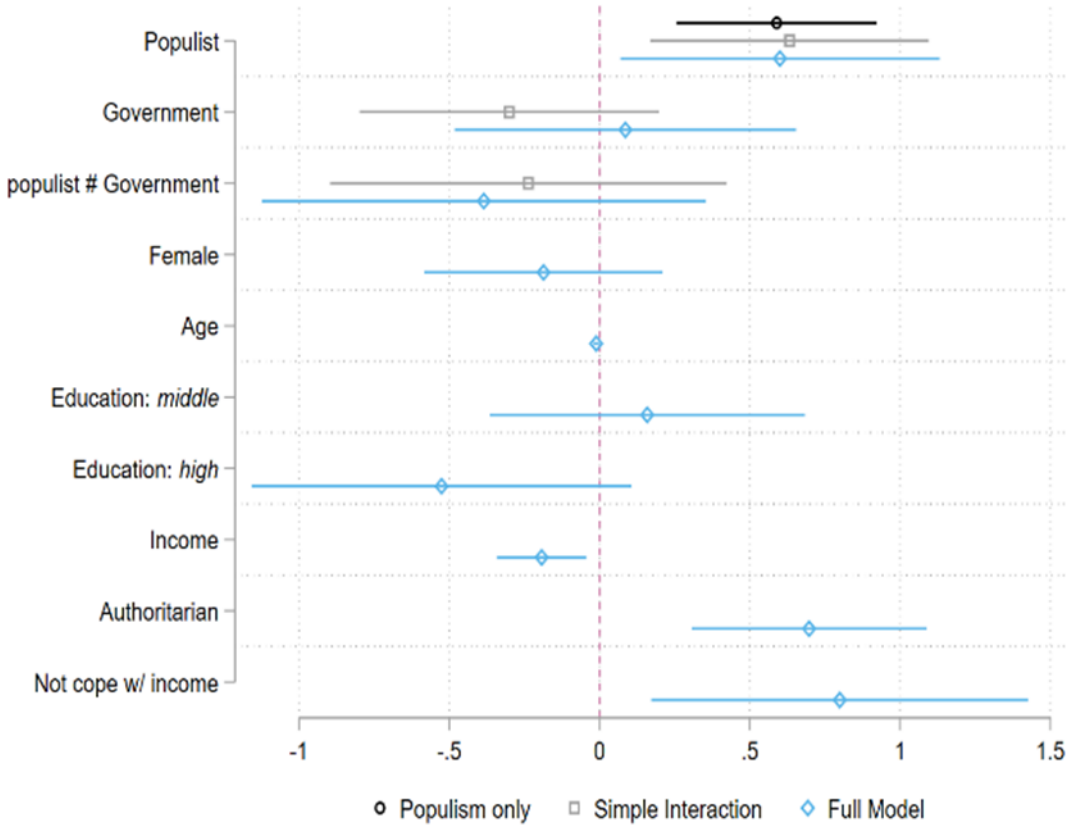
Figure 3 shows the coefficient plots of three OLS regressions, the first including only populist attitudes, the second additionally accounting for whether the respondent was a government or opposition voter and interacting this factor with populism as a control for the robustness of the populism effect, and the third model adding control variables such as age, gender, education, and income. The group of control variables also includes two additional subjective attitude components that are closely related to emotions. One is a voter's degree of authoritarianism and the other is whether the voter feels able to cope economically. Standard indicator questions from the Austrian National Election Survey were used for all variables (Heinisch and Werner 2021).

The results show that populist attitudes play a significant role as the observed effects with respect to health remain robust in all models. Authoritarian attitudes and the subjective feeling of not being able to cope with the situation also have a significant effect on being affected by the COVID pandemic in a health state. While such a health effect is often treated as a medical phenomenon, we see that it goes far beyond the physiological state and that from a behavioral perspective, the subjective experience is crucial. In particular, in the case of a pandemic, it is not an individual experience, but a collective experience, creating a collective dynamic that people can experience in groups. COVID-19 is not only a physical health issue, but also a political issue related to the perception of government and its decisions to combat the pandemic.

While the latter results only pertain to Austria and require replication, they illustrate the extent to which emotions, preferences, perceptions of elites, and subjective evaluations of one's situation play a role in the formation of political preferences and even perceptions of experience. Political actors who are able to manipulate these emotional states and subjective evaluations can form

lasting emotional bonds that go beyond the alignment of interests and rationally based preferences.

Figure 3: Coefficient plot for regression explaining a person feeling affected in own health by the COVOD pandemic, 3 models



OLS Regression analysis based on an original survey conducted by Market Institut (Sep. 2021), based on randomly sampled respondents from a pool of 25,000-30,000 Austrians, representative of the defined target group. The max. statistical margin of error is +/-2.90 percent for n=1,200 respondents.

