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Abstract

In this paper we analyse the extent to which party programmes reflect the populist type of democracy-critique and propose a classification of different types of populism. We define populism as a political ideology critical of representative democracy but not necessarily anti-democratic, claiming that populism is more than mere political tactics or style of political communication. Populism is operationalised into three core dimensions: populists combine an appeal to 'the people' with anti-establishment critique and a call for a more direct link between political leaders and citizens. We analyse party programmes of six parties that are often labelled populist: the Schweizerische Volkspartei (Switzerland), the Front National (France), Lijst Pim Fortuyn (the Netherlands), Vlaams Blok (Belgium), Die Republikaner (Germany) and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Austria). Our analysis shows that substantial programmatic differences exist between these parties and we therefore distinguish between several varieties of populism, depending on the way 'the people' are defined, the character of anti-establishment statements and the type of proposals for creating a direct link between citizens and government. Hence we reject the undifferentiated and dichotomous use of the concept populism and suggest four dimensions along which populist parties can be classified.

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1 Introduction

With the increasing political turmoil in European party systems over the last two decades, populism has become an often-used concept in political science. Focusing on new challenger-parties such as the Dutch Lijst Pim Fortuyn, the Flemish Vlaams Blok and the French Front National scholars try to explain the success and nature of these parties and the like by using the concept of populism (Arditi 2003; Arzheimer 2003; Betz 2002; Betz and Immerfall 1998; Hayward 1996; Ivarsflaten 2002, 2003; Jagers and Walgrave 2003; Kitschelt 1995, 2002; Taggart 2002). However, the label ‘populist parties’ is used indiscriminately, often in a dichotomous manner (parties are populist or not) and without too much consideration for inter-party differences. While this lack of conceptual precision is not uncommon among political scientists, we argue that the term populism needs to be defined *and* operationalised more precisely and in a relative manner, providing the opportunity of variation among political parties across time and space.

In political science literature there is much confusion and ambiguity about the nature and character of populism. Populism is sometimes considered to be only a tactical device, a mere form of rhetoric or style of communication (Jagers and Walgrave 2003). We argue that it is more fruitful to perceive of populism as an ideology, which incorporates a specific form of democracy-critique. Thus, we conceptualise and operationalise populism to its core element: the sovereignty of the people. In this we follow Margaret Canovan who understands populism ‘as an appeal to “the people” against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society’ (Canovan 1999: 3). In this appeal to the people we recognise a call for the removal of the establishment, a rejection of their values, and a cry for their replacement so that the direct link between people and the political leadership can be restored. This populist view of the establishment as the political ‘other’ is not merely an opportunistic electoral strategy, but part of a wider ideologically founded critique. Contemporary populists perceive a profound crisis of representative democracy caused by an elite that is neither representative of, nor responsive to the people. Populists campaign for institutional changes that will break down or at least weaken the political intermediaries, in particular the traditional parties, which stand in the way of the free expression of the will of the sovereign people through their real leader.

Due to the often imprecise or ambiguous operationalisation of populism, political parties are often labelled populist in a haphazard fashion. Most often the ‘usual suspects’ are the radical right wing parties in Western Europe. While we do not exclude the possibility that these parties may have populist characteristics, we develop a systematic and comprehensive conceptualisation of populism that allows us to assess to what extent all political parties are populist. After a brief overview of the populism-debate in section 2, we develop three core dimensions of populism (appeal to the people, anti-establishment attitude and pro-direct democracy stance). Subsequently we analyse the party-programs of six of the ‘usual suspects’ to assess to what extent they can indeed be called populist.

2 Populism: a contested concept

In spite of the frequently uttered *cri-de-coeur* that populism is too vague a term, most studies into populism devote little attention to defining populism. Moreover, little scholarly consensus seems to exist on the exact definition of populism and parties are often considered populist according to conventional wisdom (see for example Golder 2003). Hence, we agree with Canovan (1999: 3) when she states that ‘there is a good deal of agreement on which political phenomena fall into this category but less clarity about what is it that makes them populist’. So we are left with the unsatisfactory situation that political observers seem to know exactly who to call populist but not what precisely constitutes populism. This becomes even more problematic when one considers that, unlike ideologies such as liberalism and socialism, hardly any contemporary European party likes to refer to itself as populist (an exception being the Greek Populist Orthodox Rally). Thus, the fuzziness of the concept, its random use and the pejorative meaning of populism obscure the scientific and public debate.

