

# FATIGUE

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**Title:** Political Economic Causes of Emerging Populism: Mapping and Conceptualizing Key Variables

**Conference:** UACES Annual Conference

**Date and location:** 1-4 September 2019, Lisbon

### Introduction

This paper aims at mapping European populist parties according to their policy content rather than their inherent characteristics. In fact, populist actors and populism in general are usually mapped on their inherent content or features rather than the way they act or shape the world around them.

This is given by the fact that the main definitions of populism are not focused on the policy characteristics of a party. The main definitions of populism are the ideational approach one (Mudde, 2004), the political-strategic approach one (Weyland, 2001), and the socio-cultural approach one (Ostiguy, 2009). In recent years the ideational approach to populism has been considered the most popular definition among them. There are many reasons for this. First, Mudde's definition of populism as "thin-centered ideology" that can be attached to other ones (Mudde, 2004) was useful to expand and include the right-wing populism phenomenon in Europe and a variety of different kinds of populism as well. The emergence of quantitative text analysis also helped give validity to concepts that before were only confined to qualitative analysis. For these reasons, the studies that include measurements of discourse that are suitable for cross-country and historical analysis multiplied and became widely popular (Hawkins et al., 2018).

Another reason that increased the popularity of Mudde's definition is that the other ones (the political-strategic approach, the socio-cultural approach, and the economic approach) are mainly focused on the Latin American phenomenon. For example, Weyland's definition of populism (2001) states that populism is a political strategy where a personalistic and charismatic ruler can politically use massive and non-institutionalized support from large numbers of people. This definition was born out of the necessity of mapping a variety of socioeconomic stances that identified as populism. However, it is then hard to distinguish political phenomena such as populism, authoritarianism or even fascism. They could all in fact involve all the elements included in Weyland's definition, which was broad enough to include the variety of populist leaders in Latin America but too broad to identify populism as a distinct political concept.

On the other hand, Ostiguy's definition of populism (2009) also works mainly for Latin America as an example. It was created to study the cases of Argentina, Venezuela and Ecuador. More specifically, it was intended to understand the duality of ideological experiences present in some of these countries. The author's definition of populism works around two axes: the high-low and left-right dimensions and political cleavages. According to the author, the low dimension is "an essential and noncontroversial defining feature of populism" (2009). The "low", can in fact be left or right-wing and so it is populism itself. This two-dimensional way of identifying politics is "useful for characterizing certain political arenas and political strategies" (Ostiguy, 2009). The authors state clearly that his definition is useful for understanding the reception of parties in society and that according to it the political preferences are not linked to any particular issue at stake.

In general, the three main definitions of the concept want to put populism above the classical left and right ideological spectrum. They do that for a reason, as we did indeed see a variety of leaders that have been classified as populists without having any political content in common. Also, the only definition of populism based on the policy context, the one of Dornbusch and Edwards (1989), is as well the most limited one in terms of versatility. As mentioned in the Oxford Handbook of Populism (Kaltwasser, Taggart and Espejo, 2017) the economic definition of populism should be excluded from the most helpful ones because "does not provide clear criteria for conceptualizing populism as such" and "limits populism to leftist or inclusionary forms".

This conception is based on the popular definition of populism as "an approach to economics that emphasizes growth



and income redistribution and deemphasizes the risks of inflation and deficit finance, external constraints, and the reaction of economic agents to aggressive non-market policies" (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1989). The definition has been later expanded as a more diluted "implementation of policies receiving support from a significant fraction of the population, but ultimately hurting the economic interests of this majority" (Acemoglu, Erogov, and Sonin, 2013) and as well policies that "reject restraints on the conduct of economic policy" but that could ultimately make sense (Rodrik, 2018).

The two expansions do make sense to understand populist policy choices beyond the Latin American example. However, they fail at describing a common pattern, as did the Dornbusch and Edwards definition (1989). More specifically, Acemoglu Erogov and Sonin (2013) generalize the previously created definition while Rodrik (2018) does not generalize in a quantitative way how populists act in Europe. For this reason, this paper explores whether there is a possible pattern in the policy choices of contemporary European parties. It does so by exploring and quantifying the different and possible policy choices of populist parties as theorized in the above-mentioned literature. After describing the methodology, it maps and summarizes the average choices of populist parties in terms of spending taxes, economic redistribution, economic intervention and immigration policies. It sees which element is more relevant, and it concludes on which elements should be analyzed next. Last it will summarize and conclude with the implications for the definition of economic populism.