Turning to the issue of gender, while we observe a clear and pronounced gender difference between voters of populist radical right parties and parties of the center-right, we find only modest support for the explanations derived from previous research on this topic (e.g., Akkerman 2015; Gidengil et al. 2005; Givens 2004; Hartveld et al. 2015; Immerzeel et al. 2015; Spierings and Zaslove 2017). Negative attitudes toward immigration and distrust of elites do not convincingly help explain gender differences. Interestingly, descriptive statistics show that, on average, women are almost as negative toward immigrants and even slightly more hostile toward elites than men. New research in the context of PaCE strongly corroborates the argument that differences in religiousness could serve as explanation for the quite large gender gap we observe between PRRP and center-right parties (Jansesberger et al. 2021). Our findings suggest that it is especially the very religious women that shy away from endorsing a PRRP. Furthermore, our results show that the effect of gender loses significance once we control for the religiousness. This suggests

that gender differences in the importance of religion could be a crucial factor in why women support PRRP in far fewer numbers than men but have little reservations to opt for traditional conservative parties.

Table 2: Multilevel Logistic Regression Analysis: Explaining the Effect of Gender on the Support for Populist Radical Right Parties

VARIABLES	M1 PRRP Support	M2 PRRP Support	M3 PRRP Support	M4 PRRP Support
Gender (Female=1)	-0.296**	-0.394***	-0.140	-0.162
	(0.122)	(0.118)	(0.119)	(0.129)
Higher Education	-0.732***	-0.856***	-0.935***	-0.691***
	(0.138)	(0.134)	(0.134)	(0.143)
Age	-0.0280***	-0.0258***	-0.0233***	-0.0227***
	(0.00347)	(0.00336)	(0.00336)	(0.00366)
Household Income	-0.105***	-0.0949***	-0.0995***	-0.0986***
	(0.0242)	(0.0231)	(0.0230)	(0.0250)
Anti-immigration Attitudes	0.412***			0.338***
	(0.0308)			(0.0327)
Distrust Politicians		0.261***		0.151***
		(0.0262)		(0.0289)
Religiousness			-0.176***	-0.138***
			(0.0203)	(0.0219)
Constant	-1.126**	-0.121	2.408***	-1.322**
	(0.521)	(0.534)	(0.535)	(0.585)
Observations	1.949	1.960	1.973	1.925
Number of groups	6	6	6	6
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1				

Source: European Social Survey 2018 (ESS Round 9, 2018) – Jansesberger et al. 2021

Table 2 shows the results of four regression models seeking to explain support for a populist radical right party rather than a centre right party when factoring in gender as the central explanatory variable and then adding different control variables (Jansesberger et al. 2021). Model 1 shows that women are no less opposed to immigration than men and are not less likely to support a PRRP when compared with their preference for a center right party. If indeed differences in immigration preferences were to explain the gender gap between center right parties and PRRP, the coefficient of gender would become insignificant once we integrate immigration preferences into the regression model. Model 2 tests the argument that women are less opposed to political elites than men and therefore less likely to support a PRRP when compared with their

preference for a center right party. Yet there is no evidence that women differ from men in this regard. Model 3 focuses on the argument that women are more religious than men and thus abstain more often from supporting PRRP while still endorsing conservative center right parties. The inclusion of religiousness renders the coefficient of gender insignificant. Model 4 confirms this finding as more control variables are added. This suggests that religiousness may indeed be an important individual-level factor accounting for differences in radical right party support among right-leaning women.

Much as the psychological mechanisms and associated orientations play crucial roles, research on the relationship between populism and specific policy preferences, most commonly a form of nativism, is still in an early stage. Even though most successful right-wing populist parties combine their form of populism with nativism, it is still debated what features both concepts share, how distinct they are and on what grounds the combination exactly works. Rooduijn et al. (2021), for example, find mixed evidence for the question if populists are (always) nativists or not.

With regard to the sociodemographic profile of populist citizens, research is also still far from exhausted. Rovira Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert (2020) show that cross-national and cross-regional differences exist. In Europe the populist citizens “tend to be male, older, lower educated, not in the capital region, and unemployed” (Rovira Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert 2020), while no such evidence was found for Latin America.

Populist citizens’ attitudes towards democracy, though, seems to be homogeneous: Rovira Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert (2020) find that these citizens are politically engaged and do not want to overthrow the democratic system but rather democratize democracy. Heinisch and Wegscheider (2020) find that populist citizens tend to be against representative forms of democratic decision-making altogether, because it supposedly cannot regard for the assumed general will of the people. This holds for both left-wing and right-wing populists. Understanding the conceptions of democracy of populist citizens is an important step towards the effects that populism has on democracy and democratic quality, which we discuss in the second section of this report.

Due to this complexity, a single reason for voting for a populist party cannot be realistically assessed. In addition to the varieties of populism on the supply-side in the form of parties on different points within the political left-right spectrum, individuals might vote for populist parties because they are populist or because of the specific policies the party offers (Caiani 2019; Loew and Faas 2019; Spruyt et al. 2016).

