

Like a Hurricane? The ‘winds of populism’ in contemporary Europe

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1. Introduction

In the contemporary European context the rise of populism and populist parties is a hotly debated theme. Rightly or wrongly, the recent financial and economic crises have been assumed to fuel the demand for populist parties (see Kriesi/Pappas 2015), and mainstream politicians, including leading EU figures José Manuel Barroso and Herman van Rompuy, have in the past years voiced their concerns about the ‘winds of populism’ (Pop 2012; European Commission 2013). In the academic sphere, too, populism has become a much discussed theme – though not all scholars necessarily concur with the notion that populist parties are transforming political systems in Europe (Mudde 2013; 2014). This contribution considers how successful populist parties across Europe have really been, both in ‘vote-seeking’ as well as ‘office-seeking’ terms (Müller and Strøm 1999). Is it the case that populist parties in Europe have been flourishing electorally in recent years, and how many of them eventually managed to enter governing coalitions?

In addition, the chapter focuses on the tension between office-seeking success and electoral success. It has previously been observed that populist (radical right) parties have increasingly come out of the cold in terms of *Koalitionsefähigkeit* (Bale 2003; Akkerman/De Lange 2012; Albertazzi/McDonnell 2015). However, are populist parties in power able to sustain their popularity, or do their supporters consider their participation in office, which inherently requires compromises, a betrayal of principles? This contribution seeks to clarify whether government participation (or support) hampers the electoral fortunes of populist parties in recent post-incumbency elections.

The chapter is organised as follows. The following section briefly discusses the concept of populism and the way populist parties are defined. Subsequently the electoral performance of populist parties between 2000 and 2015 is discussed. The next section turns to the populist parties which

have joined or supported governing coalitions, and discusses the apparent electoral cost of incumbency or supporting minority coalitions.

2. Populism and populist parties

2.1 Populism

Populism is often said to be an ambiguous term which lacks a clear definition. Indeed, particularly if we consider the vernacular use of the concept, populism is often used as a pejorative and loose term to denote demagoguery, crudeness, opportunism or xenophobia (Mudde 2004; Bale et al. 2012). Even if the concept tends to be treated with more precision in the academic literature, there is still no genuine consensus as to whether populism can best be defined as an opportunistic strategy (of a personalistic leader) (e.g. Weyland 2001; Betz 2002), a particular ‘style’ of politics, marked by its appeal to ordinary people and political incorrectness (e.g. Jagers/Walgrave 2007; Moffitt/Tormey 2013), or rather as an ideology. The latter approach seems to have become quite dominant, however, particularly in the European literature. Indeed, many scholars have adopted Cas Mudde’s (2004: 543) definition of populism as ‘an ideology that considers society to be 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’.

Following this definition, the normative distinction between ‘the people’ and ‘the elites’ is key to populism. Unlike ‘full-fledged’ ideologies such as socialism and liberalism, however, the core ideas of populism do not provide answers to concrete societal problems. This is why populism is regularly perceived to be a ‘thin’ or ‘thin-centred’ ideology (see Freedon 1998); populism as such lacks a ‘programmatic centre’, but it can ‘cohabit’ with more comprehensive ideologies (Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008; Rovira Kaltwasser 2014). This implies that, in reference to European party systems, populism can be an attribute of parties on the (anti-capitalist) left as well as the (culturally conservative and xenophobic) right.

In this contribution a similar ‘ideational’ approach to populism is taken: populism is treated as a set of ideas which can be fundamental to the ideology and behaviour of political actors. Although populism may correlate with a particular ‘style’, such as the use of simplistic and politically incorrect language, the expression of this style should primarily

be interpreted as a *consequence* of the populist ideas and positions (i.e. an antagonistic position *vis-à-vis* the political establishment and an idealisation of the 'common' people). I start out from the idea that populism can be a durable defining attribute of certain political parties. Following my earlier definition (Van Kessel 2015: 13), populist parties:

1. portray 'the people' as virtuous and essentially homogeneous;
2. advocate popular sovereignty, as opposed to elitist rule;
3. define themselves against the political establishment, which is alleged to act against the interest of 'the people'.

