

WP4: Causal, policy and futures analysis

D4.5 Scenarios and desired futures



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**Populism and
Civic Engagement**



WP4 – Causal, Policy and futures analysis

D4.5: Scenarios and desired futures: Scenarios and analysis of the steps to take to reach the desired futures and avoid the undesired futures

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Dissemination Level		
PU	Public	X
PP	Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)	.
RE	Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)	.
CO	Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)	.

A brief summary of revisions will be recorded in the table below:

HISTORY OF CHANGES			
VERSION	DATE	KEY CHANGES	AUTHOR
V1.1	February 2021	Incorporating feedback from first consortium demonstration and interaction with scenario lead on POPREBEL project – alteration of matrix axis to reflect attitudes	Matthew Hall, David Barnard-Wills



V1.2	September 2021	Key negative effects of populism incorporated following workshops with consortium experts	Matthew Hall, David Barnard-Wills
V1.3	December 2021	Finalisation of indicators and useability improvements, following workshops with external academics and PaCE conference in Brussels	Matthew Hall, David Barnard-Wills
V1.4	April 2022	Final feedback incorporated on steps to take to avoid undesired futures and policy options	Matthew Hall, David Barnard-Wills
V15.	April 2022	Minor edits to clarify the status of scenario-generated suggestions and some formatting	Bruce Edmonds

The working language of this document will be English (EN), as required for reporting purposes by article 20.7 of the Grant Agreement.



Executive Summary

Across Europe, we have seen the rise of political movements that claim to challenge liberal elites and speak for the ‘ordinary person’ – movements that can be loosely categorised as ‘populist’. Many of these movements have undesirable impacts related to polarisation of politics and distrust in institutions. Populism and Civic Engagement (**PaCE**), is a research project which aims to understand and respond to the negative tendencies of populist movements, to build upon the lessons of positive examples and hence play a part in constructing a firmer democratic and institutional foundation for the citizens of Europe.

This document (PaCE D4.5) contains the finalised foresight scenarios developed in the PaCE project. The project presents a set of six scenarios spanning a range of possible futures for populist politics in a European country, varying by the prevalence of attitudes associated with populism, and the presence or absence of mechanisms that turn those attitudes into political support. The scenarios are intended for use to support foresight activities which can inform planning. We provide an example of how one might use them to envisage possible policy responses – looking at the steps that could be taken to avoid potential undesirable futures produced by populist politics is demonstrated in part 2 of this document.

The six scenarios are:

- **Populists on the outside** – Amateur populist parties are treated as media spectacle but gain little traction and power due to limited support.
- **Constant Struggle** – A vibrant and re-energised public sphere sees conflict between populists and non-populists, splitting public attitudes and populists contesting elections.
- **Populism dominant and entrenched** – Populist parties win and hold power, capturing other institutions and bringing rights into question.
- **Liberalism contented** – The collapse of populist parties and a depolarisation of debate allow for the electoral dominance of liberal or technocratic parties and a consensus style of politics.
- **Opportunistic populism** – Populist opportunists take advantage of populist attitudes and influence mainstream politics, but gain little electoral success
- **Populism pressure cooker** – A highly polarised environment where the barriers to populist parties cause attitudes to spill over into other areas of public life.

Part 1 includes a scenario matrix, the indicators used in the matrix and the accompanying narratives to bring the scenarios to life based around PaCE WP4 research on causal mechanisms.

Part 2 is an example analysis of the steps that one might take to avoid potential undesirable futures by reflectively working through these scenarios. This shows how these scenarios can be used by policy actors to inform strategic planning. This analysis focuses on the negative effects on society that are produced by populists trying to win power. This focusses on steps that could be taken to mitigate against these negative effects, and also on the potential spill-over effects of populism that are more difficult to deal with. These can include the inadvertent effects of policies – those developed to reduce populists’ popularity but having the opposite effect. Not all populism is necessarily bad or harmful, so by focussing on the negative effects of populism rather than populism per se, steps can be taken to avoid these effects without attacking legitimate forms of democratic dissent. In this example, a number of policies/directions are suggested, including: the importance of avoiding the ‘police-ification’ of politics, whilst finding ways to demonetize polarisation on platforms, addressing distributional justice, making a values based case for liberal democracy and adopting a longer-term view on populism



This report is aimed at a broad but informed audience. Those who could make use of this report are those who might be looking for suggestions for responding to the negative effects of populism, including: 1) policy actors (at an EC level and national level), 2) populism experts, 3) politics researchers, 4) foresight and scenario practitioners.

This report is accompanied by PaCE D4.6 which describes in more detail the process for the creation and validation of the scenarios and presents suggestions for other relation scenario foresight work.



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Part 1 – PaCE populism foresight scenarios

Introduction: Creating the scenarios

The PaCE project has developed six foresight scenarios based on our work into the causal mechanisms of populist voting (see annex 1). There are two parts to these scenarios. One part is the matrix, the other part is the accompanying narratives, both of which are included below.

Scenarios are a tool that can offer ‘foresight’ over certain trends and topics over which we have an interest. Foresight is not prophecy, however, and neither is it an attempt at prediction. Predicting the future implies it is predetermined. Foresight scenarios invite us instead to reflect on the future as something contestable over which we can have an input and contribute to shaping in desirable ways, rather than something that is already decided upon. Scenarios are an analysis tool that can suggest a range of possible outcomes to improve planning capacity, enhance strategic thinking and guide public policy decisions by showing policy makers a range of possible outcomes, with consequences, that can be addressed by enacting policy now.¹

One way to construct scenarios in a complex field like populism is to develop internally coherent and plausible illustrations of the future, to which no particular probability is attached. These types of qualitative studies still rigorously engage with the factors likely to influence the future, but with no prediction about which of those futures are more likely to happen. While we may not be able to predict which future will be produced by each factor, what we do, is assess the scale of influence that those factors are likely to have on the success of populism.

For example, we know which causal mechanisms have a propensity to produce more support for populist parties, and we can ascertain and analyse what is likely to influence those causal mechanisms in certain directions. While qualitative and speculative, this approach is still evidence driven.

While scenarios are not predictions of the future, they describe plausible future possibilities that can be used to inspire reflection on the drivers that will influence and inform the future. What we get out of scenarios is a method to tell multiple stories about trends that are important in the *present moment* and how these trends and their drivers might impact our future. This can aid decision making and strategic planning to avoid any undesirable consequences of possible futures.²

Scenarios grant us an opportunity to reflect on the potential implications of those models and theories in the real world. They also present us with an opportunity through collaborative workshop processes with other experts and stakeholders, to assess and scrutinise the credibility, plausibility and coherence of the causal theories used to develop the scenarios. The way these causal models interact with other trends and drivers, such as climate change and demographic imbalances, as well as with each other, is another way that stakeholders could use the PaCE scenarios after the end of the project. Scenarios cannot of course be conducted as precisely as simulations, but scenarios can give us the opportunity to describe the results and implications of those simulations.

Suggestions as to which of the causal drivers are likely to produce certain scenarios, or have an impact on that potential future, can help stakeholders to plan and strategise and then take steps to avoid the possible undesirable futures envisaged. Because scenarios lay out what *could* happen through the development

¹ Joseph Voros , A generic foresight process framework, *Foresight*, vol.5, no.3, pp.10–21, 2003. ISSN: 1463-6689. doi:10.1108/14636680310698379

² Joern Buehring, Peter C. Bishop, Foresight and Design: New Support for Strategic Decision Making, *The Journal of Design, Economics, and Innovation*, Volume 6, Issue 3, 2020, Pp 408-432, ISSN 2405-8726, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sheji.2020.07.002>



and careful articulation of multiple plausible scenarios, it can prepare policymakers to strategise for different outcomes. This contributes to informing the way policy makers think about the future rather than telling them what the future will be.

The purpose of the matrix is to facilitate reflection by policy actors on which potential scenarios may be likely to play out in different circumstances (depending on the status of the indicators set out) and reflect on how this may be connected to the current prevalence of populist attitudes in society and the extent to which these attitudes are latent or might become activated. Doing this can encourage policy reflections, such as what type of intervention, and at what point, could “move” us from one scenario in the matrix to another? Or, which interventions could make populism fork in other, unexpected directions?

The accompanying narratives are informed by PaCE’s research into causal mechanisms and, most innovatively, the emotional drivers of populism. The narratives encourage policy actors to reflect on the impact each scenario has on a hypothetical (but situated) individual, what background conditions and structural barriers and enablers may be more likely in each scenario, and the potential undesirable futures produced as a result of each scenario. The purpose of the narratives is to promote thinking about the context of policy responses to populism, the impact and limits of those policy responses, and to guide thinking towards reflecting on the consequences of policy interventions.

These scenarios are informed by the ways in which emotions and attitudes of individuals are activated to action by events and populist leaders. The importance of emotional and attitudinal drivers and activation mechanisms have been a core finding of the PaCE project. The scenarios offer an understanding of situations in which voting for populist parties is likely to increase, but also demonstrates the negative impacts of populism when populist parties fail and these attitudes find alternative outlets. PaCE has also written accompanying narratives to illustrate these scenarios. The narratives use hypothetical protagonists to bring life to our evidence-driven speculation.

The six scenarios are:

“Populists on the Outside” – Low populist attitudes but successful activation mechanisms. (In extreme cases activation mechanisms alone, without populist attitudes, could bring about a populist project, but this is rare)

“Constant struggle” - Moderate prevalence of attitudes associated with populism alongside successful activation mechanisms for those attitudes.

“Populism dominant and entrenched” - High prevalence of attitudes associated with populism and successful activation mechanisms for those attitudes

“Liberalism Contented” - low prevalence of attitudes associated with populism and absent or unsuccessful activation mechanisms for these attitudes

“Opportunistic populism” - Moderate prevalence of attitudes associated with populism and absent or unsuccessful activation mechanisms

“Populism pressure cooker” - High levels of attitudes associated with populism but absent or unsuccessful activation mechanisms for those attitudes



Scenario matrix and indicators

To create a range of scenarios that span possible futures we create a matrix across two axes. One axis of the matrix represents the prevalence of attitudes associated with populist held by members of a society. These attitudes include feelings of such as being ‘left behind’ by changes in society, or scepticism and lack of trust in elites. In principle these could be measured through opinion surveys. The other axis represents the extent to which these attitudes remain latent or activated by populist leaders and /or the media. Populist attitudes are hard to track and analyse, however there are discernible attitudes that are linked to support for populists. These are, i) a worldview in which a conflict between elites and the people predominate, ii) a moral view of politics, i.e. a contest between good and evil, and iii) a view of ‘the people’ as being homogenous. Activation mechanisms are factors like charismatic leadership and media ‘performing crises’. However, activation mechanisms can also be structural and include factors like an electoral system that allows smaller parties to breakthrough, for example.

The following nine **indicators** can be used across the scenarios to describe key differences between the scenarios. In some scenarios the indicators are merged if this is a more accurate reflection of the scenario.

The indicators denote the status and / or behaviour of the following factors in the scenarios

- **Parties and leaders**
- **Status of politics (inclusionary or exclusionary)**
- **Status of public debate / discourse**
- **Behaviour of media**
- **Public attitudes**
- **Behaviour / activity of party activists**
- **Status of rights (secure or under threat)**
- **Electoral success**
- **Institutional influence**

For example, if we observe that the behaviour of a populist party is amateurish, the behaviour of the media is to treat this party as a spectacle, this party has no extensive influence over public debate and discourse and only minor electoral breakthroughs at a local or EU level, we are likely to be in the scenario called “Populists on the outside” (see below). This is a scenario in which we see low or decreasing populist attitudes amongst the public, but those attitudes are being “activated” in some way by a small and relatively unsuccessful populist party. These scenarios offer insight for policy actors to inform policy making that helps to offset negative impacts of populism.

Populist attitudes successfully 'activated' or transformed

		Populists on the outside	Constant struggle	Populism dominant and entrenched
Activated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme yet amateurish minority populist parties • National politics still inclusionary • No extensive influence over discourse— ignored / laughed at • Media treat them as spectacle (eg invited occasionally on to talk shows) • Public attitudes at large apparently unaffected by party's presence • Activism/network building • Rights remain secure • Potential local or European parliament election breakthroughs • No institutional change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populists parties in out of coalitions • Exclusionary politics visible in public sphere - Precarious situation for minorities • A vibrant and re-energised public sphere. Increased civic engagement and / or parties adopting "culture war" positions • Adversarial media models thriving • Public attitudes split • Activists prominent on media platforms in public debate • Concepts of rights & citizenship being politically contested – this can have a legal impact/legacy • "swingy" , contested elections and frequent shifts in governments • Contestation over state institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Populist parties win elections and hold power • Politics exclusionary /changing ideas status of citizenship • Debate and discourse remains polarised despite opposition being defeated • Media captured and / or compliant. Mainstream media opposition weak • Public attitudes strongly supportive of exclusionary government • Party activists in positions of power • Rights removed • Repeated electoral victories • Institutions weakened or captured 	
Latent	Liberalism contented	Opportunistic populism	Populism pressure cooker	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collapse of populist parties • Consensus style of politics • Depolarisation of debate • Media reporting news not crisis • Public attitudes increasingly cosmopolitan. & internationalist • Activists demobilised / foregrounding of expertise and institutions • Extension of rights • Electoral dominance of liberal / technocratic parties • Institutions stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for populist "grifters" prevalent across politics, but no grand vision. Mainstream parties "flirt" with populist ideas • Scepticism towards inclusionary political projects • Poisoned well of public debate • Traditional media circumvented / ignored. Low level online click-bait culture war • Public attitudes exploitable, but not by parties. • Party activists mainly engaged in online discourse • Status of minority rights "debated" • No electoral success for populist parties • Little institutional change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Failed/uncharismatic populist leaders and parties • Some mainstream parties adopt exclusionary populist language and policies • Highly polarised political landscape and public debate • Media "performing crises" • High spill-over of public attitudes visible in mainstream culture war • Party activists visible & active in mainstream sphere • Status of rights debated vigorously • No electoral breakthroughs / high structural barriers to success • No institutional change 	
	Low/Reducing			Prevalent /increasing

How common are Populist attitudes in the population?