However, there is one important aspect that is often not sufficiently appreciated when it comes to counteracting risk factors. This is the dimension of emotional states, perceived identities, latent narratives and other more rational factors based on policy preferences and interests. Populists often appeal to emotional narratives, promise to change the status quo, and establish an identitarian bond between themselves and their followers. For the latter, it is often more important

to be understood and to have political actors relate to their grievances than to be presented with a five-point plan for solutions.

Mainstream politicians often rely on their competence, experience, and superior expertise, but neglect that all their expertise counts for nothing if they are not trusted. During the COVID pandemic, epidemiologists clearly had offered plenty of expertise, but enough people tended to follow the anti-vaccination rhetoric of radical populists because they trusted the latter more.

Summing up, populists have learned to tell compelling stories about the heartland and its people threatened by internal and external enemies (Heinisch et al. 2020). Their narratives are also linked to the hope that the future will more closely resemble a past that seems familiar to people. In this sense, the silent counterrevolution that is the undoing of liberal modernization is also an emotional project.

Differences between Western and Central/Eastern Europe

Due to historical and contextual differences, the success of populist parties and their respective positional arrangement differs between countries, specifically as a consequence of their varying levels of involvement in a crisis. The heterogeneity of regional contexts in Europe become especially visible when contrasting Western and Central/Eastern European contexts and when comparing the development of populism in both regions (Smilova et al. 2020).

An important difference can be found in the role of immigration. As shown above, populist success in Western Europe can be linked to growing numbers of immigrants and asylum-seekers in interaction with a fear of relative losses due to the perceived competition, for example on the job market and social services. Central/Eastern Europe, in contrast, is not subject to immigration. Instead, post-communist nationalism allows populist parties to connect to the nativism and authoritarianism of the right-wing populist parties in Western Europe (Pirro 2014).

Santana et al. (2020) find that while negative attitudes towards immigration are less important in Eastern Europe than in Western Europe and the perceived economic deprivation does not have any effect on populist voting at all in Eastern compared with Western Europe, other issues are more salient and increase the probability of voting for a populist party in Eastern Europe, such as higher degrees of Euroscepticism and higher levels of political trust. The latter can be explained with populist parties being in government for a longer period of time already in Hungary and Poland. The respondents might thus think of the preferred populist parties when thinking about trust in politicians, political parties, and the national parliament. The fact that economic deprivation is not found to be a significant predictor of populist success, much less a sufficient one, is underlined by the Polish case, which did not experience an economic recession in the crisis and where PiS nevertheless came to power (Smilova et al. 2020; Markowski 2016).

Another difference between Western and Eastern Europe lies in the experience of transformation and EU accession and the conditions under which this occurred. Not only can these experiences and their effects be exploited, providing angry voters with "ready-made villains" in the form of Western countries and Western companies that have dictated unfavourable terms to Eastern Europeans in order to disadvantage them. It also provides a new elite that populists in Central and Eastern European countries are targeting, namely the group of intellectuals and dissidents and the civil society organizations that were once so crucial to the transformation. In some cases, the appeal of populists lies in their seemingly apolitical and non-ideological nature. Buštíková and Guasti (2019) have called this "technocratic populism" (see also Engler et al. 2019). Heinisch and Saxonberg (2022) in new research conducted for PaCE show that one reaction by voters in Central and Eastern Europe rejecting both liberal mainstream parties and radical right populists was to opt instead for centrist entrepreneurial populism as represented by ANO in the Czech Republic.

Populism and the Quality of Democracy

Having reviewed various factors than can result in a rise of populist parties and attitudes, the potential consequences of populism are still an open question. How does populism affect the quality of democracy? In her review of current research, Akkerman (2017) identifies three broad views in the literature (see also Giebler and Werner 2020):

One group of authors regards populism as a severe anti-democratic threat. As a matter of fact, political actors opposing populist parties and politicians as well as various media outlets and political activists tend to equate populism with authoritarianism or, typically in a historical perspective, even with fascism. From a theoretical perspective that understands populism as a democratic – if illiberal – political programme or *Weltanschauung*, such an interpretation is problematic. On the other hand, however, populism might indeed be a severe threat because it rarely appears in a "pure" populist form but is often combined with anti-democratic elements.

A second group of authors interprets populism as an anti-liberal threat. In this view, populism, as defined by the ideational approach (Mudde 2017), is a genuine democratic force but endangers liberal principles such as minority rights, the separation of power, and the rule of law. Unrestricted majority rule is certainly a risk factor to democratic quality and liberal principles such as personal freedom. This threat to liberal democracy, it is argued, is the direct consequence of the way populism defines the demos: "For populism, the people should be understood as a homogeneous community with a shared collective identity. For liberal democracy, in contrast, the people should be understood as an irreducible plurality, consisting of free and equal citizens" (Rummens 2017, 554). Populism is therefore a threat to liberal democracy, never a corrective, but populism can act as a "symptom which signals that something is going wrong in the representative process" (Rummens 2017, 563).