2.2 Populist parties in Europe

In Western Europe populism is first and foremost expressed by parties at the radical ends of the political spectrum.¹ Most populist parties in Europe belong to the populist radical right (PRR) party family, which, according to Mudde (2007), combines the ideological elements of nativism (a xenophobic form of nationalism), authoritarianism and populism. The PRR typically defines 'the people' it appeals to in a cultural or ethnic sense, not least by identifying those that *do not* belong to the idealised 'heartland' (Taggart 2000). In the Western European context immigrants and, particularly in recent years, Muslim minority populations are the most typical 'outsiders'. In post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which have previously experienced relatively low levels of non-Western immigration, PRR parties often target Roma and minority populations from neighbouring countries. In general, PRR parties typically criticise the members of the political and cultural elites for facilitating the unbridled inflow of foreigners and/or the demise of national culture.

Though generally less influential than their radical right counterparts, several left-wing populist parties also managed to enter European parliaments (see March 2011). It is important to note that the terms 'left' and 'right' essentially relate to different 'issue dimensions': while the PRR is, through its nativism and authoritarianism, primarily right-wing in a socio-cultural sense, the left-wing populists are defined more by their

1 It can be noted that relating populism to political parties is particularly relevant in the European context, in which parties are still the key political actors in parliamentary systems. Populism is also often discussed in the Latin American context, where the concept is generally associated with individuals: presidents and presidential candidates (see e.g. Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).

socio-economic agenda. Left-wing populists define ‘the people’ in an economic rather than an ethnic sense; they aim to defend the interests of the ‘ordinary (underprivileged) people’ against the malign effects of the capitalist *laissez-faire* economy. The elites they oppose are the agents and beneficiaries of free-market capitalism, including bankers, large companies and the corporate rich, while the political establishment is alleged to act in these elites’ interest. Examples of left-wing populist parties include *Die Linke* in Germany, the Dutch Socialist Party (SP), *Sinn Fein* (SF) in Ireland, and Self Defence (SO) in Poland. The most successful case of left-wing populism – at least for the time being – is SYRIZA in Greece, which won 36.3 per cent of the vote in the first national election of 2015, and subsequently entered government (in coalition with the smaller PRR party ANEL). In the past years, also the Spanish *Podemos* has received ample attention after its victories in European and local elections.

Despite their obvious ideological differences, populist parties of the left and right have in common a natural wariness of the process of European integration. This is in the first place related to the technical and elitist nature of EU-decision making, which all populists are prone to oppose by nature (Canovan 1999; Taggart 2004). Additional arguments against ‘Europe’ do tend to vary between different types of populist parties: the PRR typically perceives the European Union as a ‘foreign’ threat to the sovereignty of their nation, while left-wing populists primarily portray the EU as a neo-liberal project that encourages a ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of welfare entitlements and working conditions (e.g. Hooghe et al. 2002).

The populist nature of several parties is hardly disputed. This includes, for instance, fairly long-established cases such as the French *Front National* (FN), Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) and Italian *Legha Nord* (LN). There are, however, a substantial number of borderline cases (see Van Kessel 2014). Certain parties are difficult to classify. For instance, while conceptually there are differences between communists and left-wing populists, or neo-fascist and populist radical right parties, the divisions may be blurred in practice.² Another difficulty is that populism, when seen as a thin ideology, is easier to adopt or shed than more comprehensive

2 In theory, populists do not subscribe to the fascist ideal of a totalitarian, hierarchically organised and organic state in which the people serve as mere parts of a larger whole. For populists, the people are central, not the state. They idealise the wisdom and ‘common sense’ of the people, which also goes against (certain) Marxists’ notion of a ‘false consciousness’ among the proletariat. Even so, it may be fair to argue that populism has increasingly become a rhetorical element of far-left parties in general (March 2011: 19).

ideologies, which are connected to concrete policy proposals. This means that populism is not always a lasting feature of political parties. The Dutch SP, for instance, toned down its populist appeals considerably after the turn of the 21st century, whereas the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) resorted to an explicit populist rhetoric only during a later stage of its existence.