2.1 Populism as a political tool or style of political communication

In order to construct an analytical conception of populism with empirical validity, it is necessary to distinguish between the various approaches to the concept. A main distinction is the understanding of populism as political tactics or strategy vis-à-vis populism as an ideology. Several scholars see populism as a tool or a certain style of politics (Canovan 1981; Taggart 2000; Jagers and Walgrave 2003). However, approaching populism as mere tactics is problematic. As Taggart (2000) himself puts it: “often the populist style is confused with a style that simply seeks to be popular”, i.e. an attempt to appeal to a wide range of people. This tactic of appealing to a broad electoral clientele is closely associated to the ‘catch-all people’s party’, which is not necessarily populist (Kirchheimer 1966; Krouwel 1999; 2003). Such conceptualisation of populism as a strategy has been forwarded by Jagers and Walgrave (2003). In their approach, the defining element of populism is an appeal to the people (‘populus’), with which populist parties identify and legitimise themselves. In an analysis of television-broadcasts by political parties, Jagers and Walgrave conclude that substantial differences exist between the political communication style of the Vlaams Blok and other parties. They argue that the difference is: populism. This finding corroborates the intuitively plausible idea that there are differences in discourse between populist and non-populist parties. However, the problematic aspect of approaching populism as a political style tactic remains that it virtually denies populism to have any substance.

A second approach understands populism as ‘saying what people want to hear’ and ‘to simplify political matters’. This, however, automatically leads to the conclusion that all political parties are populist as it is one of the crucial functions of political parties to offer straightforward and clear political alternatives to the electorate. As Mudde (1998) rightfully points out, political populism is then basically reduced to nothing more than political campaigning techniques. In order to circumvent these problems one needs to differentiate populism from general attempts

to win broad popular support, which is essential to democracy. Equally problematic is Taggart's definition of populism as 'an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis' (2000: 5). Populism in Taggart's view has been 'a tool of progressives, of reactionaries, of democrats, of autocrats, of the left and of the right.' (2000: 3). While Taggart's definition taps into important elements of populism, in the end he denies it to have any substance and again populism is perceived as a tool. Similarly, Shils argued that 'populism is characterised by oppositionalism' (cited in Berlin et al. 1969: 12), while Kitschling agrees that 'populism is essentially a reaction to rule' (cited in Taggart 2000: 14). Defining populism only as a political tactic, merely a style of communication or as an anti-political and oppositional stance misses the essence of populism. We argue here that populism is an ideology with several constituent elements, all derived from its central aim: to inject the will of the sovereign people directly into the democratic decision-making process. As Abts (2004: 5) puts it, 'without references to an ideological core, populism risks being reduced into a purely rhetorical instrument potentially connected to any ideological project' (our translation).

2.2 Populist ideology: the nemesis of representative democracy

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

The first element of a populist ideology is found in the populists' rejection of the political establishment. While critique and rejection of government policies is the *raison d'être* of every oppositional party, populist parties develop a unique set of arguments about the malfunctioning of representative democracy and the ruling class. In 'normal' democratic political competition the other parties or politicians are perceived as 'contenders' (*alter ego*), yet anti-political-establishment-politics [populists among them] treats the other as an "adversary" (*alien*)' (Schedler 1996: 300). Populism is not anti-democratic. Democracy as an idea is not challenged in principle, but in its organisational form. Populist emphasise the tension between democracy as an ideal and democracy as a practice. Populists criticise the intermediary organisations that stand in the way of the true, direct and uncorrupted expression of the will of the people. Populism is not anti-political either; it is highly political, but it dismisses 'politics as usual', the political establishment and the 'political class'. Finally, populism should not be perceived as 'anti-system' in the sense of total rejection of the current order: populist parties do not propose a coherent and comprehensive alternative to the political-economic organisation of society, as the radical left once did. In the populist mind representative democracy needs redemption, not replacement.