The third group of authors, finally, strongly differs in its interpretation of the impact of populism as it regards populism not as a threat but as a corrective to liberal (or representative) democracy. In this perspective, populism might reduce the power of political, economic or other elites and especially the influence of technocrats, another form of political representation opposed to principles of liberal democracy (Caramani 2017). Authors who see potentially positive effects of populism often relate them to specific kinds of populism and regard inclusionary (left) populism to be different from exclusionary (right) populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). Different kinds of populism (Ivaldi et al. 2017) are thus associated with different risks to democratic quality.

Populism's impact on the quality of democracy is thus seen differently in the research literature. These differences are partly the result of a different understanding of populism. In a normative perspective, these divergent assessments are also the result of differences in the preferred trade-off between democratic and liberal principles. Moreover, the different assessments and empirical findings in the literature are also the consequence of several intervening factors that moderate the influence populism has for the quality of democracy. Extant research has identified factors such as

the role of populist parties in government or opposition, whether populists govern (or act) in consolidated or new democracies, and whether populist parties combine their populism, understood as a thin ideology, with socialist (left) or nativist (right) host ideologies (see Huber and Schimpf 2017, 335). In such a perspective, risk factors for democratic quality depend on various contextual and actor-specific factors that need to be accounted for.

The actual effect populism has on the quality of democracy has been analysed in various ways. Researchers have used different measures of democracy and explored whether populism decreases or increases the overall quality of democracy. Others have focussed on the role of populism concerning the level and equality of participation. Again, others have dealt with questions of representation and asked what populists do when in power or how populism affects democratic institutions such as parliaments and the public discourse in general.

Overall Quality of Democracy

Whether populism affects the overall quality of democracy is the most fundamental question of any debate on risk factors. Using various indices that quantify the level of democracy in a country at specific points in time, Huber and Schimpf (2017) stress the importance of intervening factors such as the level of democratic consolidation or the specific role populist parties play in the system of government (see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). Consolidated democracies such as Austria, Huber and Schimpf argue, seem to be hardly affected by a government including a populist radical-right party, which also acts as junior partner only. The quality of democracy in East-Central Europe seems to be affected by populist governments as decreasing scores for both Slovakia (Smer) and Hungary (Fidesz) demonstrate. In Venezuela, by contrast, the populist government has led to the breakdown of democracy. Ruth-Lovell et al. (2019, 24) report that populist governments “tend to erode the level of the electoral, liberal and deliberative model of democracy”.

In a study comparing Latin American countries, Huber and Schimpf (2016b) found positive effects on the quality of democracy when populists were in opposition and especially in countries where democracy was less consolidated. Negative effects of populism, these authors show, occur when they are in power. In Europe, where populism is most often found on the right of the political spectrum, populist radical right parties also have a negative effect on democratic quality when they are part of the government, but there is no evidence for a positive effect when they are in opposition (Huber and Schimpf 2016a).

In a similar study, Vittorio and Morlino (2021, 32), presented such mixed results as well and additionally stressed the impact the Great Recession had: “(…) up until the beginning of the economic crisis in in the late 2000s, populism’s impact on polyarchic institutions appears to have been marginal, even in those cases where populism played a relatively important role, and the political system was jeopardized by corruption scandals (e.g. in Italy)”. Afterwards, the authors identify a “democratic deterioration” caused by exclusionary populist rule, but only in Eastern Europe, namely Poland and Hungary. Exclusionary populism in the West as well as inclusionary

populism in general, which is rather rare throughout Europe, does not have a clear impact on the quality of democracy, these authors maintain.

An extreme threat to the quality of democracy is finally represented by state capture through populist actors of which Hungary (Fazekas and Tóth 2016) and to a lesser extent Poland (Kozarzewski and Bałtowski 2016) and Serbia (Bochsler and Juon 2020) are the best-known cases. There, the leader coordinates vast patronal and partisan networks that exert control over the judiciary, national financial institutions, the national media, education institutions, including universities, as well as the key administrative apparatus. A further consequence entails using the state bureaucracy to restrict civil society organisations and the opposition. Attempts at eliminating the neutrality of state vis-à-vis political parties was also in evidence in the US during the Trump administration (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018) and has clearly transformed Latin American regimes such as Venezuela and Nicaragua from merely populist to naked authoritarian (De La Torre 2018).

Participation

The effect of populism – either of populist attitudes or of populist actors – on political participation is another way by which researchers have assessed its impact on the quality of democracy. Empirical research, however, has so far produced mixed results. Some studies show that populist attitudes increase political involvement and thus decrease unequal participation based on factors such as education or income (Anduiza et al. Rico 2019). Experimental research has shown that anti-elitist messages are particularly mobilizing factors whereas anti-immigrant messages delivered by political elites rather have demobilizing effects (Hameleers et al. 2018). Ardag et al. (2020), by contrast, found no effect related to populism at all.

Studies on turnout using aggregate data have observed differences between Western and Eastern Europe as the presence of populist parties leads to higher turnout only in the East (Leininger and Meijers 2020). Immerzeel and Pickup (2015), by contrast, found young and East European citizens to be rather demobilized by the emergence of successful populist radical right parties whereas in Western Europe these parties tend to mobilize already politically interested groups.