Using populism as a concept of classification is further complicated by the fact that populism is not exclusively an attribute of far right or far left political parties in former communist countries in CEE. In many of these countries, low levels of public trust and satisfaction with, often scandal-prone, political elites created a favourable environment for populism. A large number of (new) parties, often with a 'centrist' ideological position, have aimed to capitalise on the general anti-establishment mood which materialised in the decade after the transition to democracy (see Učeň 2007; Pop-Eleches 2010; Hanley/Sikk 2014). These parties have been associated with populism due to their anti-establishment (and anti-corruption) appeals, even though not all of them also explicitly defended popular sovereignty or treated 'the people' as a homogeneous body. Arguably, it is more difficult, and perhaps less meaningful, in the post-communist context to pinpoint which parties are populist or not, as populism – or at least anti-establishment discourse – has been a more general feature of CEE politics, rather than an attribute of certain parties at the fringes of the political spectrum only.

Bearing in mind these challenges and accepting the disputable nature of certain borderline cases, I aimed in a previous study to identify the parties which, in the period between 2000 and 2013, could be considered 'genuine' cases of populism (Van Kessel 2015). The following section, which discusses trends in populist party electoral performance, is based on this selection of cases.

3. Trends in the performance of populist parties in Europe

This section provides an overview of the recent electoral performance of different kinds of populist parties across Europe. In the analysis a distinction is made between the years before (2000-2007) and after (2008-2015) the outbreak of the global financial crisis. This is done in order to test the assumption that the financial and economic crises in Europe have fuelled the potential for populist parties (e.g. Kriesi/Pappas 2015). Indeed, there is reason to expect that dissatisfied voters in 'debtor countries' were tempted to vote for populist parties railing against the stipulations of the European Commission and fellow member states which insisted on harsh

austerity measures. In less hard-hit countries within the Eurozone, on the other hand, disgruntled voters may have been convinced by, in particular, the PRR's 'welfare chauvinist' arguments against the bailing out of financially troubled EU members and the pooling of more sovereignty to the European level in response to the crisis.

By comparing the electoral results of populist parties before and after the outbreak of the global financial crisis this chapter thus aims to provide an, admittedly rudimentary, assessment of the electoral consequences of the 'crisis' for populist parties. The section concentrates on countries as the units of analysis and distinguishes between the performances of three categories of populist parties: the populist (radical) right, left-wing populists, and 'centrist' populists – the latter category containing the most heterogeneous collection of parties. The electoral results relate to 'first-order' national elections, which arguably provide the best indication of the strength of populist parties in each country.

3.1 Populist (radical) right parties

Table 1 provides an overview of the electoral performance of populist (radical) right parties in Europe (i.e. the EU-28 plus Iceland, Norway and Switzerland). The table includes clear-cut cases of the PRR, but also some parties which are not quite as radical in their nativist appeals. This includes the True Finns (PS), the Dutch List Pim Fortuyn (LPF), and the Norwegian Progress Party (FrP). These are parties with a less militant xenophobic appeal than genuine PRR parties, but which nevertheless took restrictive stances on immigration and multiculturalism. The Greek Golden Dawn (CA), on the other hand, is actually too extreme to be classified as a PRR party. While the list of parties in Table 1 is thus somewhat heterogeneous in terms of ideology, all cases at least share culture protectionist positions.

When the average vote shares of the national elections in the periods before and after the outbreak of the crisis are considered, it is clear that the populist right is on the up in 15 of the 20 countries where such parties have entered national parliament since 2000. In most countries, however, the change figure is rather small, and not all populist right parties have seen a steady rise in their electoral support. The Flemish Interest (VB) in Belgium, Italian LN, Dutch Freedom Party (PVV), and Norwegian FrP, for instance, actually lost votes in their latest election. What is more, the PRR still lacks parliamentary representation in several European countries, including

Table 1: Populist (radical) right parties in Europe with representation in national parliament between 2000 and (August) 2015.