## Methodology

This paper used the data from the 2014 CHES Expert Survey to map the policy choices of all the populist parties present in Europe in 2014. This database has been chosen as it is the only one that permits to compare different parties in different countries and with such different content and political agenda. The 2014 CHES Expert Survey database divides the parties between right, left and centre according to their LRGEN value. According to this paper, the parties are identified as left if their LRGEN values are less than five or right if the value is more than five. For the purpose of this paper, a third category, populist, has been identified. To determine such category the 2014 CHES Expert Survey parties list has been crosschecked with the PopuList database as downloaded from the website on July 2019. If a party was presented in both lists, it has been categorised as populist. Parties that are not present in one of the two databases have been excluded from the mapping and the other representations. A non-probability sampling has been therefore used, and, as a consequence, this work acknowledges the limited generalizability of such technique.

Also, because the datasets stop in 2014, a lot of relevant parties have been excluded. One notable example is La France Insoumise. However, out of the total 268 parties 2014 CHES Expert Survey database and the 127 of the PopuList, 43 of them were presents in both lists and did not split up before 2014. A more detailed list of them and the parties that have been included in this work is present in the appendix.

This work acknowledges Mudde's definition of populism (2004) by using the PopuList as a source for defining populist parties. As defined by the authors themselves populist parties are the ones "that endorse the set of ideas that society is ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde 2004)" (Rooduijn et al., 2019). This work also acknowledges that the 2014 CHES Expert Survey database is based, like the name itself suggests, on experts' evaluation and that even it is the summary of 337 experts it cannot be considered a precise source in categorising policy positions.

This work analysed the selected parties and mapped them across two diverse divides and policy dimensions. First, they have been mapped between their position on improving public services vs reducing taxes and their position on immigration policy. The choice of the two axes is to put the parties on a classical left-right ideological divide, which is the position on public services and taxes, together with a variable that represents an "us versus them" populist approach. To prove this point in terms of policy positions, the one regarding immigration seemed to be the most accurate.

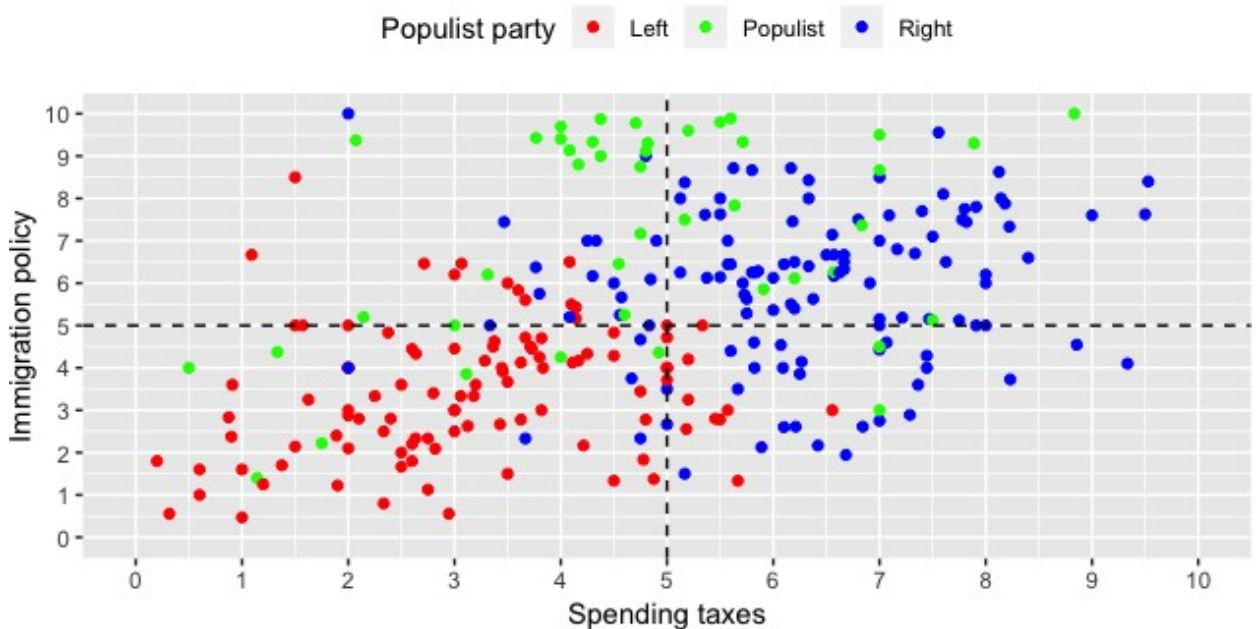
The second mapping is inspired directly by the Dornbusch and Edwards definition (1989). The parties have been mapped according to their presumed policy preferences regarding redistribution and intervention of the state in the economy. In fact, an excessive interference of the state together with unsustainable economic policies, is what defines economic populism according to the authors and might as well lead to the collapse of the system. Even if there was no way to measure the "unsustainability" element according to the data available, a high presence of economic