Populists, finally, might also affect how people can participate. Research shows that populist-leaning citizens strongly prefer direct democracy (Mohrenberg et al. 2021). Populist parties too often refer to direct-democratic procedures when in opposition but when in power they hardly empower people by introducing institutional reforms such as direct democracy (Akkerman 2017, 174).

Representation

Populism, its defenders have argued, might lead to a better representation of voters in parliament and/or government. Regarding the congruence of voters' and political elites' (candidates) attitudes, a study on Greece found rather mixed results though (Andreadis and Stavrakakis, 2017).

Comparing populist attitudes and party positions in thirteen European countries, by contrast, Dolezal reported high levels (2021).

Do populists represent their voters when in power? Akkerman (2017) identified nine parties that participated in a total of 17 cabinets either as a formal coalition partner or formal external supporter in Europe since 2000. While “government participation [of populists] is still remarkably understudied” (Akkerman, 2017, 172), he nevertheless sees fundamental freedoms and rights in danger but only in less consolidated democracies such as Latin America and Eastern Europe, but not in Western Europe. Populists, Akkerman maintains, “give a voice to those groups that prefer more exclusive policies in relation to immigrants or people with an immigrant background” (Akkerman, 2017, 175).

Indirect effects: public discourse and impact on mainstream parties

Populism not only has direct effects on the quality of democracy, especially when in government – and above all in less consolidated democracies. Populist attitudes are associated with a belief in conspiracy theories (Castanho Silva et al. 2017) and populism in general has also negative effects on public discourse. Populist actors, above all from the right, especially use social media to spread their messages with “attacks on the media elite and ostracism of others” (Engesser et al. 2017). But there are also potentially positive side effects as the strength and polarizing character of populist parties increases the news-value of political institutions such as parliaments which results in more coverage of politics and thus – indirectly – might provide a better basis for an informed electoral choice (Miklin and Dolezal 2021).

Another rather indirect effect of populism is the way mainstream parties react to the rise of their populist competitors. Based on previous studies on patterns of party competition (e.g., Meguid 2005) Albertazzi et al. (2021) distinguish three strategies: dismissive (mainstream parties do not react at all), adversarial (mainstream parties oppose populists), and accommodative (mainstream parties take over populist positions and/or build coalitions with these parties).

In their study of the development in Austria, Heinisch et al. (2021, 75) apply this typology and find both extreme types of strategies applied: “a policy of complete isolation and marginalization as well as full-fledged cooperation in government”. The conservative ÖVP’s strategy of cooperation is the result of strategic and programmatic factors, as it allowed the party after the 1999 election, when it was only the third strongest party, to break out from its role as junior partner in the Grand Coalition with the SPÖ. Moreover, the ÖVP step by step moved closer to the FPÖ in programmatic terms in the fields of immigration, security – and at least partly also with respect to Europe. The migration crisis of 2015/2016, which particularly affected Austria, once again reinforced this strategy which was personalized by the ÖVP’s new leader – and subsequent chancellor – Kurz. The SPÖ, by contrast, has tried to isolate the FPÖ (at least on the federal level of government).

New research by Heinisch and Werner (2021b) in the context of PaCE presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions Conference and the 2021 CES International Conference of Europeanists relying on a dedicated survey show that citizens either have strong preferences for participation and representation rooted in their democratic values OR relate to party leaders and have tribal understandings of parties. These linkages are unrelated to democratic values. Furthermore, effectiveness in the form of electoral success is of lesser importance than one would assume and unrelated to democratic values. These findings indicate that citizens' discontent with parties in democracy can be rooted in democratic expectations or completely unrelated to them. Here too, we see increasing evidence that citizens relate to democracy and to democratic institutions not only on the bases of values and expectations in relation to democracy but also on the bases of emotive, identitarian or personalistic bonds to leaders and groups. Such latent tendencies may be activated by leaders under the right circumstances or remain dormant in others.

Simulation: A New Approach for Analysing Risk Factors

How can we systematically assess the effects of risk factors for the quality of democracy? Research has been typically based on cross-sectional or time-series analysis to explore the causal effects certain risk factors have. Researchers have, as shown above, used measures of the overall quality of democracy and explored whether and how they are influenced by populists in government or opposition depending on contextual factors such as the previous level of democracy (Huber and Schimpf 2016b, 2016a). Others have used individual level survey data or aggregated data on turnout to assess the link between populist attitudes and populist messages on the one and mass participation on the other side.