Country	Parties	Avg. vote share in %		Change
		2000-2007	2008-2015	
Austria	Freedom Party (FPÖ)			
	Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) ¹	12.6	24.4	+ 11.8
Belgium	Flemish Interest (VB)			
	National Front (FN)	13.8	6.0	- 7.8
Bulgaria	Attack Party (Ataka)	4.1	7.1	+ 3.0
Croatia	Party of Rights			
	Dr. Ante Starčević (HSP-AS)	-	2.8	+ 2.8
Czech Rep.	Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit)	-	3.5	+ 3.5
Denmark	Danish People's Party (DF)	13.1	16.7	+ 3.6
Finland	True Finns (PS)	2.9	18.3	+ 15.4
France	National Front (FN)	7.8	13.6	+ 5.8
	Popular Orthodox Rally (LAOS)			
Greece	Independent Greeks (ANEL)	2.0	13.6	+ 11.6
	Golden Dawn (CA) ²			
Hungary	Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)	1.1	18.5	+ 17.4
	Northern League (LN)			
Italy	Northern League (LN)	4.3	6.2	+ 1.9
Latvia	All For Latvia! (VL)	0.8	2.6	+ 1.8
Netherlands	List Pim Fortuyn (LPF)			
	Freedom Party (PVV)	9.5	12.8	+ 3.3
Norway	Progress Party (FrP)	18.4	19.6	+ 1.2
Romania	Greater Romania Party (PRM)	16.3	2.3	- 14.0
Slovakia	Slovak National Party (SNS)	7.5	4.9	- 2.6
Slovenia	Slovenian National Party (SNS)	5.4	3.1	- 2.3
Sweden	Sweden Democrats (SD)	2.2	9.3	+ 7.1
Switzerland	Swiss People's Party (SVP) ³	27.8	26.6	- 1.2
UK	UK Independence Party (UKIP)	1.9	7.9	+ 6.0

Notes: Vote share in each period denotes the average combined vote share for populist (radical) right parties in national elections in the given period. Case selection based on Van Kessel (2015). Data from Nordsieck (2015).

¹ The BZÖ is only considered to be a populist party in the 2006 and 2008 elections.

² The Golden Dawn can better be identified as an undemocratic neo-Nazi party than a case of populism, but is included to illustrate the electoral appeal of xenophobic anti-establishment parties.

³ Several smaller populist parties in Switzerland with a limited vote share have been excluded.

Germany, Poland, Ireland, Portugal and Spain. The latter three countries, all of which were hit hard by the economic crisis, show that dire economic conditions do not automatically generate populist right-wing success.

Finally, it is worthwhile noting that the steepest increase in support for the populist (or extreme) right is observed in certain Western European countries (most notably Greece, Finland, Sweden and the UK). Apart from Hungary, which has seen the rise of *Jobbik*, PRR parties in post-communist countries have had modest success at best, while some actually disappeared from parliament (in Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia).

Thus, while the populist right has become an electoral force to reckon with in many European countries, it is not the case that we see a uniform trend towards greater success for such parties across the continent. Increased success for the populist right is mainly visible in certain Western European countries.

3.2 Left-wing populist parties

Other than right-wing populist parties, left-wing populists traditionally focus on socio-economic rather than cultural issues. Economic hardship may therefore be expected to have enhanced the electoral potential of left-wing populist parties in particular. As is evident from Table 2, however, only a limited number of countries have witnessed an electoral breakthrough of left-wing populists. It must be noted that certain (nominally) communist and other radical left-wing parties, such as the Czech Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) and the Communist Party of Greece (KKE), can be seen as borderline cases, due to their occasional use of populist rhetoric (see March 2011). Even then, it is evident that, across the board, left-wing radicals have fared much less well electorally than their radical right-wing counterparts.