Figure 1: PaCE populism foresight scenario matrix

Scenario Narratives

We constructed the following narrative scenarios to reflect the causal theories and the centrality of attitudes the indicators and processes of activation (or otherwise) in each scenario to reflect this. In each scenario narrative a protagonist is followed through a series of events and contexts to understand the impact these events may have on their attitudes and voting decisions as well as the negative effects this could cause in society. Each narratives is structured into three sections which reflect the following:

Section 1 focuses on the individual. This captures how individuals are affected by structural change and external shocks, which emotions are produced by this, and the way those emotions can be exploited, activated or triggered to vote for populist leaders. Or, alternatively, ways in which activation is unsuccessful.

Section 2 focusses on 'background conditions. This section narrates whether and why a populist party succeeds or fails, taking into account the strength of liberal institutions in the narrative, the media response, the party system, electoral system, talent of leader and history of the nation and the prevalence of populist attitudes in society.

Part 3 is concerned with political, cultural and societal impacts of populism. This is where the undesired futures we wish to avoid are located. This section speculates on what the legacy of the situation described in parts 1 and 2 would be in a given context. In doing so we capture three main negative effects of populism; (i) eroding of liberal institutions, ii) the effects of populism on the political system (for example, exclusionary politics being adopted and normalised) and iii) effects on societal or public attitudes. These effects do not necessarily rely on whether the party in question succeeds or fails. They can manifest in different ways, such as in the treatment of minorities, polarised culture war debates, contagion of distrust in authorities and so on.

These narrative scenarios use a protagonist and a hypothetical nation, yet one with similarities to the situation in some EU member states, to connect this "story" to each of the six potential scenarios in turn, developed in PaCE. The narratives are heavily footnoted to reference the research on which the speculation is based.



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1. “Populists on the outside”

Low populist attitudes but successful activation mechanisms

Part 1

While Theo's³ new job had brought with it a significant rise in his wages, the terms were less secure than previously, and Theo was on a rolling temporary 12 month contract. Theo worked in a large city, rented privately and enjoyed spending his money on nice clothes and trips abroad.

The cleaners at Theo's office had recently been on strike, during which he learned that they were paid barely the minimum wage and had no holiday pay or sick pay, due to them being hired as 'self-employed contractors'. He felt sorry for them, at first. Theo calculated that his wages were almost four times that of the cleaners, which surprised him. The cleaners lost their struggle and went back to work without making any gains. While Theo's material wellbeing was increasing, something was unnerving him. He walked past increasing numbers of homeless people in doorways each evening on his way home from work, news stories about increasing inequality were growing in the newspapers. This made Theo become fearful of the future.⁴ This fear did not seem to be shared by most of Theo's peers, however. In conversations with friends and colleagues Theo began to feel isolated in his fears and developing views, in which he began to replace sympathy for those economically below him with hostility. He took solace online and in discussion forums where a minority, like him, reinforced Theo's increasing sense of victimhood and fears of the future. During one of his forays on the online discussion board on which he was spending more time, he was befriended by someone who seemed to have a lot of answers to Theo's questions and spoke directly to his fears. This “friend” worked as an activist for a new small party called “*Our People Our Time*”.

Theo counted his savings in his bank account and thought he was spending too much and saving too little. He began to work out his monthly budget but couldn't see where he could make any savings and bristled at the idea of cutting back on the things he enjoyed. Theo's friends noticed that he was talking about what would happen if he lost his job, he was speculating that he would have to leave the city. “I am only two missed pay checks away from homelessness” he would say. Theo had always been somewhat risk averse, but this was now making him fearful. When he talked about the future with his friends, it was no longer about plans he had but fears he had. What would happen if I lost my job? What would happen if I lost my apartment?

³ Men tend to vote for populists more frequently than women. While the reasons behind the gender gap in voting for populist parties are contestable and wide ranging, the empirical data demonstrating the existence of such a gender gap is authoritative and convincing (Spierings, N., Zaslove, A., (2017) Gender, populist attitudes, and voting: explaining the gender gap in voting for populist radical right and populist radical left parties, *West European Politics*, 40:4, 821-847, DOI: 10.1080/01402382.2017.1287448). As such, the protagonists in these scenarios are majority male to reflect the reality of those gendered voting patterns.

⁴ The “Wealth paradox” shows that even in times of relative gratification, fear of future deprivation can be induced in voters by rising inequality around them, even if they themselves are not directly suffering (Jensen et al, 2016, 2016 in Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE , p17)

This by itself does not produce support for populists or nativists but can create the groundwork necessary for activation mechanisms to turn this fear into anger by populists. This status of instability and fear of future wealth position can lead to hostility to migration if activated, a particularly potent reaction for nativist parties (ibid,p17) .



Theo began to get angry and blame others for what he saw as the state of the country and his own insecurity and uncertainty – even though his wages continued to increase and he received a promotion. It was the fault of welfare claimants, immigrants and asylum seekers, he began to believe.⁵ One of Theo's friends did indeed lose his job at that time and fell on hard times. Theo didn't see him anymore. At work, a woman colleague had been promoted. This did not effect Theo's pay or job but he told friends he felt threatened by it. It made no sense that someone from "that background" could be promoted ahead of him, he said. The cleaners went on strike again but this time he no longer had any sympathy for them but resented them for going on strike. He thought they were threatening the stability of the company, that if they got a pay rise it would mean less for him, and he was trying to save money to stave off an uncertain future.

At the same time a local leader "*Our People, Our Time*" had moved beyond their limited online presence and onto the streets and started to distribute pamphlets in Theo's area, holding rallies and stunts to attract attention – which they then filmed and shared online amongst their small but growing and vocal supporters. The main message was that the "hard working majority" were being undermined by the parasitical elements in society, including immigrants and welfare claimants. Theo started to see himself as a victim of this narrative as his fears of future deprivation continued growing. The Party's policies promised to protect lower middle class tax rates by limiting how much was given to certain minorities. Direct causal links between the two were made.⁶ Theo decided, as an "insurance policy" for his own future, to vote for this party.⁷ He previously had been a centrist voter and told no-one at work about his new political affinity .

Part 2

"Our People, Our Time" was successful in European elections, electing several MEPs to the European parliament. Once in parliament the representatives did not attend many committee meetings or fulfil MEP obligations in the ordinary sense. Rather, they used the opportunity to promote their rhetoric against the EU, and again, filmed and shared this with supporters back home. This emboldened Theo to talk about his vote more in public and at work. It made people uncomfortable, and he lost some friends and got into arguments. His party entered the national elections on the back of "native-only" policies. However, several

⁵ Blame attribution is central to the Manichean populist worldview. Linked to the emotional response of anger, blame attribution is crucial to triggering support for populists (ibid, p9)

⁶ Even amongst the "well-to-do's" (Jetten J, Mols F, Postmes T. (2015), Relative Deprivation and Relative Wealth Enhances Antiimmigrant Sentiments: The V-Curve Re-Examined. PLoS ONE 10(10): e0139156. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0139156), populist leaders have managed to craft a sense of injustice and decline that can be so effective that it can turn relative prosperity into perceived relative deprivation. Through discursive techniques deployed by populist parties, relatively well-off groups can be made to feel that they are victims of injustice. This is a particular aptitude of nativist leaders, in which people are convinced by them that they are the victims of conspiring elites and migrants. The "wealth paradox" further shows that less tolerance towards outgroups among wealthier groups may be accounted for by the "status anxiety, status threat, and fear of falling" among members of such groups "as group boundaries are increasingly permeable and these strata's wealth positions – less secure" (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p34, 'Theoretical model of causes of populism'. D4.2, PaCE) and (Jetten, Jolanda (2019). "The wealth paradox: Prosperity and opposition to immigration", European Journal of Social Psychology Volume49/6 , October 2019: 1097-1113).

⁷ Voting for populist parties may serve as an insurance model for middle class voters that, rather than seek to radically change society, serve to block any compromise of their position with minorities or migrants. Such voters are seen to be hostile to redistributive policies towards the neediest and "populist leaders and parties have fought to minimize the tax burden for the middle classes and to block aid for minorities". (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, 'Causal mechanisms of populism'. D4.2, PaCE, p63)). This insurance model of voting "implies that populism is not a tool for the middle classes to *change* the system, but rather to obtain opportunistic gains *within the system*." (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, 'Causal mechanisms of populism'. D4.2, PaCE, p63).



TV appearances by their leader on the run up to the national elections were a catastrophe for the party. The leader garbled his responses, could not think of basic party policies when asked – such as on healthcare, old age care, transport, foreign policy and so on. Several times he did not know what was in the manifesto he was holding in his hand as a prop, beyond his repeated assertions about the party's antipathy to immigrants, "scroungers" and feminists. The leader was mocked widely, memes appeared online in which he was the running joke and the party's vote imploded at the national election. Whether it would have imploded anyway without this performance is unknown. The leadership changed in the background without any fanfare to another figure who was not widely recognised and did very little to inspire the public imagination either.⁸ While not adopting any policies from *Our People, Our Time*, the mainstream party did start to adopt some of the anti-immigration rhetoric of the party.⁹



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⁸ Nativist parties are very rarely successful in power or in coalitions. In fact, "perhaps the most striking difference between populist and nativist parties is that in no modern European country have nativist parties won power singlehandedly; at best, they have achieved office as junior coalition partners ... By and large, their leaders do not exercise personalistic power or espouse radical political change; instead, party leadership changes usually are frequent, non-dramatic, and procedural" (Pappas, T., S., Skleparis, D., 'Report on modern-day developments of populism and nativism in Europe', PaCE, D1.2, p18)

⁹ The legacy impact of nativist parties on mainstream parties, however, is an area of concern. In response to a perceived populist threat of some kind, even if a minor threat such as in this instance, some parties adopt a kind of strategic performative responsiveness, without altering fundamental policy platforms, which may take the form of adopting some of the rhetoric in a milder form (Habersack, F., (n.d.), "How mainstream parties respond to the populist challenge" ECPR's Political Science Blog. Accessible at: <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/how-mainstream-parties-respond-to-the-populist-challenge/>).

¹⁰ Photo by [Marius Oprea](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Part 3

Theo continued to be fearful of some future deprivation even while his wages continued to grow and maintained a sense and identity of victimhood, which was nourished by a now embedded polarisation of public debate. He signed up to new online forums and news sites, which satiated this new identity. The party he had voted for was still in a relatively healthy and stable position amongst its small core vote and Theo intended to vote for it again at the next European Parliament elections. Within the party, however, there was conflict. One faction was becoming increasingly pragmatic and wanted to professionalise the party further, losing some of the more radical policies such as the “repatriation” of migrants. They also tried to distance themselves from their supporters online, who they thought gave the impression that the party was a home for delusional racists and eccentrics. Another faction, however, vigorously opposed this, instead claiming that their radicalism and “pure” offer to “the people” on race, immigration and nationalism was what set them apart from the others.¹¹ In the city that Theo lived in the party did not do well at local elections but there was a consistent undercurrent of hostility towards different minorities. A group of migrant workers were attacked on a bus near Theo’s place of work, the city council passed anti-homeless laws and employed private security to remove homeless people from certain areas they had traditionally found shelter. The mainstream party in charge of the council focussed all its campaigning and policy making on law and order. It was on these issues where they felt most under threat from *Our People, Our Time*, unlike at a national level. This replaced their previous flagship commitments to public provision of childcare, which had been a key policy of theirs at the last election. *Our People Our Time* were still widely considered a joke amongst more educated voters (although they were feared in more deprived communities), regardless of whether they would win. However, Theo felt they would defend his interests against people below him, even as he received another pay rise and moved into his new house.¹²

¹¹ Even though *Our People, Our Time* are not successful in this scenario there is evidence that when far right populist parties (“nativist” in PaCE terminology) are successful they tend to moderate their policy offer, or else, as mentioned, their success is short lived (Rooduijn, M., de Lange, S, L., van der Brug, W., (2014), A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe , *Party Politics*, Vol. 20(4) 563–575).

¹² The “bargaining and insurance” voter is a voter who is motivated not by wanting the whole system to be overturned. Instead, by supporting a credible threat to the system, these voters aim to ensure their privileged interests are maintained. This type of voter is motivated by political frustration with present parties and the political system (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. D4.1, PaCE, p59 - 62). This type of voter is also likely to be part of the “squeezed middle”, “whose economic status has become more precarious and which fears that it could lose its social status and cultural identity, is thus getting ready to experiment with more radical changes of the political and economic order” (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. D4.1, p60 - p61).



2. “Constant struggle”

Moderate prevalence of attitudes associated with populism in the alongside successful activation mechanisms for those attitudes.