What populists attack is representative democracy as it is organised and the elite that perverts it. It is important to note that populists do not entirely reject representative democracy (they operate in it); they are not anti-democrats, but democrats who are mugged by reality. Their disapproval of representative democracy is a disapproval of elitist democracy and its institutional framework. In their view, representatives do not represent the people but only themselves. Democracy as it functions is attacked in the name of democracy as an ideal. Populism is then, in the words of Kitschelt (2002: 179), ‘an expression of dissatisfaction with existing modes of organisation of elite-mass political intermediation’. This dissatisfaction is expressed in a typical vocabulary and discourse. The populist critique on representative democracy focuses on parties as *partes pro toto*; parties are the heart of representative democracies. An interesting notion in this respect is the contribution of Peter Mair (2002), who argues that the real distinction to be made is the one between populist democracy and party democracy. Therefore, he says, Tony Blair is populist because he bypasses his own party. Politicians such as Blair, the German Kanzler Schröder and Dutch Labour leader Wouter Bos try to circumvent the intermediaries in their own parties and establish a direct link with party members and the wider electorate. Yet, it seems more appropriate to call these politicians political entrepreneurs as they clearly remain within established parties and do not reject the main institutional framework of representative democracy.

Next to an anti-political party and anti-establishment stance, populists also formulate critique against other political intermediary organisations such as trade unions and interest organisations, against the bureaucracy and the press. All these agents obstruct the free expression of the will of the people. They simply stand in the way of the direct link between the people and their real political leader. For populists, this popular will is the only legitimatisation for political action.

The second criterion for an ideology – a sketch of the ideal type situation – is represented within the populist ideology by the idea that governing should be grounded in the ‘*volonté général*’. Democracy demands that political decisions are made under full popular control, and should be a vocation of the will of the people. This brings with it a certain notion of the people, perceived as one, united and organic. No cleavages exist but the one between the elite versus the mass, between the establishment and the people. Clearly the populist leader sides with the people on this divide. In the eyes of the populist, the established elites have hijacked representative democracy, and populists will bring it back to the people. As Mudde highlighted, elite and mass are moral categories that do not need to exist in reality (2002). This leaves room for different connotations of the people, who can be defined ethnically, civically or as the common people (‘the silent majority’).

The people are seen as united and uniform so therefore references to ‘the people’ should not (only) be understood as rhetorical claims, but as part of a consistent ideology. This notion of the monolithic people sharpens the distinction between the sovereign people and those ruling in their name. Populists construct two cleavages: between the people and the establishment,

and between ‘the political class’ and the populist leader himself (Schedler 1996). For populists differences between opposition and government are without meaning. Populists ‘recode the universe of political actors as a homogeneous political class’ (Schedler 1996: 295). For populists, the entire political establishment, whether in government or not, is recruited through the same corrupt institutional mechanism and they all take part in a corrupt system through which betrays the will of the people.

The third constituent element of an ideology, how to get from the perverted reality to an ideal situation, consists of proposals by populists to break down intermediary structures and to construct more direct links between the people and the leader. Populists will propagate more direct forms of democracy, in casu referenda, popular consultations and direct election of office-holders. By election of the populist leader (or in the pure populist mind, by his natural selection), and through the introduction of mechanisms of direct democracy, the ideal of sovereignty and supremacy of the will of the people will be restored. The populist ideology thus has constructive elements to it, not only being ‘a vehicle of protest, but at the same time creating an identity [...] aimed at changing the political regime’ (Abts 2004: 8, our translation).