Certain left-wing populists have nevertheless become significant political forces. This applies to the Greek SYRIZA which appealed to the many Greek voters tired of austerity and ‘diktats’ of foreign lenders. Podemos in Spain previously won 8 per cent of the vote in the European Parliament elections of 2014 on the basis of a similar platform, and may well see success in the December 2015 Spanish national election. It is evident that the popularity of these parties is directly related to the crisis-laden political environment in their countries – though also note that we did not see the rise of any (radical-left) newcomers in hard-hit Portugal. The German *Linke*, Irish SF, and Dutch SP have also become noteworthy political players – though the populism of the latter party has become less pronounced. It is clear, however, that the crisis has not caused a wave of left-wing populism across European party systems.

Table 2: Left-wing populist parties in Europe with representation in national parliament between 2000 and (August) 2015.

Country	Parties	Avg. vote share in %		Change
		2000-2007	2008-2015	
Croatia	Croatian Labourists – Labour Party (HL-SR)	-	5.2	+ 5.2
Germany	Party of Dem. Socialism/The Left (PDS/Linke)	6.4	10.3	+ 3.9
Greece	Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA)	3.8	21.2	+ 17.4
Ireland	Sinn Féin (SF)	6.7	9.9	+ 3.2
Netherlands	Socialist Party (SP) ¹	9.6	9.8	+ 0.2
Poland	Self Defence (SO)	7.7	-	- 7.7

Notes: See Table 1 notes.

¹ The SP is a borderline case of populism, as it toned down its populism in the 2000s.

3.3 ‘Centrist’ populist parties

The final group of populists, here labelled ‘centrist’ populist parties, is rather diverse. It should primarily be seen as a category of miscellaneous cases which do not fit easily in the previous categories due to their relatively moderate policy positions – although the Hungarian FIDESZ has been flirting increasingly with the PRR ideology (see e.g. Pirro 2015; Mudde 2015). Table 3 does contain many, what Hanley and Sikk (2014) have called, anti-establishment reform parties (AERPs) from Central and Eastern Europe, which are characterised by their anti-corruption agendas and an otherwise non-radical political ideology. Some of these parties, such as the Bulgarian NDSV and Slovakian *Smer*, have been known for their populist rhetoric during their founding years, but less so in later years. The Hungarian FIDESZ and the Polish PiS actually became more populist in their later years – but the latter toned down its radical anti-establishment rhetoric again more recently. While their more general ideology may not always have changed fundamentally over the years, such cases are difficult to classify as either populist or non-populist.

Table 3: 'Centrist' populist parties in Europe with representation in national parliament between 2000 and (August) 2015.

Country	Parties	Avg. vote share in %		Change
		2000-2007	2008-2015	
Austria	Team Stronach (TS)	-	2.9	+ 2.9
Belgium	List Dedecker (LDD)	2.0	1.2	- 0.8
Bulgaria	National Movement Simeon II (NDSV) ¹			
	Citiz. for European Devel. of Bulgaria (GERB) ¹	21.4	17.1	- 4.3
	Law, Order and Justice (RZS) Bulgaria Without Censorship (BBT)			
Czech Rep.	Public Affairs (VV)		14.8	+ 14.8
	ANO 2011 (ANO)	-		
Hungary	FIDESZ ²	21.0	48.9	+ 27.9
Iceland	Citizens' Movement (BF)	-	3.6	+ 3.6
Italy	Forza Italia (FI)/People for Freedom (PdL)		42.3	+ 15.7
	5 Star Movement (M5S)	26.6		
Lithuania	Labour Party (DP) ³	19.9	10.0	- 9.9
	Order and Justice (TT)			
Luxemb.	Alternative Democratic Reform Party (ADR)	10.0	7.4	- 2.6
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS) ⁴	19.7	-	- 19.7
Romania	People's Party – Dan Diaconescu (PP-DD)	-	7.0	+ 7.0
Slovakia	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)			
	Direction (Smer) ⁵	35.5	6.9	- 28.6
	Ordinary People (...) (OLaNO)			

Notes: See Table 1 notes.