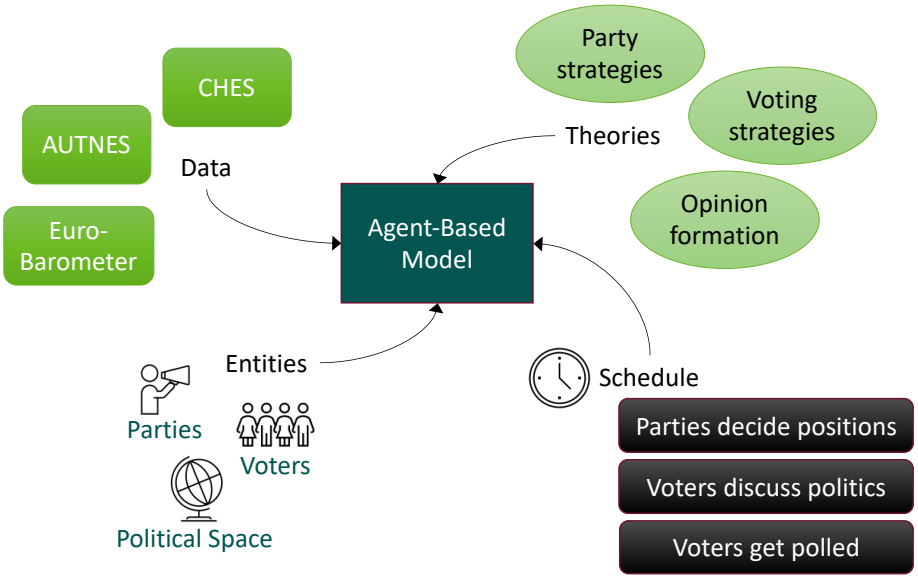
An alternative approach to assess how populism or factors associated with populism affect the quality of democracy is the use of agent-based simulation. An agent-based model (ABM) simulates the actions and interactions of autonomous agents, which can represent both individuals (e.g., voters) or collective entities (e.g., parties), in order to understand the behaviour of the system under investigation. Specific advantages of this approach are the capability to explicitly model individual behaviour, include heterogeneous decision-making processes, and integrate quantitative and qualitative data from a range of sources. It also allows for exploring what-if scenarios and counterfactual reasoning. The PaCE project (WP 2) uses real world data on voters' attitudes and party preference, on the position of political parties, and the salience of issues in the mass public and combines this with theories on voters' decision-making (Lau et al. 2018) and parties' strategic moves in the political space (Muis and Scholte 2013, Laver and Sergenti 2012).

In a recent paper, Meyer et al. (2021) simulate the development in Austrian party politics between the national elections of 2013 and 2017, a period that was affected by the refugee crisis of 2015/2016 and the above-mentioned leadership-change in and shift to the right by the conservative ÖVP. The best available model uses a mix of voter strategies and successfully reprodces the trends in opinion polls, namely the rise of the ÖVP. Subsequent simulations will not only use what-if scenarios based on different voter strategies (such as the relative importance of rational choice) but will focus on what-if scenarios concerning real-world developments such as the refugee crisis and the leadership and programmatic change of the ÖVP. This will be compared to the development in Germany, where mainstream parties are confronted with populism not only on the right (AfD) but also on the left of the political spectrum (Linke).

Here we summarise some preliminary results from the simulation study of the Austrian case study covering the period 2013-1017 (during the migrant 'crisis'), as described in D2.3 and D2.5. The purpose was to better understand the dynamics of the rise of the AfD there, We will not give the full simulation details again here, but quickly summarise to provide some context.
The simulation modelled the interaction between voters and the parties both situated within a 7-diminesional space of attitudes to 7 key issues (economy, welfare state, budge, immigration, environment, society and law&order). Voters could change their opinion on these attitudes due to social influence, and could use a variety of strategies to decide which party to vote for (rational

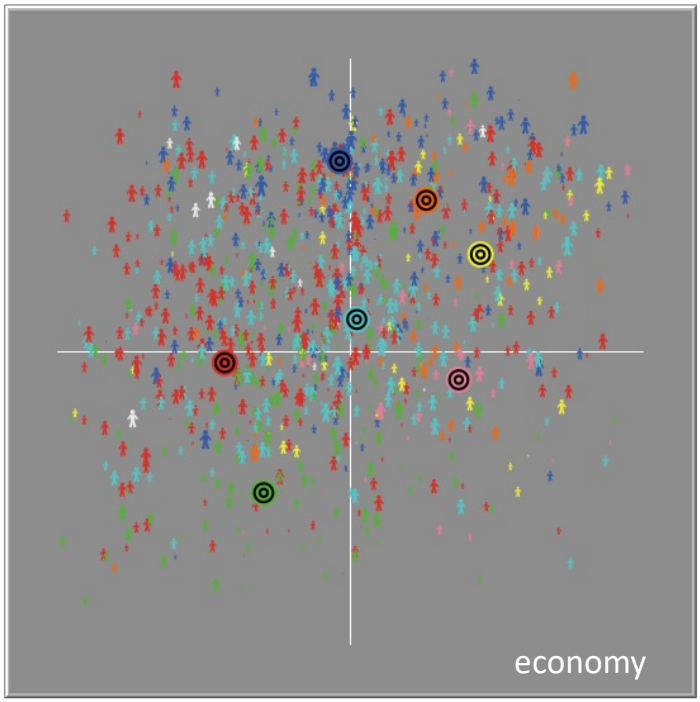
choice, confirmatory, fast&frugal, heuristics-based, go with gut and identity-based). Simultaneously the parties (SPÖ, ÖVP, FPÖ, Grüne, NEOS, BZÖ, Team Stronach) could use a variety of strategies (Aggregator, Satisficer, Hunter and Sticker) to use in order to decide their policies.