Part 1

Frank had always enjoyed living in the town in which he grew up in, nearby a larger city, to which many residents, including Frank, had commuted to. However, in recent years he had noticed a subtle change developing in his town. A local primary school had shut. The street he grew up in used to be full of young families but was now primarily populated by retired people and the elderly. Local amenities, such as cafes, restaurants and bars were less full than they once were, Frank was noticing. Frank too was approaching retirement.¹³ A church in which Frank had been baptised had now closed down and been transformed into an old people’s home. There wasn’t less money around in the town, as such, and Frank himself was still earning a good wage, it was just being spent on different things in the town or was taken out of town and spent in the nearby city¹⁴. People were ageing in his town.

This made Frank begin to wonder about the future. Things appeared less stable than they once were, the “natural” regeneration of the area with young families and children appeared to have halted. A sense of fear of the unknown played on Frank’s mind. What would happen to the Doctor’s surgery? If the school has shut, will the town decline? Will his favourite bar close if there are fewer young people going to it these days? Frank also noticed that many of the staff at the new old people’s home appeared to be migrants. He didn’t mind, but he did notice.

Frank began to develop feelings of undirected anxiety and fear about the future. Over time these feelings of fear began to gain a focus in Frank’s mind in ways he was at first uncomfortable with. As Frank himself aged he began to fear for his own status in the town. He had always felt he knew people in his street, was respected and understood by people and knew the community. He knew his place in the community and his role in society. But as the nature of town changed and new people moved in Frank’s fear began to locate on those people, and gradually turned into anger.

¹³ Demographic change, including ageing, low birth rates and declining health for certain strata of population are situational mechanisms (macro causes) that, while alone do not produce support for populist parties, can provide the basis on which support for populist parties can grow.

A demographic crisis produces different sentiments in different parts of the EU. In central and Eastern Europe it tends to induce hostility to the EU (perhaps in part because of youth emigration to other EU countries) and hostility to minorities. In all EU countries an ageing and ailing population triggers sensitivity to law and order issues and produces ‘welfare chauvinism’. (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1, p11

¹⁴ The “wealth paradox” (Jetten, Jolanda (2019). “The wealth paradox: Prosperity and opposition to immigration”, European Journal of Social Psychology Volume49/6 , October 2019: 1097-1113), has demonstrated that despite popular assumptions about links between deprivation and support for populism, in times of relative prosperity or gratification support for populist parties may rise. if accompanied by perceived insecurity of some kind. This can trigger fear of future deprivation, which is in turn linked to growing inequality in society. (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE , p17).



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During this time, Frank retreated to Facebook, which he had recently joined, as well as regularly checking a local WhatsApp group he had joined to oppose a local planning development that had now morphed into a kind of bespoke news aggregation function for the local community. Stories were shared on this group about local services being “swamped” by immigrants. They also included stories of local schools where Frank’s native language was no longer spoken. This made Frank even more fearful. The national media fixated on towns like Frank’s, calling them “dying towns” and “left behind deserts”. Frank felt protective of his town and wanted to defend it from these scare stories. There were still things he enjoyed about living there, a sense of pride, he thought – but the stories also made him more worried. He felt hostile to the immigrants working in the old people’s home now, where previously he had not given it much thought. He started to associate with his “own group” and fear he (and this group) were losing their status. He also began to fear crime more than he once had, even though crime rates remained very low, and he began wondering whether the town was more vulnerable than it once was now that the community spirit he remembers had waned.¹⁶

¹⁵ Photo by [Adrián Metasboc](#) on [Unsplash](#)

¹⁶ Frank’s feelings of uncertainty and fear will not by themselves necessarily lead to anger, the emotion that is the key driver of support for populist parties. Anger is activated through a complex combination of feelings of fear and precarity with the performance of a crisis – which can be directly produced by a populist leader creating such narratives, or through the media (Moffitt, Benjamin (2015) “How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism”. *Government and Opposition*, 50:2, 189-2170). The role of the media in performing crises is often crucial in shifting emotions towards anger and to support for populist parties (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE, p9)



As the stories about pressure on local services increased so did Frank's fear, and he began to think about his own future reliance on state welfare. He had never used it before, had always been employed and in good health, but now he was getting older the reliability of that provision took on different stakes for Frank and he felt uncertain. Frank began airing his views in his local café where he sat for an hour or two each day with his newspaper, and increasingly on his smart phone, and realised other people his age felt the same anxiety and anger about what was happening in the town. And many agreed that local people and people born in the country should be first in the queue for welfare.¹⁷ The few young people that were left in the town disagreed with them strongly. Frank felt alienated from them. He rarely spoke with young people anymore and when he did felt a gulf in understanding between them. His local newspaper further polarised this with stories about the young people's social attitudes, which differed from Frank's.

For the first time in his life Frank decided not to vote for a mainstream party at the upcoming local elections, but he would instead vote for a new party that been recently formed and had promised to put 'local people first'. That party was led by an unknown and rather underwhelming candidate and only achieved a very small number of votes. Frank felt disillusioned and concluded nothing much more could be done. He continued receiving stories online of general decline of the nation and met his friends to lament the decline of their town. On winning the local elections the traditional mainstream parties acted in power as Frank thought they always had done. Rather than get apathetic Frank was angry. Very quickly afterwards another new party emerged, and Frank decided to vote for them too.

Part 2

The new party Frank voted for also failed to make any significant gains. However, yet another party that appealed to Frank sprang up a few years later and he voted for them too. Frank was feeling newly politically invigorated and some of the parties he had voted for were gaining a modicum of credibility in the mainstream discourse. So much so that Frank felt able to voice his support for these parties when discussing politics with people in a way he had not done so before. He noticed, however, that several new parties that ran completely counter to his own party's manifesto had also sprung up and were making gains. They focused almost exclusively on economic issues, detached from cultural issues of immigration. The old mainstream parties had, within several years, been just about obliterated in the polls and what seemed like a vibrant multi-party system had replaced it.¹⁸ This was possible due to a constitutional change some years earlier when politics had appeared more mundane and technocratic. This change had altered the voting system to proportional representation, rather than elimination by rounds. In the previous system, voters clustered behind the mainstream candidates in the final round of voting, meaning smaller parties struggled to ever break through. This had been a point of contention with voters for a long time, seeing it as "democracy without choices" because the same type of candidates always won in the end and even when a new political party won nothing would change.¹⁹ Both left and right leaning voters were happy with the change which had, regretfully, been implemented by a mainstream party to deal with what they perceived

¹⁷ In all EU countries, an ageing and ailing population can trigger sensitivity to law and order issues and produce 'welfare chauvinism' (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p11, 'Causal mechanisms of populism'. PaCE, D4.1)

¹⁸ We conceive that the "constant struggle" may play out through multifarious new parties flourishing (sometimes briefly), whereas mainstream and older liberal parties all but vanish as a mediating and strong presence in the political field. These establishment parties become instead just part of the "constant struggle".

¹⁹ The perception of "democracy without choices" is a key grievance driving support for populist parties (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, 'Theoretical model of causes of populism'. D4.2, PaCE, p33 – 35).



to be a crisis of apathy.²⁰ Issues that, to now, had not seemed to excite any attention amongst the public were now promoted online vigorously by a growing army of activists and party members. Grievances that would never have previously gained much traction now appeared to agitate increasing numbers of people online. Phrases like “the erosion of the family” and “decline of the West” appeared more commonly alongside references to specific moments in history that seemed to take on new and novel importance, such as the “peaceful revolution of 1989” and “since World War 2”. Importantly, the phrases and issues formed part of a narrative that increasingly set up “The People” as a wholesome protagonist against an increasingly malevolent antagonist - variously “the elites”, migrants or the media. The stories being told were of decline but future restoration, if only the people would act.²¹ Celebrities and public figures were forced into public apologies for seemingly innocuous comments that supposedly “disrespected the nation” or, alternatively, some were forced to apologise for remarks that were seen to be intolerably reactionary to other influential groups online.²²

²⁰ A point of concern for many years up to the global financial crash of 2007 was voter apathy. Some voting systems were changed, in other countries politicians tried to reinvigorate internal party democracy by extending primaries and hustings. In the UK, for example, 2nd preferential voting was offered and rejected by voters, and internal Labour party elections for leader were opened up beyond members to “registered supporters”. This decentralisation of politics and attempts to bring decision making closer to the people, however, is seen by some to have been unsuccessful, and even counter-productive in many cases, as it has undermined the ability of parties to effect change. (Rosenbluth, F., M., Shapiro, I., 2018, “Responsible Parties: Saving democracy from itself”, Yale University Press, New Haven. <https://yalebooks.yale.edu/book/9780300232752/responsible-parties>).

²¹ PaCE has identified a core populist narrative framework within which six further sub-categories exist. This narrative frame involves a protagonist (the people) and antagonist (the elites). These narratives also include references to specific temporal events (for example, “World War 2”), which are attached to a story of decline alongside promises of restoration (Lindenauer, T., [Schielicke, A.](#), Definitions and operationalisations of populist narratives. PaCE, D3.1).

²² Polarisation of public debate is a key strategy of populists and provides fertile ground in which anger can be activated to action, i.e., voting.



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Part 3

Several years later discussions in Frank's café were still highly polarised and political. Frank enjoyed it if he was honest with himself, even if he did get into arguments a lot. In that time one of the mainstream parties had edged back into power, but only in coalition with one of the new parties and that coalition seemed to be fraying. The issue of contention was over a constitutional change that was proposed around the concept of, and protection for, citizenship and citizens. The new party wanted to make it harder to become a citizen and remain a citizen, and was rejecting even third generation immigrants, calling them "guest citizens" in the media. The media ran with this polarising debate, asking whether the sons and daughters of immigrants should in fact be grateful to be in the country they were in. This contestation over the nature of citizenship caused a permanent breach in Frank's friendship with an old friend who had voted for one of the new left parties. Another café regular, originally from Asia and a regular of the café for over twenty years, also stopped coming down to the café for discussions. Once the new party in coalition mentioned "repatriation" for migrants, the coalition with the mainstream party broke down and new elections were called. Protests became common place on the streets. Frank saw his former friends marching past the café one day on a pro-minority rights march. He ignored them. The mainstream liberal

²³ Photo by [AJ Colores](#) on [Unsplash](#)



PaCE

party was split down the middle before the election campaign even began. With one faction urging “realism”, which meant running on a robust anti-immigration platform while distancing itself from nativists and right-wing populists, and the faction wanting to completely reject that politics and focus on universal rights. Another fragile coalition was eventually formed with the “realist” faction of the liberal party and this time with a new party from the left. No-one had confidence it would last very long. The problem was that all political horizons beyond either populism or ‘stopping populism’ had been pushed out of the political sphere. No new ideas to solve the growing problems of society were discussed. Consequently, necessary policies to improve local services for the young in towns like Franks, were not adopted. Continued economic disagreement between the coalition meant that no new economic policies were even proposed and the structural issues of skills, education and unemployment in certain regions were left unaddressed.



3. “Populism dominant and entrenched”

High prevalence of attitudes associated with populism and successful activation mechanisms for those attitudes

Part 1

Jakub and Farkus sat in a café overlooking a town square in which they had once squared up against each other as members of opposing political factions. Jakub as a trade unionist and Farkus as a member of the youth section of a right wing political party. They had decided, now much older, to bury the hatchet. They had both voted for ‘*New Start!*’ in recent elections and the party had swept to power, taking a majority of seats in both chambers, meaning the leader (now president) was virtually unhindered in implementing his anti-corruption drive, the platform on which he was elected. *New Start!* had only been formed 2 years prior to the elections, one of many start up parties that the media had widely expected to rapidly disappear. Both Jakub and Farkus had voted for the party because they were tired of what they perceived to be a corrupt and tired system. However, their votes were also driven by different and seemingly conflictual reasons.²⁴

Jakub had recently lost his job as his company offshored some of his tasks, while automating much of the others, reducing the factory size significantly. The trade union protection he previously enjoyed no longer existed, and he felt helpless and ashamed of his situation, having once been a proud and well-paid worker.²⁵

Farkus had seen no such decline in his living standards or financial situation. The business he ran was doing well and his children had left home for good universities. Farkus had kept a shop for his whole life in a particular business district. There were now shops opening in this district, however, that he did not like. Some were run by new migrants, some were new age lifestyle shops and others were new coffee bars, which young students frequented. He had recently complained of the young and had got into an argument with a young woman outside that café for what he considered to be her disrespectful behaviour towards him. He complained that no-one in the business district knew him anymore or respected him. He knew that *New Start!* valued traditional hierarchies and gender roles and had primarily voted on that basis.²⁶

The leader of *NewStart!* is known to be one of the country’s foremost businessmen and one of the country’s richest men. He owns yachts on which he is often photographed by paparazzi having parties with celebrities and other colourful figures. Some suspect he calls the press and tells them when and where his yacht is going to be moored. Despite this, he rails against the rich elites running the country and its deep

²⁴ Anti-corruption sentiment - both perceived and real - is linked to populist breakthroughs in an earlier populist upswing, including Berlusconi in Italy and the election of Orban’s Fidesz in 2010 (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE, p23)

²⁵ Shame and loss of identity is an individual and psychological “action formation mechanism” and important effecting motivator for voting for populist parties. The question is whether and how such emotions are activated by narratives deployed by populist leaders (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1)

²⁶ The “cultural backlash” thesis explains support for populists as a matter of conflict over values, rather than material interests. Such support for populists is seen as a “retro reaction by once-predominant sectors of the population to progressive value change” (Inglehart, R., and Norris, P., 2016. "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash." HKS Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP16-026, August 2016), who view social changes brought about in gender, hierarchies and other progressive social issues in a negative way in a negative way (Ibid.). However, it is important to note that cultural backlash and economic insecurity do not compete as explanations for populist’s support (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE, p9).



unfairness. Despite his string of publicly known affairs, his wealth, his crude and sometimes shocking behaviour and several divorces he foregrounds family and traditional values in his campaign literature.²⁷ His key promise is to eradicate corruption from the country, a situation which has become a touchstone issue for voters. This corruption not only refers to money and favours - of which there have been a few scandals – but refers to the claim that the whole political system is a ‘stitch up’ amongst the elites who conspire to keep the common man out.²⁸ When making this promise he talks in the language of the ‘common people’ and despite what the media interpret as mistakes or “gaffs”, his popularity continues to rise. These repeated spectacles suck in all political energy and media attention - including on his own TV station - as the old parties struggle to rebut his claims. The old parties struggle not only because of the charisma of *New Start!*'s leader and his canny use of media spectacle, a fresh and explosive presence in politics, but also because many of the claims about those parties - such as their aloof view of the people, their technocratic preferences and their failure to deal fairly with the economic transition of globalisation - are true.