¹ NDSV and GERB are only considered populist parties in 2001 and 2009, respectively.

² FIDESZ is only considered a populist party from 2006 onwards.

³ DP is only considered a populist party in 2004.

⁴ PiS is only considered a populist party in 2005 and 2007.

⁵ Smer is only considered a populist party up until 2006.

The electoral developments shown in Table 3 should thus be approached with some caution; some of the electoral shifts are due to a change in classification instead of a change in the support for individual parties. What the table does show is the strong (and increased) presence of populism in

Italy and Hungary. As regards the latter case, the success of the PRR *Jobbik* in addition to the dominant FIDESZ party should also be considered in that regard. In Italy, the parties of Silvio Berlusconi, *Forza Italia* (FI) and the People of Freedom (Pdl), have remained strong up until the 2013 election. In this latter year, Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement (M5S) also entered parliament with over a quarter of the national vote. It is further evident that the Czech Republic, previously characterised by a relatively stable party system, has in recent years seen the coming (and going) of new anti-establishment parties. On the whole, however, it is difficult to notice European-wide trends on the basis of this table.

4. Populists in power and their electoral fate

As self-proclaimed political outsiders, populist parties in Europe are not naturally part of the governing elites. Table 4 nevertheless shows that there have been many cases of populist parties in government in the past decade and a half. One caveat, once more, is that the populist character of several 'centrist' anti-establishment parties in CEE can be disputed. Nevertheless, the table also shows a considerable (and growing) number of radical parties which have entered or supported governing coalitions. These are predominantly parties of the radical right that formed alliances with centre-right parties (see Bale 2003; De Lange 2012); the only radical left exceptions are Self Defence in Poland – whose spell in office was short and disastrous – and SYRIZA in Greece – which has struggled to retain its ideological credibility during its negotiations with foreign lenders.

What these two cases appear to underline is the notion that populist parties fail once they take government responsibility; they lose the ability to present themselves as political outsiders and fail to live up to expectations. As Mény and Surel (2002: 18) have argued, a populist party's fate 'is to be integrated into the mainstream, to disappear, or to remain permanently in opposition'. Indeed, for parties with an outspoken anti-establishment appeal it is challenging to strike a balance between acting effectively as a responsible coalition partner and maintaining a credible outsider appeal (Heinisch 2003), and studies have shown that 'anti-political establishment parties' tend to lose more heavily than established parties after a period in office (e.g. Van Spanje 2011).

It is indeed evident from Table 4 that populist parties tend to pay an electoral price for governing. While this is not necessarily typical for populist parties only (see e.g. Rose/Mackie 1983), some parties have clearly found it