3 Operationalisation of populism as an ideology

From our definition of populism as an ideology, we can develop quantitative and qualitative indicators to examine the extent of populism in party programmes, political broadcast, websites or political speeches. According to our operationalisation, party programmes are populist only when tapping into all three dimensions: (1) there must be references to ‘the people’ in the sense of ‘common people’ or ‘ordinary men’ who the populist claims to represent; (2) programmes must include proposals to create a direct relationship between the people and the power holders; and (3) they have to contain anti-establishment or anti-elite statements. In this manner we can isolate parties that ‘merely’ propose instruments of direct democracy or those who are ‘simply’ opposition parties from populists.

The first stage of our analysis of party programmes is of a quantitative nature. In line with the saliency approach (see Robertson 1976), we will simply calculate the percentage of sentences referring to ‘the people’, as well as the proportion of anti-establishment and anti-elite statements and sentences with proposals for more direct forms of democracy. On the basis of these data we draw preliminary conclusions on the level of populism. In a subsequent stage we will conduct a more in-depth qualitative content analysis of party manifestoes to assess the precise nature and intensity of these populist statements, taking into account the context on which they bear heavily.

3.1 References to ‘the people’

Our first indicator of populism consists of defining ‘the people’ as an organic monolithic entity of common men. For populists, the people are ‘one and indivisible’ (Schedler 1996: 294), but also ‘ordinary’ (Canovan 1999: 5). Central to populism is further the accusation that the

establishment divides the people and acts only in the interest of particular groups at the detriment of the public good. 'Although reference to the people is common to several political languages, not any appeal to them is coupled with the denunciation of the illegitimate power of a small clique of elites' (Papadopoulos 2000: 5). When speaking about the people, we expect populists to employ a general terminology, indeed using terms such as 'the people' or 'the citizens'. That is not to say however that references to 'the people' cannot be expressed in more specific terms. Populists utilise various definitions of the people, of who constitutes the people and of its qualities; from the entire nation to the underdogs (Canovan 1984, in Abts 2004). In their attempt to appeal to a broad public, populists may speak for example of car owners or teachers as well. These groups are presented as representative for the people in general, victims of the establishment and their self-interested politics. This underlines the populist idea of people as 'ordinary men' or 'common, tax-paying civilians', as an illustration of their connection with and understanding of the people and their singular will. After all, 'all virtue resides in the people, one and undivided, and all hope resides in its saviour, one and incorruptible (Schedler 1996: 294). We thus consider statements in party programmes populist if 'the people' are understood as a monolithic entity without internal cleavages, and if references reflect an understanding of the people as 'common and ordinary', in need of protection against the establishment.

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

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

The most evident indicator here lies in concrete proposals for direct democracy such as binding referenda, recalls and popular initiatives, popular consultation and direct elections, or reforms of the electoral system. For the quantitative part of our analysis we will take into account proposals for direct election of heads of state and mayors, binding referenda and public consultation. We will simply apply the rule that if these typical instruments of direct democracy are proposed or supported in a party programme, the second quintessential element of populism is present. In the qualitative part of our analysis we will also take into account other institutional proposals and more abstract pledges for change and legitimacy, and promises of 'political reform' that we assume to be characteristic for the populist rhetoric. As Papadopoulos (2000: 7) puts it, 'populists [...] have [...] a ready-made solution to present: more transparency to preclude informational asymmetry, or better more cleanness'. Here we will also include references to the populist party itself, or better 'movement', and its leadership. Only they possess the virtues that both distinguish them from the establishment and which guarantee the

restoration of ‘government by the people, for the people’. Taken into account are references in which the populist movement is portrayed as the sole legitimate alternative to the political institutions of the establishment and the only genuine conveyer of the popular will. Here we may think of populists referring to their party as the ‘movement’ that can replace the existing political intermediaries for bringing the popular will into politics and an emphasis on the party’s leadership and cadre as ‘ordinary men and women’ who serve as the direct link between the preferences of the people and the political arena.