Part 2

New Start! wins power by a landslide against all expectations of the local and national media but not against the expectations of its new supporters. Everyone they talked to seemed to be voting for them for different reasons.

In the immediate term, the new government claims that it will honour its manifesto pledge to drive corruption out of politics and announces a policy blitz for its first hundred days in power. Amongst proposals, which are rapidly implemented, are new laws for voter ID making it harder for certain groups to vote, limits on party donations from institutions and organisations other than businesses. This has a negative impact on the main opposition party, which gains a lot of its funding from trade unions and sources other than business. Wide ranging inquiries into the previous government's finances are also launched. The second set of policies focuses on law and order, including new loitering laws – the opposition claim this is to give police more powers against refugees travelling through the country – trespass laws, which impacted the Romany community, a proposed change in the country's constitution, limits on the legal right of redress for human rights claims, libel claims against newspapers are made easier and limits on women's reproductive rights. Some of these law and order policies have a more distinctly political edge. An increase in police powers and a limit on the right to protest and of workers to strike, for example, is tied into the same set of policies. This erodes the political capacities of the opposition. *New Start!* announce these policies at rallies at which the resurrection of the traditional family is claimed to be foundational for the new start that the country needs. Here, it is also announced a raft of policies that will “get people back to work”,

²⁷ Populists often transgress “all the rules of the game”, according to Pippa Norris, including engaging in “boorish behaviour, which makes them appear distinct from the elites they are criticising and more like “real people” (Norris, P., in Friedman, U., February 27, 2017, “What is a Populist?”, *The Atlantic*. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/02/what-is-populist-trump/516525/>).

²⁸ Voters are not only frustrated with the type of corruption that is perceived to be benefiting individuals on a personal basis but with what they perceive as deep state capture by the establishment parties in such a way that it corrupts democracy itself. “[P]opulists have to a large extent succeeded in convincing the people that the political establishment is corrupt in a deep, structural way” (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE, p23), insofar as the “cartelization of politics” may in and of itself be seen as a form of corruption (Katz, R, Mair, P., 1995. “Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party”. *Party Politics* 1995;1(1):5-28).



bring in investment and encourage people to have more children are also announced to excitable crowds.
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Because of the power balance in the country's parliament the leader of *New Start!* has the authority to hire staff directly into the country's civil service. Over the course of a five-year term it's leader hires business friends and supporters directly into positions that they are not necessarily experienced in. For example, an owner of a rare metals processing plant, who donated significant sums of money to the party, was put in charge of procurement for the armed forces. Such appointments are not illegal but are deeply unconventional and over the years repeatedly shock both media observers and opposition parties. Friendly judges were placed in key constitutional roles and supporters of the party were placed in high positions overseeing regulatory state bodies. There is not much they can do about it, however. Importantly, they do not shock or even garner much interest amongst the public. Media and opposition campaigns against such appointments in the early stages of the reign of *New Start!* were interpreted by the supporters of *New Start!* as being a case of the old political establishment being sore losers, rather than any legitimate public interest. These failed campaigns against such appointments further damaged the opposition's credibility and undermined the ability of the opposition to hold the new regime to account. Importantly, these appointees go on to appoint more people under them within the institutions of government, none of whom are exposed to elections.³⁰

Part 3

Farkus watches the first years with contentment, stands at his shop doorway more proudly than he has in recent years and is satisfied with the way his country is now going. He also observed with interest the new public order laws and is far quicker to call the police when he sees something he does not like in his business district, such as homeless people or people he judges to be foreign. He successfully lobbies his local council (also *NewStart!*) for a CCTV camera system to be erected in the business district to better enforce the new laws on policing of public space. He also feels emboldened to tell his migrant neighbours in the business district that he voted for the government whereas previously he kept it quiet. This sours relationships with them, and they get into several arguments. Farkus calls the police on one occasion. While no crime or violence was committed, the police arrest his neighbouring shop owner. From that point on his neighbours stay out of his way.

Jakub was less comfortable with the government. He did not like the focus on law and order on the streets as much as Farkus and did not proudly tell people that he voted for *NewStart!* However, he did not regret his vote, and the more the party was criticised in the media the more entrenched his views became. The

²⁹ Some Central and Eastern European countries, such as Hungary, Poland and Serbia, unconstrained by the neo-liberal consensus since the global financial crash have been able to "thicken" their populist agendas. They have done this by using direct investment from other authoritarian countries outside the West and using the state to pursue conservative agendas based around workforce activation, natalism, and sovereignty (Mitchell A. Orenstein & Bojan Bugarič (2020) Work, family, Fatherland: the political economy of populism in central and Eastern Europe, *Journal of European Public Policy*, DOI: 10.1080/13501763.2020.1832557). This process seems likely to continue in a future situation in which populism becomes dominant and entrenched.

³⁰ Populists in government, for example Orban in Hungary, often aim to "capture" "reform" "dismantle" or "sabotage" the state bureaucracies they have power over. In doing so, their aim is to permanently alter the structures, resources, personnel, norms, and accountability relationships within public administration and state institutions, accelerating "democratic backsliding" (Bauer, M. W., Becker, S., 2020, *Democratic Backsliding, Populism, and Public Administration Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 19–31 doi:10.1093/ppmgov/gvz026).



criticism was perfectly normal for the media and opposition parties. However, it demonstrated for Jakub a certain entitlement of the previous political and media class that had driven his anger with them in the first place, and he felt they were not giving the new party a chance. He got on with his life taking less interest in politics and the news but determined to vote for *NewStart!* again.

Five years on, and following an announcement by *NewStart!* at which the leader talks about “real countrymen” and “real citizens”, a debate on a popular evening news show is held on the concept of citizenship, with one side arguing that only people with a long lineage in the nation are real citizens and new arrivals are not. Whether or not this will impact the actual legal definition of citizenship is not entertained by *NewStart!* representatives. However, following the media coverage a new system of increased checks of ID cards at more access points to public life is announced. Police and officials will be checking the ID of people entering train stations and travelling on buses and there will be checkpoints at various points in city centres that the government is naming “freedom gates”. For the majority, ID cards are an accepted part of life, but anecdotally, stories begin to emerge of ethnic minority citizens being disproportionately asked for their ID by police, being refused apartments by landlords and increased police pressure in migrant neighbourhoods, premised on finding “illegals” and checking ID of people who do not “look” like they are from the country. The social atmosphere is tense and community leaders begin to worry about public disorder and violence if the situation continues.

A protest movement then breaks out following the passing of a law limiting people’s right to a trial by jury, but is swiftly crushed with the new police powers and new surveillance technologies deployed widely by the government against political groups and trade unions. The government are now entwined closely with the police and are often seen alongside them on media photo ops outside houses that have just been raided by police. Following several trade union’s involvement in the protest movement, the government passes a new law forbidding them from automatically enrolling workers into their union, which undermines their funding model. While there has been no law change, ethnic minority citizens also report that they are finding it increasingly burdensome to re-enter the country following a holiday or business trip, and that border guard’s attitudes towards them is becoming increasingly hostile.³¹

³¹ The populist strategy of politicising personnel, changing norms of behaviour of personnel and reducing accountability in order to transform state bureaucracies into instruments of populist rule can produce negative impacts on the ground in people’s interactions with state officials (Bauer, M, W., Becker, S., 2020, *Democratic Backsliding, Populism, and Public Administration Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 19–31 doi:10.1093/ppmgov/gvz026).



4. “Liberalism Contented”

Low prevalence of attitudes associated with populism and absent or unsuccessful activation mechanisms for these attitudes

Part 1

John hadn't voted in a while but was quite happy with the political situation in his country.³² The two mainstream parties that had dominated politics for most of his adult life - barring the recent but failed “populist moment” - were relatively stable in the polls, he thought things were very much back to normal and he didn't feel any great need to give support to either of them. Luckily for him his job was stable, had rapid career advancement attached to it in a growing company, was decently paid and his house price kept rising and rising so he felt wealthier by the year.

Recently, an explosive political scandal involving a minor far right nativist party leader had caused that party's support to implode. That had been the end of the “populist moment”, as it was called in the press. The leader had appeared on TV a few times in recent years and John had thought him rather interesting but had not been motivated to vote for him and did not share in the anger he seemed to be demonstrating.

John was happy with the way society had developed from the stuffy and restricted life his parents grew up in and liked to think of himself as liberally minded. He happily told people that he supported equal marriage rights (when pressed more closely his preference was in fact for civil partnerships – as he thought the church should be free to refuse to marry people). However, he did get a little aggravated that it was always being “pushed in his face” and on TV. He liked to think he believed in a “live and let live” philosophy but also thought that the special pleading of certain groups was going a bit far as they had basically achieved equality already. He also thought that while migrants had made a net contribution to the country – he himself employed an immigrant cleaner – his positive views were mainly focussed on the economic benefit of immigration and how much he liked their food. He rarely thought about migrants offering any intrinsic value to the country as part of communities or society. John was very happy to have a diverse workforce. However, he thought that anti-racism training offered at his company was a bit of a scam, as no-one there was *actually* racist. He thought people should be promoted on merit, like he had been, he said, and was opposed to positive discrimination policies in his company. He was also proud that his government offered asylum to the persecuted of the world but had the feeling they should be a little more grateful for it. He wanted to take in people in genuine need into the country, he just thought some were faking it. He never grumbled about this publicly, however, and was looking forward to a peaceful retirement. He didn't think about politics much if truth be told, would never vote for one of the “angry parties” as he called them, and did not have anything to do with anyone other than people in his town, with whom he rarely discussed politics. Instead, they discussed sport, holidays, family and house prices.³³

³² Voter apathy, as mentioned above, can be seen as an issue in political systems and may lead to decentralisation innovations by political parties, which in turn can prove counter-productive as they erode the party's capacity for action, frustrating voter's expectations (Rosenbluth, F., M., Shapiro, I., 2018, Responsible Parties: Saving democracy from itself, Yale University Press, New Haven).

³³ This is to reflect latent views that may be activated - but there also must be causal mechanisms to produce anger that motivates action. So, in this instance John may or may not share some of the cultural views of the far right – even



Recently, however, the rather long economic boom appeared to be stalling ever so slightly. It wouldn't affect John, as he was approaching retirement and owned his home outright. He was looking forward to a generous pension. He did observe, however, that some of his younger colleagues had never managed to buy a house at all, which confused him, and nor did they seem to have the same job stability that he enjoyed. They never appeared to have enough money for holidays, and were often on short term contracts, vanishing just as John was getting to know them. They were more multi-cultural than his generation, which he outwardly supported, but did not seem to be as good with money, John thought.³⁴

Part 2

Smaller parties that were sounding economic alarm bells about home ownership, wages, financialisation of cities and housing and generational injustices were seen as fringe and extreme. The media ignored them, mainly, dominated as it was by centrist and liberal commentators and journalists. They were more concerned with international news events, and, over the years, many political news desks had been cut back. Regional reporting had for a long time now been eroded, due to the dominant view in the media organisations and TV stations that nothing much happened outside the major cities anymore, so there had been very little to report politically or culturally for many years now. In its place, people in the regions who had previously been served by regional newspapers turned to online sources, Facebook pages on local interests, WhatsApp groups and other online sources focusing on issues and areas that they cared about and that appeared not to be taken seriously by the capital city's news broadcasters.

Many years beyond the “populist moment”, which had peaked on the run up to the Covid-19 pandemic, alternative parties had virtually vanished from public consciousness, coalitions were stable and consensual, and leaders talked more about “getting things done”³⁵, rather than discussions about what was to be done. Voting in the regions and amongst lower income citizens, however, declined quite markedly. No-one thought or suggested the apathy was anything other than contentment, and not many political analysts or journalists tried to discover why. The main parties were comfortable with the fact that these voters had “nowhere else to go” now that populist parties had been “found out” during the pandemic. Leaders of the

if he thinks himself relatively liberal - but he is financially and socially contented and secure, so he does not feel under any particular threat or fearful. Because of this it is unlikely he can be roused to anger about these cultural issues. The “cultural backlash” thesis seems most potent when intertwined with voters also experiencing economic uncertainty, even if they are relatively wealthy (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. D4.2, PaCE).

³⁴ The thesis here is that a coming economic shock or change of some kind will not be felt equally between “generationally contented liberals” and the rest. As a result, perhaps such contented liberals do not notice what is happening beneath their feet. Spyros Kosmidis argues that inter-generational inequality can contribute to the potential rise of populist attitudes because it generates a sense of victimhood, due to thwarted income expectations and sense of unfairness. This in turn contributes to negative views of elites and engenders polarisation amongst the population. The study used survey data gathered in Greece to measure the effect that perceptions that social immobility has on populist attitudes (Kosmidis, S., November 6, 2018, “The Political Consequences of Intergenerational Inequality”, Research Paper, LSE, accessible at: <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Hellenic-Observatory/Assets/Documents/Events/2018-19/LSEHONov2018Kosmidis.pdf>).