intervention of the state coupled with high redistribution under unstable macroeconomic conditions might lead to what predicted by Dornbusch and Edwards.

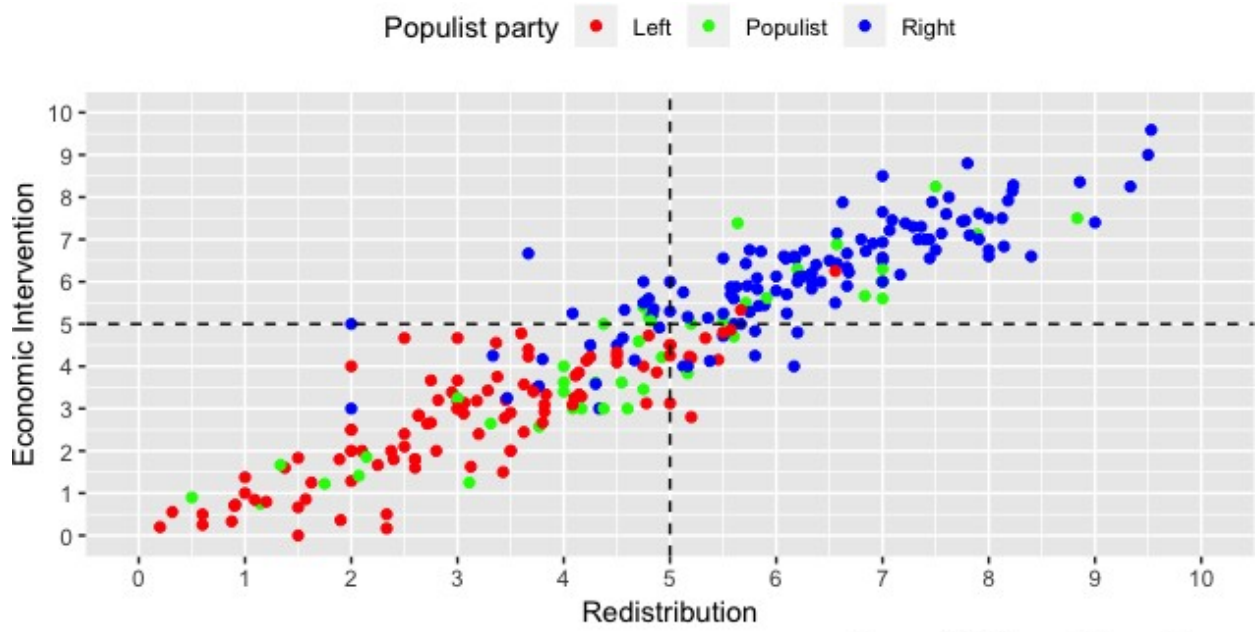
Last, we see what the median and average positions of populist parties in Europe considering the entire sample. We discover that, besides having a few outliers, there is a common pattern in the way populist parties position themselves in terms of policies.