Figure 4: An illustration of the main simulation elements



As far as possible all these settings (and the others) were based upon available evidence. The voters were created using characteristics from the AUTNES data set, the parties using the CHES data set.

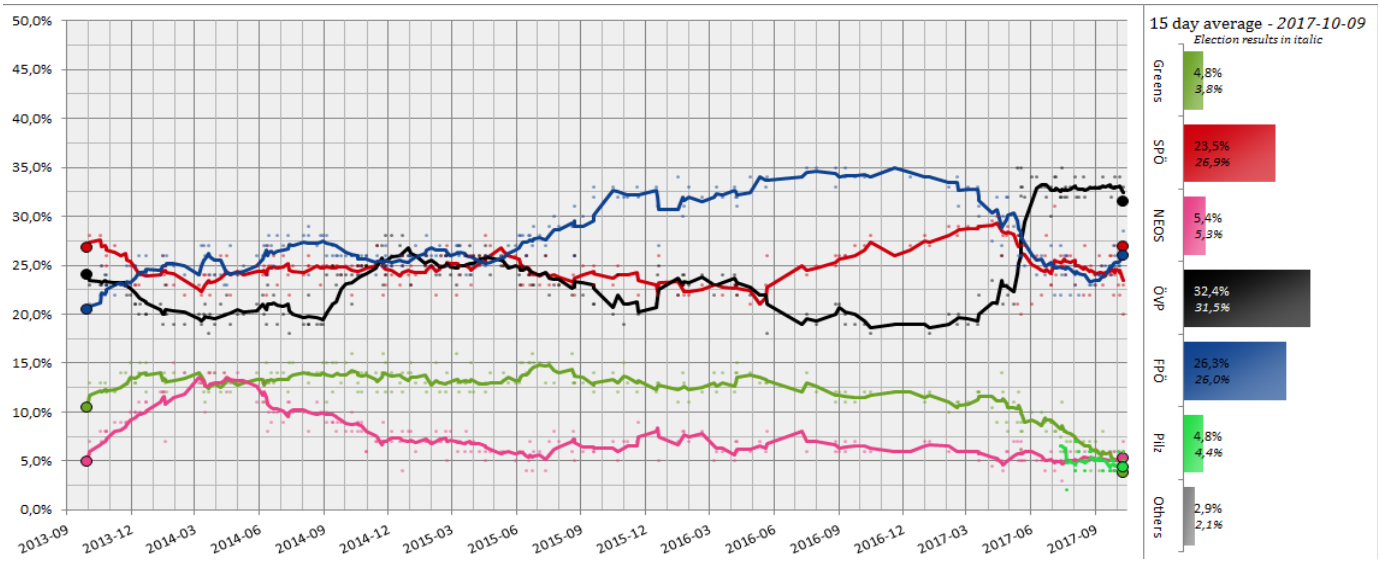
Figure 5: An illustration of two of the dimensions in the space of attitudes with parties and position of parties shown



- Parties (7) are placed according to the party positions and assigned a strategy
  - Aggregator: SPÖ, ÖVP
  - Hunter: FPÖ
  - Sticker: Greens, BZÖ, NEOS, Team Stronach
- Voters (1060) are placed according to their opinions
  - with some random noise added
  - Adopt colour of party they currently would vote for
- Assigned mix of strategies taken from our analysis of AUTNES
  - Rational Choice: 18.3 %
  - Confirmatory: 29.8 %
  - Fast and Frugal: 38.5 %
  - Heuristics-based: 4.9%
  - Go with Gut: 8.5%