3.3 Anti-establishment statements

Our third indicator of the populist ideology consists of statements directed against an establishment of non-representative elites that are recruited through and can survive thanks to intermediary institutions and structures. In the populist mind, these intermediary institutions harm the sovereignty of the people as they cut the direct line between the people and their true advocates, i.e. the populist leader(ship). Against the populist ideal stand formalised structures such as political parties and government formation, as well as – and probably even more so – informal habits that allegedly represent nepotism and corruption. Populist oratory directed against the establishment can take many forms. It may be directed at specific institutions, policies or individual politicians, or formulated in a more general and abstract fashion, against a ‘system of old parties’, ‘political class’, or ‘the establishment’. It may thereby be concentrated not only at political institutions and actors alone since cultural elites, media, trade unions, bureaucrats and intellectuals are in the populist imagination suspicious of disturbing the direct link between the people and their leader too. They all diffuse the will of the people into particular or individual interests. Populists, in the words of Margaret Canovan, ‘direct their challenge to both the political and economic establishments *and* elite values of the type held by opinion-formers in the academia and the media’ (1999: 3). The primary goal of these statements is to ‘delegitimise established structures of interest articulation and aggregation’ (Barney and Laycock 1999: 321).

This potentially wide range of statements will first be approached in a quantitative manner. We will count statements directed against a perceivably corrupt and self-interested elite of politicians, ‘established parties’, ‘politics’ and media as well as pejorative references to institutions, bureaucracy and intermediary organisations in general. We assume that the higher the overall number of anti-establishment statements, the more populist the party under investigation is. In detailed descriptions of each party we will go into the nature and intensity of the anti-establishment statements we found. As we stated before, all three elements of the populist ideology need to be discernible in a party programme before we can label a political party populist.

4 Populism in six party programmes

In the following paragraphs we present the results of our analyses into the populist content of six European party programmes. Sections 4.2 to 4.4 contain the findings for each party on the three dimensions of our populism model, as well as representative quotes from the party manifestoes. In sections 4.5 and 4.6 we draw on our data for a comparison of the parties in terms of their relative level of populism, and introduce a preliminary typology of populist parties. We analysed recent versions of election programmes of six European political parties: the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), French Front National (FN), Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF) from the Netherlands, the Vlaams Blok (VB), the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (FPÖ)¹ and Die Republikaner from Germany. The main reason for our case selection is that all of these parties are often labelled populist by political observers. We want to establish whether and to which extent this label is justified. Our relative and continuous conceptualisation of populism allows variation among parties concerning their level of populism on each of the three dimensions. Before presenting the results of the programme analysis, we will shortly introduce the six political parties included in our research.

4.1 Six European parties ‘suspected’ of populism

The *Schweizerische Volkspartei* has existed since 1971 when it was formed from a merger of the Bernische Bauern-, Gewerbe-, und Bürgerpartei (BGB, founded in 1918) and the Democratic Parties of German-speaking cantons Glarus and Graubünden. Originally the SVP was exclusively active in the German-speaking cantons of Switzerland, but it now has branches in all three other language areas too. It consequently developed into a Swiss nationalist party, although it is still strongest in the German-speaking part and historically associated with protestant middle-class. In the 2003 general elections the SVP gained 55 out of 200 seats in the lower house, thus becoming the largest party, and obtained two out of the seven *Bundesrat*-positions. Especially the Zurich branch of the SVP, previously led by Christoph Blocher (until his inauguration as Minister of Justice also president of the radical AUNS – *Aktion für eine unabhängige und neutrale Schweiz*), has been labelled populist (Linder 1999).

The *Front National* was founded by Jean-Marie Le Pen in 1972, who started his political career with the anti-European and nationalist Poujadists in the 1950s. FN’s hostility towards immigrants and Le Pen’s numerous allegedly racist statements have shocked many but not withheld the party of being elected into the European Parliament and into office in some French towns. Front National’s greatest national success was acquired during the 2002 presidential elections when Le Pen made it to the second round, beating the socialist leader Jospin in the first round. Although more often labelled extreme-right, FN has been portrayed as a populist movement by several scholars (Golder 2003; Scharsach 2002).