³⁵ Technocracy of one sort or another is seen as a core driver of populism. In Cas Mudde's words. “populism is an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism” (Mudde, C., 17 February, 2015. “The Problem with Populism”, Guardian. London, Accessible at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/17/problem-populism-syriza-podemos-dark-side-europe>. A new phenomena is starting to get scholarly attention, however, which is “techno-Populism”, that which combines populist appeals to the notion of “the people” with a “post-ideological” invocations of expertise.(Bickerton, C., Techno-populism: The New Logic of Democratic Politics, OUP). A type of popular technocratic politics based on action not principles can be discerned in leaders like Emmanuel Macron.



coalition often appeared in public with celebrities, smiling broadly and triumphantly linking their party's fortunes with fame, success and celebrity. They appeared at national football games with the players and the country was currently bidding to host the Olympics.

At the end of their first term there was a mildly surprising defeat for the governing party – analysts put it down to a low turnout. The leader of the defeated mainstream party gave an emotional and humble speech on the steps of his office about the importance of the office not the office holder, met with the leader of the new party and was photographed publicly shaking hands and meeting her family. There was a peaceful transfer of power to a new party who seemed to adopt many of the same popular policies but with more energy and professionalism. The leader of the old party appeared on political shows analysing current events. However, he never criticised the new government and it was understood he and the new president occasionally exchanged phone calls during which he gave her advice.

Part 3



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PaCE

John had now retired and hadn't voted in years. He was recently reading an analysis about long term investment opportunities as he had a lot of spare cash since he downsized his home. This article alarmed him. It seemed to suggest after years of stability an overvaluation of the stock market was about to be corrected in quite a severe way. He tried to understand what this meant for his pension and, despite not being an expert, it did not seem to be good. This piqued his interest in politics again and he was wondering if the parties had been talking about it in the news. However, after several weeks he could not see anything of note about the stock market or the economy generally. The smiling politicians all looked and talked the same, he thought. They were more often seen on TV shows and at events that were ostensibly nothing to do with politics. He looked his local representative up on the internet and found he had never had a job outside of policy or politics.³⁷ John started to worry about this and resentment began to build up within him. This resentment was based on the fact that no-one seemed to be taking this problem seriously. However, he had nowhere to place this renewed political energy and interest, and generally just hoped that things would stay the same and his financial position would not be threatened, although he grew increasingly anxious and fearful about what he had learnt.

³⁷ A recurring issue in contented liberalism is the professionalisation of politics and technocracy. Esmark, Anders, "The technocratic take-over of democracy: Connectivity, reflexivity and accountability", ICPP 2017, Singapore. <https://www.ippapublicpolicy.org/file/paper/594bba371f736.pdf>, See above footnote for more details. David Barnard-Wills, Mathew Hall, Anais Resseguier & David Wright, ELSI of Policy Recommendations, PaCE D6.6 , 2022 also examines the relationship between populism and a pushback against technocratic politics.



5. “Opportunistic populism”

Moderate prevalence of attitudes associated with populism, and absent or unsuccessful activation mechanisms

Part 1

Sonya used to work at a factory making fuses for industrial washing equipment until it shut almost all operations and moved most jobs offshore. It maintained a very small and highly skilled workforce as it introduced an innovative AI and robotics platform to the factory floor, funded by the government’s new regional development fund. Her trade union, of which she was a member, negotiated a small redundancy package on behalf of all the workers laid off but could not prevent the loss of jobs, which was the main employer in Sonya’s town. With her redundancy money Sonya started a small craft export business from her living room, selling produce worldwide online, which was just enough to get by. She missed her friends and colleagues from the factory, however, and spent most of her time alone in her house on the internet. After some years the orders on her new business began to dry up. Even working from her living room, Sonya could not compete with the prices of goods being produced in East Asia.³⁸

³⁸ While the effects of globalisation on voting is complex, the globalization-related drivers for populist voting mostly affects “losers” in the competition over scarce resources and/or those who suffered from some form of relative deprivation” (Eatwell Eatwell, R. 2005, p53., “Charisma and the Revival of the European Extreme Right”. In J. Rydgren (Ed.), *Movements of Exclusion: Radical Right-Wing Populism in the Western World*. Nova Science Publishers: New York). This is an economic interest thesis. Another account explains that the “losers of globalization” narrative, offered by populists, provides those voters with a voice. In the *Fears not Values* study (De Vries, C, F. and Hoffmann, I, (2016). *Fear not Values. Public opinion and the populist vote in Europe*, Bertelsmann Stiftung) the researchers argue that fear of globalization is the single most important defining feature for voters of populist parties (the cases studied by De Vries and Hoffman fall into PaCE categories of nativist and populist - both right-wing and left-wing - parties. (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p21, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1).



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She felt powerless about her situation and had run out of employment options in her town. She occasionally met with her former co-workers from the fuse factory who would, despite all still being quite young in the 30s and 40s, talk about their old times together in the factory. Some had benefited from leaving the factory and were now earning more now than they were before. Others, like Sonya, were suffering financially. But all agreed that the community they once had had been lost, and the times spent working at the fuse factory were better than they are now. Some former younger colleagues had moved away to the larger city nearby to find work. They all lamented the decline of the town as the young started moving away, even though the factory was seen as a success story and even if some had financially benefited from losing their jobs.⁴⁰

One of the group, Rachel, speculated that there was some kind of plan or strategy to make the town decline, otherwise, why make so many people redundant from the largest employer in the area? The group rarely talked politics, and the mainstream political parties rarely appeared to talk to them. The collective view of the group of friends was pretty much that politicians “were all the same” and in many cases corrupt,

³⁹ Photo by [Remy Gieling](#) on [Unsplash](#)

⁴⁰ Demographic decline can intertwine with fears of globalisation on issues such as migration, exceeding ‘absorption capacity’ and competition pressures. These alone are situational mechanisms that do not necessarily trigger support for populist parties, only the background factors necessary for support to emerge (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p11, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1).



until Rachel, however, said a new party had been formed that was talking about towns like theirs.⁴¹ The leader, a woman called “LV” by her supporters, had shown how towns like theirs had lost out from globalisation through no fault of their own. Her rhetoric emphasised the unique industrial skills that the people of this nation had, which had now been replaced by robots and cheap imitations from abroad. It was a great shame on the nation, she claimed, to be humiliated in this way.⁴²

None of the friends had thought about it in these terms before. The leader claimed It must be that the nation was being deliberately undermined by globalist corporations, who wanted no workers in factories in the West and cheaper labour from abroad to make more profits. While Sonya and the others would have relied in the past on their trade union to take on issues of profiteering and suppressing wages, now that they were all working in different areas without trade unions, they listened more and more to what this populist leader was saying online. They discussed politics more when they met in person and on the WhatsApp group they had set up together.⁴³ LV claimed there was a crisis in the countryside, of which their town was a part. It was dying. And this was a deliberate plot by the elites in the capital to replace those who lived there with immigrants, who would work for cheaper wages. While different aspects of this rhetoric seemed to make less sense, no counter argument was made as no other politicians were talking about their town in this way.⁴⁴

LV was due to visit the town during an election campaign leading the group of friends to discuss her and her party with more seriousness, some scoffed at her ideas, others laughed it off, but others said they

⁴¹ Populist parties can represent and vent the frustration of people with the “democracy without choices” model of liberal democracies, particularly in times of economic distress when the old model appears to be failing them. However, populists may do this by focusing attention on issue of corruption and identity politics, rather than economics per se. As Noam Gidron and Peter Hall say, “in order to mount distinctive appeals at a time when the differences between parties on economic issues has narrowed, many parties have put more emphasis on identity or values, which often draw middle-class voters to the left but working-class voters to the right” (Noam, G., Hall, P., 2017, The politics of social status: economic and cultural roots of the populist right”, *The British Journal of Sociology* 2017 Volume 68 Issue S1).

⁴² A national collective narcissism, which is “the unrealistic belief in the greatness of the national group - may be associated with support for populism as perceived as “in-group disadvantage””, causing feelings of resentment (Marchlewska, M., Cichočka, A., Panayiotou, O., Castellanos, K., Batayneh, J., 2017 “Populism as identity politics: Perceived ingroup disadvantage, collective narcissism and support for populism.” *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9 (2). pp. 151-162. ISSN 1948-5506) in (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p48, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1).

⁴³ The extent to which online filter bubbles either contribute to, or alternatively are expressions of pre-existing support for, populist leaders and ideas is contested. However, the importance of online communication for populist leaders and their supporters for influencing public debate seems established (Groshek, J., Koc-Michalska, K., 2017, Helping populism win? Social media use, filter bubbles, and support for populist presidential candidates in the 2016 US election campaign, *Information Communication and Society* 20(9):1-19). The importance of in-person relationships for embedding support for populism is vitally important, however. (Boulianne, S., Koc-Michalska, K. Bimber, B., Right-wing populism, social media and echo chambers in Western democracies, *New Media and Society*, Volume: 22 issue: 4, page(s): 683-699).

⁴⁴ Populist attitudes and conspiratorial thinking are connected in their anti-elitism, manichean worldview, view of “the people” as good and benign, and the reduction of complex world events to malignant plots by powerful groups (Castanho Silva, B., Vegetti, F., Littvay, L., 2017, The Elite Is Up to Something: Exploring the Relation Between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories, *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23:4, 423-443). This is important to understand why “conspiratorially framed anti-establishment populist rhetoric resonates with the public” (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p49, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1).



thought he had a point and may vote for him. At one discussion things got heated and two of the friends removed themselves from the WhatsApp group.

Elections arrived. Sonya felt betrayed by the previous political party she always voted for as it appeared to not talk about people like her anymore or towns like hers. She did not feel represented or valued. The trade union of which she was once a member no longer held any sway. This was mainly due to structural changes in the nature of employment and increasing automation, which consequently also caused a steady decline in membership. She was hoping someone else would speak for her, but they didn't. She wasn't sure whether LV would win but wanted to threaten the mainstream with the possibility. She thought LV was mildly dangerous and definitely divisive but was fairly confident she would not win, and she wanted to "rattle the doors" of the capital to make them hear her town. She voted for the party but told no-one of her support.⁴⁵



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⁴⁵ The "bargaining and insurance" model of voter behaviour describes the motivation of a certain set of populist voters. Voters who want to send a message to the establishment by voting in their factional interests (perhaps along ethnic lines) but do not want systematic change of liberal democracy (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, 'Causal mechanisms of populism'. PaCE, D4.1).

⁴⁶ Photo by [Miguel Henriques](#) on [Unsplash](#)



Part 2

The Party system in Sonya's country meant that LV did not secure sufficient votes to achieve any representation for his party, despite getting lots of votes across the board.⁴⁷ This became one of the main points of contention for LV and other supporters of the party. Despite huge demonstrations, a very vocal online media presence and widespread and sensationalised media attention, LV had little chance of a breakthrough. The two round voting system and "winner takes all" system meant that small parties had little chance of gaining power.⁴⁸ Sonya's country also had quite a strict constitution that forbid much of the legal change to minority rights and the judicial system that LV's party was promising. Commentators predicted long and drawn out court battles should they ever win power and try to effect the change their supporters apparently wanted. This did not mean, however, that LV's supporters gave up. Rather, because of the constitutional limits on their chance of success, they turned to other means, and some directed their political attention outside of the party.

Part 3

Years later, following another failed election LV promoted a "stab in the back" myth and further promoted her conspiratorial ideas about the political system, which now felt far more plausible to Sonya given the amount of people voting for LV without getting any seats in the parliament. Sonya still followed LV online and, adjacent to the stories about LV, are further conspiracy theories about all sorts of plots and actors Sonya has not heard of. Sonya turned away from an interest in party politics and started to believe in a more conspiratorial view of the world, joining several online conspiracy movements and forums. LV's party waned but former representatives took advantage of the media interest in their party and remained prominent in the online political world Sonya now inhabits. Many set up pages asking for funding for new and exciting projects that will finally "win for our people", to which Sonya often donates. They rarely amount to anything substantial and she is concerned that they may mainly exist to line the pockets of the activists. Their output is very sensationalised, often promoting outrage against certain minority groups or immigrants. Much of the political discussion is now concerned with "cultural erosion", a term coined by one of the former party representatives to describe what he claimed was a determined effort by the "elites" to destroy the family and the traditional way of life of the nation.⁴⁹

Sonya shares many of the infographics and videos from former members of LV's party with friends and family on WhatsApp groups. Mainstream parties are back in charge in her local area but she, along with

⁴⁷ The party system of a country is one contingent condition influencing whether a populist leader or populist party can make a "breakthrough" and gain power.

⁴⁸ The voting system of a country can influence both voter behaviour and the likelihood of minority party success. While much conventional wisdom and scholarship presumes proportional representation voting systems benefit minority (and therefore emerging populist) parties (Norris, P., 2004, Does PR promote political extremism, *redux.*, *Representation*, 40:3, 226-229), this is not necessarily true of both left and right parties (Downes, J., Chan, E., February 7, 2019, How electoral systems affect support for populist parties in Europe. *LSE blog*. Accessible at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2019/02/07/how-electoral-systems-affect-support-for-populist-parties-in-europe/>). It is the case, however, that First Past the Post Systems or Two Round voting systems offer more obstacles to successful breakthroughs by minor parties.