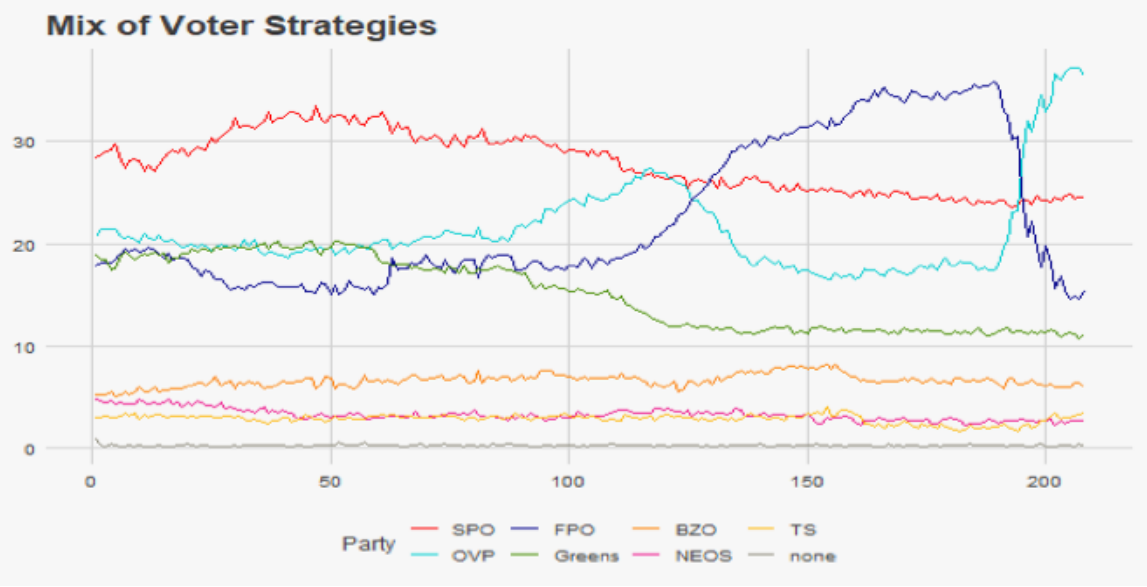
Then the simulation was explored to see how close to the observed results it could get. These target results were the polling for these parties in the 2013-2017 period.

Figure 6: The target polling data, Austria 2013-2017



The best model results obtained looked like that below, which are quite a good match to those above.

Figure 7: The simulation-generated polling proportions from the best results of the model.

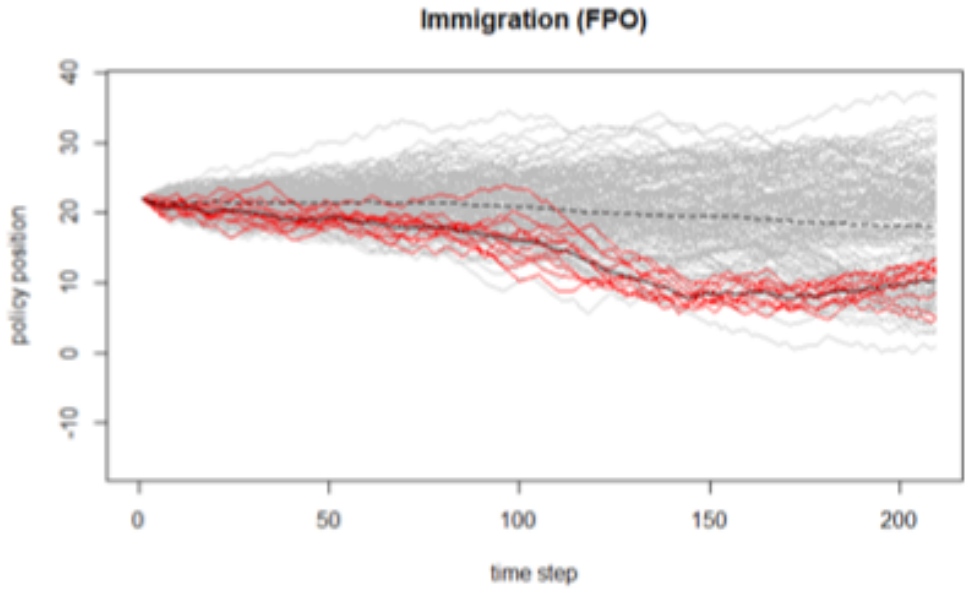


However, when you run the simulation many times using the same parameters, you get a *variety* of different patterns, only sometimes matching the target polling data. The diagram below gives an idea of the variety.

Figure 8: the polling proportions generated by the simulation in nine different simulation runs, illustrating the variation of outcomes with the same initial conditions.

This emphasises our first conclusion as to risk in these kinds of situation. *Politics is **not** deterministic – even when the conditions for populism and the potentially right activation mechanisms are there, there is still a considerable amount of contingency*.
Thus next we investigated the source of the contingency, analysing the runs for what properties resulted in matching the target data (and thus gaining a considerable share of the vote in the 2017 election). The next figure shows the policy position of the FPO as it developed over time, with the runs that matched the target data shown in red (in 11 / 170 runs).

Figure 9: the policy position of the agent representing the FPO, over time, in 170 simulation runs with the same initial conditions. The runs that successfully match the observed outcomes are shown in red.



Counter-intuitively, it is the movement of FPÖ on the immigration issue that is most influential in getting votes. It seems that it adopted a more “centrist” view during migrant crisis, mitigating the harsher policies and racist overtones. It then became slightly more extreme just before the 2017 election, allowing ÖVP to move in and take votes back. Having established its credentials on the topic of immigration before it was able to be more moderate on this – adopting some of the flexibility of populists. Thus we come to the second preliminary conclusion which is that *the flexibility of more populist parties (compared to traditional, ideologically-based parties with relatively fixed policies) can allow it to shift to opportunistically get votes*.

PaCE is now working on a more extensive series of comparisons and what-if experiments to identify more of the risk conditions.

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