## Results



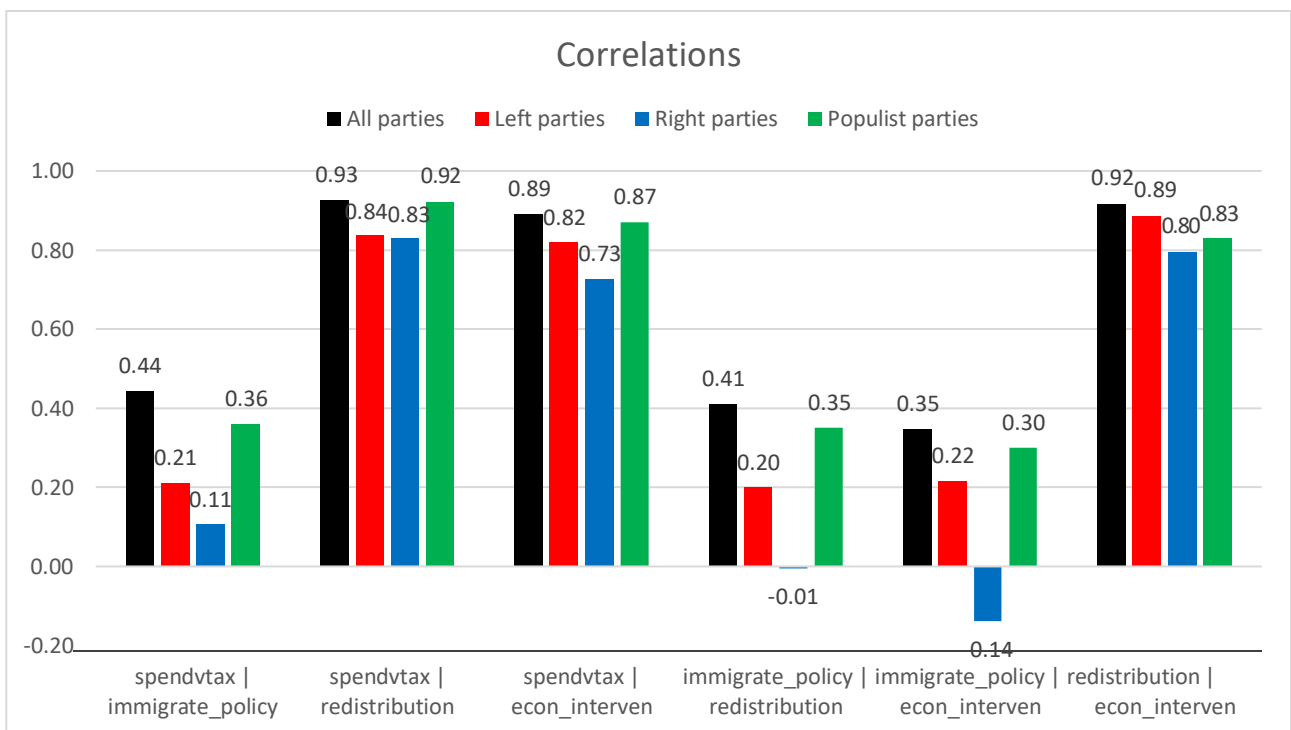
The chart that maps all European parties according to their preference between for spending taxes and having public services and their position towards immigration policy shows two things. First, that there are indeed some populist parties scattered across the classical left-right political divide. In fact, as expected, the majority of left parties are in the bottom left quadrant, where the preference is to collect more taxes, have more public services, and to be fully opposed to restrictive immigration policy. In contrast, the vast majority of the right parties are in the top-right corner, where the preference is exactly the opposite. Surprisingly, there are a few right-wing parties in the bottom-left section of the diagram, which shows that some parties identify as a right-wing but are left-wing in terms of policy decisions. However, as mentioned before, we do find populist parties coherently scattered across the right-left divide. This means that some parties use populist tactics and are populist in style, but are in reality simply left or right-wing. The second important element is that the majority of the populist parties are in the central top part of the diagram, which means that the average populist European party is moderate in term of economic policy but is extremely right-wing in terms of immigration policy positions. This confirms Mudde's definition of populism and European right-wing populism, but do not explain the phenomenon of so-called "left-wing populism". In fact, and as it is shown later, the average populist party has a position in terms of spending taxes of 4.74, which is almost exactly at the centre. Also, the parties on the left side of the chart are considered as outliers. In general, this graph shows us that there are almost three distinct ideological groups in 2014 Europe: the left, the right, and the populists.