⁴⁹ The extent to which "cultural backlash" is driving support for populist parties (and influencing populist's rhetoric) is gaining increasing scholarly attention (Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural Backlash*. In *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press). However, as stated above, a cultural explanation for populist support does not preclude an economic one alongside it (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, 'Causal mechanisms of populism'. PaCE, D4.1).



many former voters of LV's party, congregate online under Facebook and Twitter stories from the mainstream news to disparage and mock any progressive causes being promoted by the mainstream parties. To her delight, the mainstream party in charge is now starting to talk about the importance of traditional values – albeit in a much softer way than any of LVs former supporters. They also appear to be adopting more stringent immigration controls, while simultaneously extolling the virtues of immigration to their own core supporters.⁵⁰ Sonya thought this hypocritical and still refused to vote for them. She now expresses political views to strangers she would never have previously said in person. However, many of her in-person relationships have soured due to the amount of time she spends online and the conspiratorial and culturally controversial worldview she has recently adopted. Her online relationships are, however, contingent on her political views. She is becoming increasingly averse to disagreeing on any point of contention with her new online associates in case she loses their trust.



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⁵⁰ Mainstream parties respond in complex ways to challenges by populist parties. In some countries, such as Sweden, a strict *cordon sanitaire* is maintained between the mainstream and radical right populist parties (Anna-Sophie Heinze (2018) Strategies of mainstream parties towards their right-wing populist challengers: Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland in comparison, *West European Politics*, 41:2, 287-309, DOI: 10.1080/09638185.2018.1511111). With other parties, some kind of programmatic adjustment or engagement is made - sometimes called "programmatic contagion". The extent of this phenomenon is contestable, however (Matthijs Rooduijn, Sarah L de Lange and Wouter van der Brug, A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe, *Party Politics* 2014, Vol. 20(4) 563–575). While other parties demonstrate a strategic responsiveness towards populist's demands, while not deviating from their own policy (Habersack, F., How mainstream parties respond to the populist challenge, *ECPR's Political Science Blog*. Accessible at: <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/how-mainstream-parties-respond-to-the-populist-challenge/>).

⁵¹ Photo by [Daria Nepriakhina](#)  on [Unsplash](#)



6. “Populism pressure cooker”

High levels of attitudes associated with populism but absent or unsuccessful activation mechanisms for those attitudes.

Part 1

Guillaume had never voted in an election in all his 24 years and did not intend to start now either. He had gone to university, the first to do so from his lower middle class family, yet, on leaving, had failed to get a stable job. His housing situation was also precarious, and he never seemed to have enough money to spend on things he enjoyed doing. His parents were not poor, but nor did they seem to be getting out of the permanent economic struggle they were in. Most of his friends from university had voted for the left of centre party that promised to extend welfare provisions. Guillaume, however, had heard it all before, he said to his new friends, and he could not see the difference between the two parties or the point in voting. Nothing ever really changed.⁵² He had very little interest in politics, until he started reading Facebook posts in a group suggested to him from Facebook called *Youth Blues*. Guillaume guessed it had been suggested to him because he once liked a post about an old nostalgic TV show he used to watch as a kid,⁵³ and old schoolmates from his old town were members. In this group, all Guillaume’s problems seemed present – no satisfying job, no home of his own, seemingly no future – and all was blamed on a mixture of ‘globalists’, migrants, asylum seekers, feminists, and elites conspiring to prevent *real people* from succeeding. This was novel to Guillaume. He had not expected it when he joined the group. While this cocktail of interest groups conspiring against him at first seemed unlikely, several videos made by the leader of a new party *Together!*⁵⁴ piqued his attention with his oratory and the way this leader seemed to offer a simple set of solutions to Guillaume’s problems. Gradually, Guillaume’s ennui and apathy began to change. He had felt shame at his position in life, having been promised so much and felt he was at fault that he was not achieving anything. This had made him socially withdrawn, but now those feelings began to shift to anger the more he watched the leader of *Together!* speak. The apathy associated with shame was replaced by a commitment to action associated with his newfound anger.⁵⁵ It wasn’t his fault that he was unemployable,

⁵²Mandhai, S., AMraoui, A, E., 20 Apr 2017, Why does Le Pen get so much support from young voters, [accessible at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2017/4/20/why-does-le-pen-get-so-much-support-from-young-voters>]

⁵³ Populism thrives in (and seeks to increase) polarised debate. Research suggests that many of the algorithms promoting content on various online platforms reinforces divisive and polarising content. This appears to be in order to increase and monetise the reactions and engagement with that content (Ohme, J., 2021, Algorithmic social media use and its relationship to attitude reinforcement and issue-specific political participation – The case of the 2015 European immigration movements, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 18:1, 36-54) and (Sven Engesser, Nicole Ernst, Frank Esser & Florin Büchel (2017) Populism and social media: how politicians spread a fragmented ideology, *Information, Communication & Society*, 20:8, 1109-1126).

⁵⁴ The communication style of populists is an important component of their strategy and appeal (de Vreese C, H., Esser F., Aalberg T., Reinemann, C., Stanyer, J., 2018, Populism as an Expression of Political Communication Content and Style: A New Perspective. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*. 23(4):423-438). While the names of new or emerging populist parties is an understudied area, the names adopted by populists can fit in with their overall rhetorical and communicative style.

⁵⁵ PaCE D4.1 and D4.2 demonstrate how emotional affect is an important indicator of support for populist parties. The most potent of these feelings is anger, and this is often activated by a charismatic leader or a set of “performed crises” in the media. While shame, loss of identity and fear are important, it is when those emotions are transformed into



single and had no career prospects, he thought, it is *their* fault. There was not enough money to go around. In fact, he thought, it makes perfect sense that the more people there are in the country the less resources, jobs and houses there are. It is the fault of immigrants that I cannot get a job and house, he thought, the fault of elites that my degree is worth less than previous generations and it is the cartel of technocratic parties preventing change.^{56 57} He finally decided to attend a next demonstration advertised on this Facebook group he had joined - the “Put the people first” march - which promised to be the start of a movement for the restoration of “stolen” resources and birth rights. This was the first time Guillaume had ever taken any political action.



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Part 2

Despite the large demonstration there had been no political breakthrough. However, this did not mean the sentiments behind the demonstration and the new party *Together!* had waned. On the contrary,

anger that support for populism is activated (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Causal mechanisms of populism’. PaCE, D4.1 and (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. PaCE, D4.2).

⁵⁶ Blame attribution and moral evaluation is an attitude linked with anger, crucial for triggering populist action, like voting. (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p9 ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. PaCE, D4.2).

⁵⁷ The “cartelisation of politics” and contemporary European “over-constitutionalised” systems is a key factor in the “crisis of representation”, a grievance that is exploited and highlighted by populists (Smilova, R, Smilov, D., 2020, p22 ‘Theoretical model of causes of populism’. PaCE, D4.2). In turn, however, a system dominated by traditional parties is often quite impenetrable to new parties. While increasing voter anger this may simultaneously prevent populist party breakthroughs, further antagonising this grievance. It is this situation that we describe as the “populism pressure cooker”.

⁵⁸ Photo by [John Webster](#) on [Unsplash](#)



membership had swelled and demonstrations continued, some becoming somewhat violent and now, because of the prominence of what many considered racist and dangerous views, many protests were faced with counter-demonstrations. Despite this increased prominence on the streets and in the media, however, the constitutional make-up of the country's voting system meant that a breakthrough was highly unlikely. Moreover, even if a breakthrough occurred, the iron-clad checks and balances and the constitutionally driven culture of the country - protecting rights of minorities and limiting powers of the governing party - probably meant much of the manifesto would not be implemented. This was deeply embedded in the country's long history of stable liberal institutions. The party structure of the main parties – in which candidates are chosen from within the party structure by often opaque methods, rather than a system closed to open primaries - meant that capture of the main parties was also virtually impossible. This gave some comfort to the mainstream parties, because it had not been long since the country had seemed very contented, and they thought they had put any threat of populism behind them many years earlier. They thought things would probably return to normal soon. Supporters of *Together!*, including Guillaume, however, also discussed these likely outcomes and limitations on their political project. Rather than getting disheartened they decided to focus their efforts on national culture and do this through the media - both traditional media and social media. Their thinking was that they would change the country “from below” rather than seek legislative change.⁵⁹ In this approach, they were somewhat influenced by “Alt-Right” tactics online that had been prominent many years earlier. The younger supporters of *Together!* could not remember the “Alt-Right” but found information about their tactics online and became skilled at generating controversies that polarised the country.

Part 3

The shift in focus from electoral politics to culture and media spectacle by supporters of *Together!* led to a semi-permanent culture war in the country at large. Almost every news item or popular issue seemed inflected with political or cultural conflict of some type. Street demonstrations continued, which often now descended into some kind of violence. Public debate was conducted in bad faith, with people rarely committed to the facts. Media commentators were themselves the target of seething resentment from the huge numbers of people who felt the barriers to their political projects were more evidence of an establishment stitch up. Conspiracy theories flourished, Guillaume began reading and sharing such conspiracy theories online –all took a similar form, in which some shadowy elite group, often at a global scale, was conspiring against the people. These “theories” explained the electoral failures of *Together!* despite what its supporters saw as near universal support amongst the public. This environment of conspiracism took place within tightly defined online “filter bubbles” in which everyone agrees and success was judged in terms of likes, shares and views. In this environment it seemed to many that the whole country was on their side.⁶⁰ Public debate outside of these “echo chambers” became virtually impossible

⁵⁹This is part of our speculation about the “pressure cooker”. Constitutional constraints and background conditions that prevent breakthroughs do not necessarily lead to populist sentiment waning. On the contrary, these sentiments break out in different ways, such as polarising culture wars on the internet. The “populism pressure cooker” is also a key example of a scenario that warns against simplistic (and technocratic) responses to populism.

⁶⁰ The idea of the filter bubble (and the related concept, the “echo chamber”) was first popularised by Eli Pariser (Pariser, E., T, 2011, *The Filter Bubble: What the Internet is Hiding from You*, Penguin Press, New York). However, recent scholarship has questioned the existence of filter bubbles, showing instead that people have constant access to and engagement with mainstream news sources, they just don't believe in them (Bruns, A., 2019, *Filter bubble. Internet Policy Review*, [online] 8(4). Available at: <https://policyreview.info/concepts/filter-bubble> [Accessed: 23 Jun. 2021]). In the context of populism, this makes sense. A key populist worldview is a deep distrust of the elites and



without some kind of accusations of bad faith. New news outlets specialising in polarised debate sprang up online to fill the gap left by collapsing support in old media institutions.

Disturbingly, a few smaller and even more extreme parties and movements emerged. They advocated openly racist policies and in one incident even filmed themselves knocking on the doors of hostels that house refugees, many now from the impacts of climate change, demanding to see their ID.⁶¹ Mainstream parties became alarmed at the growing tensions on the streets and the polarisation of debate. They seemed at a loss to understand how they could respond effectively to these disturbing developments, even if no political breakthrough was likely. Gullaume's support for the populist movement that had emerged was undimmed. He simply refused to believe that the worst things being reported – such as attacks on hostels – were happening at all. He saw them as further evidence of a media conspiracy against his party and the people. To assuage the threat and try to dampen the antagonism, that appeared to be starting to run out of control, the mainstream parties began adopting many of the policies being encouraged by the populists, such as stricter limits on immigration and not extending minority rights.

Some years later, after adopting these policies had not done anything to calm the country, a new potential leader of the mainstream coalition started getting media coverage with his promise of moving beyond left and right and simply saying he will “get it done” and “do what's necessary” for everyone. He talked of efficiency and common sense and appears in his rhetorical style to transcend ideology. Internal elections were planned in which this approach would be tested.⁶²

establishment, so voters do not have to be shielded from mainstream news sources to deny their validity, they just distrust them.

⁶¹ Taylor, D., 20th August, 2020, “Far-right activists filmed hassling asylum seekers in hotels”, *Guardian*, accessible at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/aug/28/far-right-activists-filmed-hassling-asylum-seekers-in-hotels>.

⁶² This approach is the “techno-populist” approach described above (Bickerton, C, J., Accetti, C, I., 2021 “Technopopulism: The New Logic of Democratic Politics”, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/technopopulism-9780198807766?cc=gb&lang=en>).



Part 2 – “Steps to take to reach desired futures and avoid undesired futures”. A worked example of scenario analysis

In this section we provide an example of using these scenarios to help us think about steps that society can take, and policy measures that could be adopted, to avoid the negative effects of populism. This is just one example of how stakeholders and policy actors can use the scenarios; to reflect on steps to take in their specific context to mitigate against the negative effects of populism. First, we need to define the elements being used and define what type of populism we are considering and the negative effects it may produce.

The following example uses the scenarios to help us consider policy measures with the view to avoiding the negative effects of populism. Before this can proceed it is necessary to set some working definitions. This section will first explain how ‘populism’ is defined in the preceding scenarios, then set out how a policy maker could determine desirable or undesirable futures, the negative effects of populism; and then the use of scenarios to work out the steps that could be taken to avoid negative effects as well as steps that may cause unintended consequences; and conclude with potential pathways specific for countries that find themselves in particular scenarios. This section will be structured as follows:

Which Populism?

Populism is a term that belies a singular definition. Throughout PaCE, our working definition has been that populism is ‘illiberal democracy’. However, in these scenarios, because we are trying to capture and inform stakeholders about undesirable and desirable futures, the type of populism we consider is less important than whether those leaders or parties cause negative effects for society. As such, some scenarios are more ‘nativist’ or far right than purely populist, escaping the PaCE definition, but these examples are coherent within broader definitions of populism found in the literature and common understandings of the term.