Table 4: *Populist parties in power between 2000 and (August) 2015.*

Country	Party	Type	Period	Vote ante	Vote post	Change
Austria	FPÖ	PRR	2000-2002	26.9	10.0	- 16.9
	FPÖ	PRR	2003-2005	10.0	11.0	+ 1.0
	BZÖ	PRR	2005-2007	-	4.1	+ 4.1
Bulgaria	NDSV	Centrist	2001-2005	42.7	19.9	- 22.8
	GERB	Centrist	2009-2013	39.7	30.5	- 9.2
Czech Rep.	VV	Centrist	2010-2013	10.9	-	- 10.9
	ANO	Centrist	2014-	18.7	-	-
Denmark	DF*	PRR	2001-2005	12.0	13.3	+ 1.3
	DF*	PRR	2005-2007	13.3	13.9	+ 0.6
	DF*	PRR	2007-2011	13.9	12.3	- 1.6
	DF*	PRR	2015-	21.1	-	-
Finland	PS	PRR	2015-	17.6	-	-
Greece	LAOS	PRR	2011-2012	5.6	2.9	- 2.7
	SYRIZA	Left-wing	2015-	36.3	-	-
	ANEL	PRR	2015-	4.8	-	-
Hungary	FIDESZ	Centrist	2010-2014	52.7	45.0	- 7.7
	FIDESZ	Centrist	2014-	45.0	-	-
Italy	FI	Centrist	2001-2006	29.4	23.7	- 5.7
	PdL	Centrist	2008-2011	37.4	21.6	- 15.8
	PdL	Centrist	2013-2014	21.6	-	-
	LN	PRR	2001-2006	3.9	4.6	+ 0.7
	LN	PRR	2008-2011	8.3	4.1	- 4.2
Lithuania	DP	Centrist	2004-2006	28.4	9.0	- 19.4
	TT	Centrist	2012-	7.3	-	-
Netherlands	LPF	PRR	2002-2003	17.0	5.7	- 11.3
	PVV*	PRR	2010-2012	15.5	10.1	- 5.4
Norway	FrP	PRR	2013-	16.3	-	-
Poland	PiS	Centrist	2005-2007	27.0	32.1	+ 5.1
	SO	Left-wing	2006-2007	11.4	1.5	- 9.9
Slovakia	Smer	Centrist	2006-2010	29.1	34.8	+ 5.7
	HZDS	Centrist	2006-2010	8.8	4.3	- 4.5
	SNS	PRR	2006-2010	11.7	5.1	- 6.6

Notes: The Swiss SVP is not included due to the idiosyncratic Swiss consociational executive system. The figures relate to the national elections prior to and after government participation.

* Parties that did not participate in government but provided parliamentary support.

difficult to reconcile their populist anti-establishment disposition with the responsibilities of government, and consequently lost the support of many members and voters. One notable case is the Austrian FPÖ, whose ineffective spell in government dismayed its grass-roots and supporters, and eventually triggered a split in 2005 – out of which the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ) was born (Luther 2011). In the subsequent years the FPÖ nevertheless recovered from its electoral punishment; the party won 20.5 per cent of the vote in the national election of 2013, while the BZÖ disappeared from parliament. In the Netherlands, the newly founded LPF was also plagued by serious infighting after its leader Pim Fortuyn was murdered – though the bickering was related to personal enmities more than ideological disagreements (De Lange/Art 2011). The party's coalition partners soon pulled the plug out of the government and the LPF subsequently saw a rapid fall in its popularity, and disappeared from the Dutch political scene altogether in 2008. Among the parties which left a bad impression in office were also the NDSV and GERB in Bulgaria, the Czech Public Affairs (VV), the Polish SO, and the Labour Party (DP) in Lithuania. These were all parties which largely built their support on the promise to 'cleanse' politics from corruption, but ended up tainted by scandals themselves.

There are thus various cases of populist parties which left a bad impression in government, because they failed to live up to expectations, fell victim to infighting, or a combination of both. Several scholars have nevertheless questioned the conventional wisdom that populist parties are bound to lose after a period in office, and argued that electoral success may be prolonged if the party's organisational cohesiveness is preserved, an outsider image maintained, and policy successes are claimed (see Zaslove 2012; Akkerman/De Lange 2012; Albertazzi/McDonnell 2015). These scholars pointed to populist parties which (largely) retained their electoral popularity: the Danish People's Party (DF), Italian LN (in 2006), and Swiss People's Party (SVP). These parties successfully managed to 'keep one foot in and one foot out' of government by conveying policy effectiveness to their grass-roots and supporters, and preserving their radical discourse. As demonstrated by Albertazzi and McDonnell (2015) through the cases of PdL, LN and SVP, furthermore, many populist party members and representatives have shown to be quite pragmatic and goal-oriented, and ready to accept inevitable compromises. Furthermore, several larger populist parties, including FIDESZ, PiS, and Berlusconi's FI and PdL, have (long) retained their dominant position in their party systems by convincing

their supporters that their efforts to reshape the established system was still work in progress.