Source: 2014 Chapel Hill expert survey

The second graph has been created to test the policy prescriptions highlighted by Dornbusch and Edwards (1989) in the European case. Even if the majority of parties are correlated across the left-right spectrum, the majority of parties are concentrated in the centre of the graph. More specifically, 75% of them are positioned between 4 and 6. It shows that the intuition regarding populists and policies and Europe is correct, and the Dornbusch and Edwards definition (1989) does indeed apply specifically to the Latin American example. Once again, even if they position themselves across the ideological left-right spectrum it is interesting to see how the majority of the parties are aligned in the same section of the graph, proving that there is a common pattern across populist parties.



Source: 2014 CHES Expert Survey

The correlations between different variables show another interesting element for what concerns populists. Especially for what concerns the relations between economic policy choices and immigration policies, populists parties show a higher correlation (and therefore a higher coherence across the right-left divide) than even right-wing parties.



| Political sides | Count | Spend taxes mean | Immigration policy mean | Redistribution mean | Economic intervention mean |
|-----------------|-------|------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|
| Left            | 104   | 3.150448         | 3.437153                | 2.791526            | 3.026352                   |
| Populist        | 43    | 4.741379         | 7.218065                | 4.265837            | 4.242708                   |
| Right           | 121   | 6.266838         | 5.895160                | 6.165236            | 6.293951                   |

Source: 2014 CHES Expert Survey

Last, the average positions for each variable and across the left-right-populist division shows that populist parties are in between and extremely centrist regarding all policies, except for the ones regarding immigration. Otherwise, they position themselves close to 5 for what concerns the position regarding spending taxes, redistribution and economic intervention of the state.

### Summary and Conclusion

The mapping and analysis of 43 populist parties in 2014 Europe according to the ideological definition of populism showed that there is a common positioning in terms of policy decision both among the right, the left, and the populists. More specifically, and for what concern the economic policy-immigration policy divide, we clearly have three distinct ideological groups. Also, if we look at economic policies more in detail, we can see that populists have on average very centrist and moderate positions in opposition to the popular definition of economic populism elaborated by Dornbusch and Edwards (1989). In general, if you identify as populist, you are probably going to be moderate in terms of all policies except for what concerns immigration. This contradicts the other main definitions of populism, which state there is no clear structural and ideological element in being populist.

We can conclude as well that the concept of economic populism linked to Latin America shows the continent's difficulties in dealing with its deep social and economic cleavages. The fact that the average populist European party showed on average to be strongly against inclusive policies for immigrants, even more than the average right-wing party, shows the economic populism might also, in this case, a way to deal with a deep social and economic cleavage. We can see a "thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups" (Mudde, 2004) but ultimately with the antagonism between the people and the immigrants rather than the people and the elites.

In this case, economic populism can be considered as a way of responding to a permanent social problem with extreme or completely new policies due to lack of responsive institutions. Economic culture also plays a role, and it might be the reason why, according to the literature, Latin America ignored constraints while Europe did not. To better explore this point, this work will be later expanded with possible data on Latin America for a comparative analysis and as well as data regarding other policy positions.



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## Appendix

List of populist parties considered in this paper:

| Country | Name     |
|---------|----------|
| aus     | OVP      |
| aus     | FPO      |
| aus     | BZO      |
| bel     | VB       |
| bul     | VMRO-BND |
| bul     | ATAKA    |
| bul     | GERB     |
| bul     | NFSB     |
| bul     | BBT      |
| cro     | HDSSB    |
| cro     | HL-SR    |
| cze     | ANO2011  |
| cze     | USVIT    |
| den     | DF       |
| est     | EK       |



|      |         |
|------|---------|
| est  | ER      |
| fin  | PS      |
| fra  | FN      |
| ger  | Linke   |
| ger  | AfD     |
| gre  | SYRIZA  |
| gre  | LAOS    |
| gre  | ANEL    |
| hun  | Fidesz  |
| hun  | JOBBIK  |
| ire  | SF      |
| it   | LN      |
| it   | Fdl     |
| it   | M5S     |
| lith | TT      |
| lith | DP      |
| lith | DK      |
| lux  | ADR     |
| net  | SP      |
| net  | PVV     |
| nor  | FrP     |
| pol  | PiS     |
| rom  | PP-DD   |
| slo  | SNS     |
| slo  | OLaNO   |
| spa  | Podemos |
| swe  | SD      |
| uk   | UKIP    |