What are desirable and undesirable futures?

The scenarios that are set out here are predominantly undesirable futures, or futures with undesirable features within them. Even the apparently satisfactory scenario – *liberalism contented* – has some concerning indicators in it and contains the seeds of another populist wave. This is deliberate. Predicting *desirable* futures, and then advising on steps to take to get to these desirable futures would be too prescriptive, would rely on prophecy and include the partisan politics from the authors. Whilst for some policy, actors desirable or undesirable future might be



obvious to them, determined by political priorities or philosophical commitments, we need a position to work from. There are no evidential indicators we can use to show what a desirable future is like. While the authors and contributors to these scenarios do have political preferences, like all citizens, these preferences are not drawn out of the evidence produced in PaCE in the same way that negative indicators and realities have been. What has been evidenced, however, are emotional drivers for populist attitudes⁶³ and the ‘negative’ effects produced by certain strands of populism. For example, the capture and erosion of state institutions in *Populism dominant and entrenched* can be evidenced by examples, as can threats to minority rights in a number of the scenarios. Taking as a baseline assumption that ‘rights’ are at the very least worth protecting and eroding or undermining them can be viewed objectively as a negative effect of populism. This is particularly so when considering some of the core commitments of the EU around human rights for its citizens. Essentially, the undesired futures are those that break the fundamental ability to conduct politics in a peaceable, rights-respecting, democratic manner based on the rule of law.

We can be prescriptive therefore about negative effects that go against, or contribute towards, violating some fundamental rights of EU citizens. It is not for us to tell policy actors what a desirable future for the EU is, but we can identify when certain core values and rights of the EU are being eroded, identify these and identify steps to take to avoid this. It is within our remit to warn against the negative effects of populism in this way, show how these negative effects may come about and what is most likely in different circumstances. In doing so we are informing stakeholders about the potential dangers of policy making and helping them reflect on the steps to take to avoid these negative effects. If a desirable future is one in which these negative effects are lessened, then on that basis, these steps advise on how to get such a desirable future.

Negative effects of populism

The following core negative effects of populism were identified through PaCE research, collaborative workshops and consortium consultation: **Erosion of minority rights / status; Polarisation of public discourse and political system; Exclusionary politics; Degradation of liberal institutions; Chronic mistrust of authorities**

Within these headings are other undesirable processes that it is important to be aware of when making policy to limit the negative effects of populism. One troubling process we identified is what we have called ‘spill over effects’. Spill over effects are negative effects produced by populist waves that are unconnected to whether populists win power or not. They also may be caused by measures taken to combat populism, such as technocratic or institutional approaches that contribute to the grievances of populism. Spill over effects distinguishes the erosion of state institutions or capture of media by a populist dominated government on the one hand, which are direct negative effects of populists, with for example the degradation of public debate or chronic mistrust of authorities on the other. These second types of negative effects can be caused by populist mobilisations that do not win power. For example, a permanent low level culture war may be produced by growing levels of populist public attitudes being activated by a populist party but that party not gaining power. Nevertheless in this type of situation online political spaces can be

⁶³ PaCE D4.1 and D4.2



chronically polarised, as they are in the *Opportunistic populism*. Negative spillover effects in this case can also, for example, bring a minority's status into question in public debate, while not directly threatening minorities with political power or the power of the state or judiciary. This can have a deleterious effect on the role minorities have in public and civic life, not to mention the psychological and emotional damage imposed on those citizens. Another different type of spillover effect is when mainstream parties start to adopt populist policies and language as a way to see off their threat of populists at elections. In this case populists are inadvertently causing negative effects by the threat they pose the mainstream. All of these types of effects erode social cohesion and on that basis are undesirable. A final example of a negative spillover effect is chronic mistrust. This can be produced both by populist leaders engineering mistrust as a tactic of confusion and to undermine trust in mainstream institutions and parties, and it can be caused by public reaction to technocratic measures developed to defend institutions against populism, such as changing voting rules or political party rules.

Considering spillover effects as important to the negative effects of populism is vital because, as other PaCE work packages have shown, populist parties may not in fact be winning power in large numbers across the EU. They are often being beaten at the polls. However, this does not mean that the negative effects produced in the population and within democratic institutions by the presence of populists and their attempts to gain power are not important. It is these types of effects that policy actors will need to take steps to avoid if they are to avoid undesirable futures. Spillover effects are also crucial to understanding responses to populism insofar as those responses can themselves cause certain spillover effects. For example, policy actors limiting TV time for populist leaders, changing the threshold for minor parties to enter parliaments or get through early rounds of voting, depending on the electoral system, erecting structural barriers to party funding and so on, all combat populism in one way but may increase the grievances of populists and contribute to other negative effects such as increasing mistrust, or reducing the ability to participate in democratic politics.

- **Erosion of minority rights / status.** Erosion of minority rights and status can take a number of forms. Discursive, psychological, practical, substantial – can cause discrimination, bigotry, feelings of alienation from society, can encourage violence. Minority rights are often something targeted by populists and form part of the grievances expressed by them, whether it be gender rights, cultural and sexual rights or rights of asylum seekers. The basis of questioning minority rights is often to question who is a 'true' member of 'the people', who the populists claim to represent.⁶⁴
- **Polarisation of public discourse and political system.** Not all polarisation is bad. Radical disagreement can be healthy for democracy and for forging the truth out of clashing opinions and views. However, to the extent that policy discussions become impossible without wider grievances becoming involved, assumptions of bad faith of the other party, questions about their character rather than their argument, it becomes harmful for politics in liberal democracies. Conducting public debate and discussion without other agendas derailing those discussion is vital for a healthy public sphere.

⁶⁴ Wahlbeck, O. 2016. "True Finns and Non-True Finns: The Minority Rights Discourse of Populist Politics in Finland" *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 37 (6): 574-588



- **Exclusionary Politics.** The politics of exclusion is a type of politics characterised by exclusionary concerns and questions. Who should be in, and who should be out? who is a citizen who is not? who should be respected who should be disrespected? permeates all politics. Questions of citizenship, borders, migration, minorities dominate political conversations, and cause harm to those whose status is being questioned while undermining the idea of a pluralistic polity.
- **Degradation of liberal institutions.** This negative effect is more concrete when populists are in power. Capture of state and civil institutions by populists can happen when they are in government, including the media, the judiciary and state administrations, all of which bolster a strong liberal democratic state. In such situations the remit of institutions, who leads them, and who is employed by them is decided by the populists. However, liberal institutions can also be degraded by populists attempting (but failing) to get into power. An independent media is a good example to use to make this point. An independent media is threatened by populists undermining trust in it and also is undermined by the media being too partisan, in either direction. This is another example of a potential spill over effect of trying to combat populism. If the media or other institutions become too partisan in their attempts to undermine populists then trust in them and their standing could be degraded.
- **Chronic mistrust of authorities.** Chronic mistrust of authorities again is caused by populists in power and trying to get into power as well as authorities themselves failing to live up to expected democratic standards over the years, in areas ranging from tax policy to nepotism, elitism and corruption. These failings give populists an opening to exploit legitimate grievances and turn justified scepticism into chronic mistrust. In power, populists can spread mistrust of remaining centres of liberal or democratic authority within the state and media, while bolstering trust in their own authority. However, more often, a technique of undermining the reigning government by populists is to engineer crisis in a way that undermines trust in those authorities. Conspiracy theories of the 'mainstream media' and 'elites' are commonplace in populist discourse, encouraging people to believe that the authorities are plotting against them. These conspiracy theories, fake news and confected scandals all contribute a chronic mistrust of different sources of authority, including political, news and medical authorities.

Analysis of some possible policy options or actions to take to avoid negative effects

The scenarios capture the impact that public attitudes have on future possibilities, and the background conditions and events that may impact on those attitudes. A background assumption is that increasing populist attitudes can (although not that they must) cause negative effects. With this basis a policy maker can then consider steps to take to avoid undesirable futures - that is futures with lots of negative effects of populism in them.

As discussed above with spill over effects, however, it is not so simple. Structural or technocratic steps taken by policy actors have the potential to make things worse.



Common policy options pitched in response to populism include: Erecting structural barriers; Funding restrictions; Building ‘grassroots’ networks; ‘Correcting’ or improving public discourse; Developing better narratives in favour of liberal democracy and the EU ; and ‘Policification’. These were gathered during the various iterations and discussions of the scenarios throughout the process.

- **Erecting structural barriers.** Erecting structural barriers can mean practices such as changes to the electoral system that disadvantage parties seeking to make a breakthrough in the elections. These changes could be increasing the number of votes a party or a candidate requires to make it through to the next round of voting. This depends on what type of electoral system a country has but is relevant in France, and is also relevant within parties – the British Labour party have changed the rules around voting that make it harder for a minority candidate to make it onto the leadership contest ballot.
- **Funding restrictions.** Altering funding requirements for donating to political parties, for example, which harms minor parties more than mainstream parties is one policy option to prevent populist breakthroughs. Preventing funding from abroad could be another structural barrier.
- **Building ‘grassroots’ networks.** Building grassroots networks to tackle populism is one way to offset a rise in populism, however, the extent to which this can authentically be carried out by policy actors is another question.
- **‘Correcting’ or improving public discourse.** One major concern with populist discourse is its reliance on fake news, conspiracy theories and disinformation to spread confusion and gain popularity for their polarising views. Stopping the proliferation of such discourse seems like a good policy option, and can be done by deploying ‘fact checkers’ or passing more restrictive content laws about spreading fake news on social media platforms. However, there are two problems with this. The internet is notoriously difficult to police, and secondly, whether fact checking actually works is contestable. Convincing people that the information they believe is wrong is more problematic than just presenting alternative facts, even if those facts happen to be true. At issue here is whether the authority doing the fact checking is trusted or not. In populist discourse it is often the ‘elites’ who are not to be trusted so ‘elites’ doing the fact checking will not hold much sway.
- **Developing better narratives in favour of liberal democracy and the EU.** This policy option would involve developing a story based on a nation’s values that opposes the populist’s exclusionary worldview or a story about the principles of the EU and how that is relevant to people’s lives and why they should commit to it and be inspired by such a story. Values and principles, however, are extremely contested in contemporary times and the idea of the EU and liberalism is the very thing populist oppose. However, giving a strong alternative story to exclusionary populism may be worthwhile as a policy option.
- **‘Policification’.** This policy option refers to the way establishment policy actors try to outlaw the views, tactics or presence of populist parties in some way. This can be through libel actions, common in the UK, by criminalising protests, banning people from certain platforms, seeking to undermine the legitimacy of the party by claiming they are funded ‘from abroad’ or are backed by foreign powers. Of course, criminal activity and violence is something that should be policed. However, any policy option that seeks to delegitimise the presence of populism or criminalise or



police non-violent or non-criminal acts is ‘policification’. This policy option is fraught with danger as it increases grievances of populists about the ‘elite’ and is illiberal in itself. Populism in itself is not necessarily bad, and policy actors should remain focussed on the negative effects produced by populism.

Steps taken that may cause unintended consequences

Policy actors taking steps to prevent undesirable futures produced by populism can have paradoxical effects. Policies that suppress or marginalise populist opinions may in the short term appear to work, but over time are likely to be policies that generate further grievances.

Not all negative effects of populism come about by populists winning power, as discussed in the spillover effects above. Steps taken to prevent populists winning power, such as structural changes to the voting system, may inadvertently produce these spillover effects, which have corrosive impact on social solidarity. This is something to be considered below when developing policies and steps to take (and which steps not to take) to avoid undesirable futures.

Ideas, policy options and steps to take coming out of the scenarios.

The following policy options emerged through systematic reflections through the scenarios as options and steps to take to avoid undesirable futures we were working with. Ideas and policy options that come out of foresight scenarios differ from other policy recommendations inasmuch as they are drawn from reflecting discussion through the scenarios themselves. We used these scenarios as the basis for discussing consequences and unintended consequences of various political, societal and policy options that are available. The steps and ideas produced below serve as a demonstration of how working through these scenarios can produce policy options.

Neutral policy options, that is policy options that are not political or politicised, are very difficult to find. Many policy options contain within them the grievances populists claim they have against the elites. For example, grievances about technocracy or attacks on ‘free speech’ could both be amplified by policy actors taking steps to avoid undesirable consequences of populism. Taking a stance against populist arguments it also admittedly political. This is not a bad thing necessarily. However, these alternatives need to be argued for and justified by policy actors when proposing them, rather than pretending they are the neutral option. ‘Culture wars’, as is found in the *Populism Pressure Cooker* and *Constant Struggle* scenarios make policy responses to issues associated with populism very challenging as they will be inherently politicised. There are likely to be very few un-politicised policy options.

When taking steps to avoid undesirable futures of populism it is necessary to first understand where you are and the direction of travel of that populist sentiment and associated public attitudes are taking. Populism has different manifestations in different environments, and this makes a big difference to availability and efficacy of policy options that policy actors can take.

The foresight scenarios assess levels of attitudes in the population that could be mobilised to support populist agendas on one axis, and the activation of those attitudes on the other axis. This



shows that both attitudes and successful activation of those attitudes is necessary to achieve a populist breakthrough – although the two also can work in symbiosis. While it would be very tempting for liberal parties facing populist challenges to put in place structural barriers to populist political mobilisation this may be a mistake. If the populist related attitudes and sentiments are widely and strongly held, there is a danger of backlash against such measures and a resulting increase in populist support. For example, placing structural barriers limiting minor parties' chances of success at elections may foster those feelings of political exclusion that populists can prey on.