Populist parties are thus not doomed to fail in office. Populist parties that gain votes in post-incumbency elections, however, remain exceptions to the rule. The case of the SVP, furthermore, is not easily comparable to other cases, in view of Switzerland's idiosyncratic decentralised political system, whereby executive decision-making is based on power-sharing and consensus. The DF, on the other hand, never took full government responsibility, which made it ostensibly easier for the party to retain its outsider image and, thus, electoral credibility.

In most cases, then, government participation is not a recipe for success in subsequent elections. However, it is not necessarily a recipe for electoral eradication either, if a populist party can claim to have remained reasonably loyal to its principles and prevent organisational meltdown. The case of the FPÖ has, furthermore, shown that post-incumbency losses can be overcome in the longer run. All in all, while leaving a good impression in office may be particularly hard for populist parties, the electoral damage of joining or supporting a governing coalition may be limited, especially from a longer term perspective.

5. Conclusion

It is often assumed that Europe is witnessing growing success of populist parties in recent years, and that the rise of these parties is facilitated by the consequences of the 'Great Recession'. This chapter has shown that this conventional wisdom requires some qualification. In terms of popular support, it is correct that populist right parties have seen an increase in their success in many European countries. In countries such as Finland, France, Hungary, Sweden and the UK, these parties have made remarkable gains in the most recent national elections. In other countries, however, populist parties fared less well, some still failing to gain parliamentary representation altogether. The crisis has also not led to a surge of left-wing populism, notwithstanding the remarkable rise of SYRIZA in Greece and Podemos in Spain. As far as populist parties with a more centrist or elusive ideological appeal are concerned, it is difficult to see clear European-wide patterns in terms of electoral support.

What is evident, however, is that it has become increasingly common for populist parties to participate in government. In the Central and Eastern European context there have been a considerable number of 'anti-

establishment reform parties' which largely built their support on public dissatisfaction with the political elites, and which often entered government briefly after their foundation (Hanley/Sikk 2014; see also Učeň 2007; Pop-Eleches 2010). In Western Europe, particularly populist (radical) right parties have come out of the cold and entered, or supported, governments in Austria, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland. While it is evident that government participation often comes at an electoral cost for populist parties, some manage to survive when they remain organisationally cohesive and communicate successfully their achievements in office to their supporters and grass-roots (Albertazzi/McDonnell 2015). Although it is still true that populist parties face a difficult challenge in squaring their anti-establishment character with a role in office, they should not be perceived as completely different from their mainstream rivals; indeed, many of their members and voters may be well aware of the compromises involved in taking government responsibility. If governing populists achieve little, disintegrate due to internal struggles, or become involved in corruption scandals, however, their chances of survival are clearly reduced.

Yet it is clear that a considerable number of populist parties managed to sustain their electoral appeal and have become durable forces within their party systems. What is more, the French *Front National*, Danish People's Party, and Norwegian Progress Party all underwent successful leadership transitions in the past decade, showing that populist parties are certainly not always 'flash-in-the-pan parties', which rely solely on the appeal of a single 'charismatic' leader.

What is more, in particular the populist radical right seems to have benefited from the emergence of a new structural cleavage between 'winners' and 'losers' of globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2008). The PRR appeals to the latter group: socially less mobile and culturally conservative voters anxious about the consequences of globalisation. In many countries PRR parties have become the natural 'owners' of issues such as immigration and European integration. These are salient issues with regard to which mainstream parties typically fail to take clear positions (see Van Kessel 2015). While immigration has thus far hardly been a theme in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the recent flow of refugees from the Middle East and Africa, and the EU's plans to divide asylum seekers over its member states, may also push the issue higher up political agendas in this part of Europe.

By limiting itself to the electoral performance and government participation of populist parties, this chapter has only considered part of the

puzzle concerning the success and failure of populist parties in Europe. Certainly if the focus is on policy outcomes, it is also important to consider the impact populist parties have on their rivals' agendas (see e.g. Meguid 2008; Abou-Chadi 2014). It is clear, in any case, that populist parties have carved out an important place for themselves across European party systems, and thus have become fairly ordinary political actors which are here to stay.

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