Example of scenario-based reflection on policy options

In scenario planning, decision makers are often looking for options that are robust across a range of scenarios. Given that scenario planning is not predicting the future, strategies that are likely to be effective in reaching a desired goal across a range of likely potential futures are desirable.⁶⁵ Based upon a reflection of the PaCE populism scenarios by experts (including from the EUNOMIA project⁶⁶), the following policy strategies could mitigate the negative impacts of populism across the six potential futures:

- **Demonetize polarisation on platforms and in media**
 - Establish codes of conduct for broadcast and print media to sign up to committing them to avoid creating 'spectacle' news and 'performing crises' in politics and culture.
 - Establish laws around algorithmic accountability for social media companies (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter etc). This means identifying the algorithms of content providers that exacerbate polarisation for monetary gain and create guidelines, laws and standards to reduce or eliminate those methods of content provision.
 - Publicly fund independent local and grassroots media. This is to mitigate against 'clickbait' media culture. Money to fund this could be raised by a specific tax on 'Big Tech' or social media companies and large online news providers.
 - Encourage and fund more 'slow media'.
- **Avoid "police-ification" of politics**
 - The starting point for this recommendation is the belief that radical disagreement in democracies is legitimate and should not be subject to prohibition of any kind.
 - Political organisation, speech, mobilisation and protest, even if disruptive and unpleasant, is part of democratic politics and should not be criminalised or de-legitimised.
 - Avoid focussing on 'foreign interference' and funding as the cause of negative populism. Those sources, if relevant, exploit existing political grievances rather than causing them.
- **Make the case**

⁶⁵ Wright, G., & Cairns G., *Scenario Thinking: Practical Approaches to the Future*, 2011, Palgrave

⁶⁶ <https://eunomia.social/>



- Values must be defended. Make robust and public arguments for rights and laws that are of value in society, rather than hiding those rights and laws in technocratic policies or language. E.g. make the case for minority rights strongly, unapologetically, convincingly and publicly.
- **Distribution**
 - Ensure change is equally distributed. Whether this be in automation, political power, economic change or ‘greening’ the economy etc. Equitable distribution can mitigate against the politics of discontent.
 - Inequality has a paradoxical role in populism as some are driven by a desire to protect status against those beneath them. However, implementing distributive economic policies that increase equality between the very top on the one hand and the middle and bottom on the other can increase a sense of fairness and social solidarity, undermining the tensions that negative populism feeds off.
- **Technocracy**
 - Democratise and make accountable democratic institutions when in power. Making institutions of the state and democracy – such as the judiciary, parliament, media – more accountable, local and relevant to people’s concerns rather than aloof from them, can undermine the purchase of ‘anti-elite’ claims by populists.
 - Keep profound political and economic changes on the table and up for debate to replace the debate about individual’s status and rights. Make it part of healthy public discourse, rather than ‘not for discussion’. E.g. ‘globalisation’, ‘deindustrialisation’. By debating topics at the core of a voter’s life outcomes, the status of minorities status and who deserve rights can be removed from the agenda.
- **Public discourse / drivers**
 - As well as focussing on underlying drivers of discontent, such as economics, inequality, not all of populism’s support comes from these sources. Don’t ignore more problematic drivers and expressions of populism. E.g. racism, misogyny, xenophobia, chauvinism. These negative drivers of populism do need to be confronted.
- **Adopt a long-term view**
 - Recommendations under this heading are less specific policy options and more a disposition towards populism. Other work packages in PaCE indicate that waves of populism wax and wane. Although they are difficult, measures to reduce the degree of populist sentiment held by a population will likely have longer term permanence than measures aimed at reducing immediate populist political mobilisation. Many of these are going to involve large scale significant political choices about how economies and democracies should function rather than small scale policy tweaks.
 - Policy makers should pay specific and close attention to how they are going to avoid people feeling ‘left behind’ by forthcoming social transformations. Adaptation to climate change/green new deal, demographic changes, workplace automation, immigration and refugee flows all have potential to significantly alter communities, employment and the economy. All are potentially disruptive and without clear explanation to people are potentially



unnerving. Policy actors, if asking people to adapt to change and make sacrifices, must ensure those sacrifices will be shared across society.

- Don't confuse the immediate triggers of populist mobilisation with the systematic causes of populist mobilisation (e.g. Gilet Jaune in France triggered by fuel tax, but not inherently caused by this).
- The existence of funding from abroad, or targeted disinformation campaigns doesn't mean that populism only exists because of these campaigns. It is likely to be exploiting the issue rather than creating it.

Scenario specific reflections and suggestions

In addition to these above general considerations, the negative effects of populism and recommendations to mitigate them may vary, depending on which scenario you are considering. A policy actor should therefore consider the set of scenario indicators (for example, activities of parties and leaders, the degree of exclusionary policy, the nature of public debate, the behaviour of the media, electoral success of populist parties, etc) across the scenario matrix. These indicators characterise potential observable elements in the world that could indicate which scenario a particular country is in or heading towards. Having a sense of which scenario seems most likely, can suggest more specific policy options to address the negative impacts of populist politics. The status of the nine indicators should be used to denote which scenario you may find yourselves in, and this in turn can direct you towards more specific options, for example:

Erosion of minority rights

- **Populists on the outside**
 - i. Minority rights not threatened in this scenario but the groundwork for questions around minority rights is being created. The risk is that this terrain of public discourse is abandoned, leaving it open to opportunistic populist actors.
 - ii. Encourage a robust, pre-emptive defence of minority rights, why they are important and how we all benefit from them.
 - iii. Make political space for discussions around future and change, and how people will not be left behind by forthcoming changes.
- **Constant struggle**
 - i. This scenario has a re-energised public sphere where minority rights are being actively politically contested. The risk here is that minority discarded, threatened or undermined in pursuit of other political objectives. It will be tempting for political parties to attack minorities for vote share. Issues affecting minorities can be underfunded?
 - ii. Ensure access to justice and human rights process through the law, to protect minority in a potential conflictual environment.
- **Populism dominant and entrenched**
 - i. Minority rights are under threat in this scenario, or may have already been removed. The ruling government is actively hostile to minority rights. Legal recourses also removed



- ii. Protection of minority rights therefore becomes only possible at either sub-governmental (e.g., localities with a different politics), non-governmental/social (social movements), or international levels (EU, other treaty bodies) – without access to national governmental policy levers.
- **Liberalism contented**
 - i. This scenario offers the opportunity to really bed-in and institutionalise protection of minority rights and create strong institutions, as part of wider measures around social equality. There is however a risk of creating “left-behinds”.
 - ii. Policy makers should not be technocratic about these policy measures; they should claim them, own them and argue for why these are important and how they benefit everybody.
 - iii. Be very wary about how economic benefits, scarcity, precarity and changes are distributed.
- **Opportunistic populism**
 - i. ‘Debates’ about whether minorities should have rights should not be tolerated in mainstream. Instead, strong leadership is required to make the case for why rights are important. This requires political fortitude and mobilisation around principled issues.
- **Populism pressure cooker**
 - i. Mainstream parties should avoid any adoption of populist policies around minority rights
 - ii. Mainstream parties ought to argue against, rather than adopt, populist discourse around minority rights

“**Bad faith polarisation**” of public discourse and political system (to the extent that policy discussions become impossible without wider grievances being involved and politics becomes exclusionary by default)

- **Populists on the outside**
 - i. Don’t over-represent the support that negative populists have by bringing into mainstream debate. Attitudes are low in this scenario, media should reflect that.
 - ii. Discourage spectacle media – encourage more ‘slow media’
 - iii. Media / personality important here. Don’t over inflate in public debate.
- **Constant struggle**
 - i. Polarisation is not necessarily negative if not in bad faith. Distinguish between vibrant debate and bad faith polarising.
 - ii. Maintain red lines on discussing people’s status, however. Religious, sexual and ethnic minorities not ‘up for debate’
- **Populism dominant and entrenched**
 - i. In situation of media capture and degradation of public debate, alternative sources of media should be established if possible



- ii. International and supra-national standards imposed, if possible - eg EU fact checkers
- **Liberalism contented**
 - i. In this scenario, time and space is available to bed in good public discourse mechanisms and standards of public debate
 - ii. Act to prevent monopolisation of media in this time of political tranquillity, which at later date may cause resentment to build up of elite control. Etc. The stakes may feel lower here, but important to act.
- **Opportunistic populism**
 - i. Similar to populism pressure cooker, but measures more precautionary.
 - ii. In order to prevent the space of non-mainstream media being occupied by bad-faith actors, we encourage public support/funding to 'good faith' non-mainstream media – for example investigative local journalism, public science communication, maybe with quality standards but with strong protections around independence.
- **Populism pressure cooker**
 - i. In this scenario, mainstream political parties are doing some of this bad-faith polarisation (not just fringe actors) so they have quite strong capability to stop doing this.
 - ii. Varied voices ought to be brought into policy process and institutions. Breakdown the binary between elites (giving information / debating policy) and people.
 - iii. Media effects (for example polarisation of debate on social media platforms) here are likely large and significant), so strong measures against monetisation of political polarisation can be adopted.
 - iv. In the absence of populist capture of power, there's opportunity to start to address the long-term, structural causes of populist grievances (left behind, lack of access to opportunities).

Degradation of liberal institutions

- **Populists on the outside**
 - i. Emphasise importance of local / EU politics and elections, so these sites do not become site for protest votes, as this could lay ground for institutional erosion. Parties should seek to put good quality candidates up for local elections, and be willing to de-select poor quality incumbents.
- **Liberalism contented**
 - ii. Democratise institutions and increase citizen participation to prevent technocratic hegemony developing, which could cause future grievances to build up.
 - ii. Be wary of assuming that apathy of public equals contentment with the status quo.
 - iii. Confidence and trust in institutions must be constantly earned and renewed not taken for granted.
- **Populism dominant and entrenched**



- i. Institutions are captured in this scenario and being eroded. Opposition to this difficult if not inside or in control of institutions.
- **Constant struggle**
 - i. Maintain the struggle over institutions at level of personnel and ideas not over fundamentals legitimacy of function.
- **Opportunistic populism**
 - i. In this scenario there is no radical institutional change, so this can be exploited as source of stability in aggressively unstable political environment.
 - ii. Maintain highest institutional standards for contributing to public life
 - iii. Encourage institutions to be source of authority. Hollowing out public institutions and encouraging privatisation in more areas of life and society can undermine civic authority. This should be avoided.
- **Populism pressure cooker**
 - i. No institutional change but danger from mainstream parties adopting a populist pose.
 - ii. Leave institutional integrity (courts, parliament, separation of powers etc) intact
 - iii. New agreement (or renewed commitment) by mainstream to ethical standards in public life (to avert populist slide)

Chronic mistrust of authorities

- **Populists on the outside**
 - i. While being careful not to overrepresent support for populism in this scenario, by inflating the populist message beyond its levels of support, also care must be taken not to be seen to be suppressing it unfairly.
 - ii. Codes of conduct and standards for media to stop them treating politics as spectacle or news as entertainment. This way, avoiding the performance of crises. (legal or voluntary?)
- **Liberalism contented**
 - i. Danger here is building mistrust of technocracy. Implement measures to democratise and engage with variety of voices
 - ii. Even though politically dominant, radical accountability should be promoted and implemented in institutions to avoid sense of hegemony
 - iii. Meritocracy promoted to avoid technocratic cliques developing. This meritocracy should be diverse, so to avoid same elites gaming their way to top. (meritocracies, however, contain similar dangers of generating new cliques).
- **Populism dominant and entrenched**
 - i. Issue here is that chronic mistrust of 'old' authorities and previous elites is being embedded by dominant populist parties.
- **Constant struggle**
 - i. Face political contestation in good faith, even if your politics is at risk
 - ii. Avoid 'policification' of politics; your opponents may be winning the battle of ideas because the grievances in population are real not because they are cheating or being criminal in some way.



- iii. Rely on courts to implement the law not to win political arguments. For example, constitutional law must be upheld, but the values on which a constitution itself is based must be argued for, not just assumed.
- iv. Regulate international donations coming into domestic political organisations. But do not mistake this money for being the cause of populism.
- **Opportunistic populism**
 - i. The spreading of mistrust of authorities is closely related to the polarisation of public debate, so requires similar policies in Opportunistic populism. One being to de-monetize polarisation (How? First would need to “open the algorithm” that YouTube etc uses to accountability and scrutiny)
- **Populism pressure cooker**
 - i. Standards and codes of conduct for media to prevent them from “performing crises”

Conclusion

This report has presented the populism foresight scenarios created by the PaCE project, followed by an example analysis that showcases using the scenarios to reflect upon steps societies might take and policy options to prevent the negative impacts of populist politics. We offer the scenarios as a way for European policy makers to support, structure and challenge their thinking on the issues of political populism, and the responses that can be adopted towards negative impacts.

Scenario analysis differs in how it produces policy options and ideas to mitigate the negative effects of populism insofar as it is driven by reflection and systematic discussion of the likely consequences different options may produce in the foresight scenarios, rather than being directly evidence-based. A policymaker would need to perform their own policy analysis using the scenarios to consider desirable and undesirable futures with experts in the specific situation in order to come up with their own list of possible responses, since that would naturally incorporate situation-specific domain knowledge that is not accessible to us.

If you would like further information on the methodology used to generate and validate the scenarios, we direct you towards the methodology report (D4.6).