During the 2002 Dutch elections newcomer *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* won a landslide victory, obtaining 26 out of 150 available seats in parliament. LPF’s turbulent rise and the behaviour of its flamboyant leader – Pim Fortuyn, who was assassinated nine days before the elections

– caused several scholars to draw on the concept of populism in an attempt to classify this newcomer (see Van der Brug 2003; Keman and Pennings 2003).

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

The *Freiheitliche Partei Österreich* has been on the Austrian political scene since the 1970s, presenting itself as a liberal party. Since the late 1980s however, the rise of its most prominent political leader Jörg Haider and a seemingly consequent radicalisation of the party’s stances on immigration led many to label FPÖ radical right wing and populist (Betz and Immerfall 1998; Papadopoulos 2000; Scharsach 2003).

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

4.2 References to the ‘people’

It is not hard to find clear examples of references to the people in party manifestoes of the SVP. Statements like “*Der Mittelstand wird ausgesaugt*” and a plea for “*Dem Volk das letzte Wort auch in der Aussenpolitik*” are the most explicit examples of a total of 49 coded references to the people (or synonyms as *Das Volk*, *Der Wähler*, *Burger*, *Bevölkerung* or *Publikum*). Some references to the cleavage between the people and the state, between the establishment and the SVP were less indisputable. We did include statements for which this rhetoric opposition unequivocally followed from the context, but remained out any statements in which this cleavage left unmentioned. The references to the people have a civic connotation rather than a nationalistic one.

In the lengthy programme of the Front National we coded a total of 106 references to the people, 86 of which can be interpreted as speaking of the monolithic, sovereign entity pitted against its enemy, the establishment. Twenty statements can subsequently be characterised as referring to subgroups within the nation, examples being farmers and entrepreneurs. The references to the people the FN is making have an explicit nationalist connotation, the great majority constituted of the category ‘The French’ (*Les Français*), followed by ‘compatriots’ (*Les compatriotes*). This observation is strengthened by the fact that many statements reflect

FN's interpretation that the bulk of the problems the people suffer result from immigration and the process of European Integration.

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

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

For the FPÖ we coded a total of 27 references, 13 of which refer to the people vis-à-vis the establishment and 14 to different subgroups. The majority of the 13 general references carry the word citizen (*'Bürger'* and *'Bürgernähe'*, the latter can be translated as 'close to the citizens'). Two references refer to 'the people' (*'Das Volk'*), understood as the Austrian nation, which is constituted of different historic, German-speaking, *'Volksgruppen'*. Besides this nationalist notion of the people, many statements refer either to different occupational groups such as farmers (*'Bauern'*), employees in so-called unprotected sectors (*'Erwerbstätige im nichtgeschützten Bereich'*), artists (*'Künstler'*), or to members of the working – i.e. tax-paying – population. The latter are referred to in terms of 'the insured' (*'Versicherte'*), 'the contributing' (*'Beitragszahler'*) and 'economic effort-makers' (*'Leistungsträger'*).

In *'Een toekomst voor Vlaanderen'*, Vlaams Blok's party programme of December 2002 we counted a total number of 102 references to the people, 78 of which refer to 'people-against-establishment' and 24 to particular, mostly occupational, groups. With 18 references 'we' (wij/we) is the term most often employed, followed by two categories that may be translated as 'the people' (12 + 12 times: *'Volk'* and *'Mensen'*). The former should be understood in a regionalist (Flemish) context, the latter as 'common' or 'ordinary' people. Important to note is that VB oftentimes equates itself with the people, when 'we' in one sentence refers to the party cadre whereas in the next it relates to the Flemish people. We coded references to subgroups within the Flemish community too: shop-owners, handicapped and small entrepreneurs. The VB mentioned these groups of 'common men' as illustrations of the entire Flemish population that perceivably is the victim of an illegitimate and unrepresentative establishment, of crime, of unfair financial flows to the Walloons and of immigration. These subgroups are partes-pro-toto

for the ‘ordinary people’ that deserve to be freed from the yoke of Belgian federalism and a self-interested and corrupt establishment.

4.3 People-leadership relations

As Switzerland utilises the instruments of direct democracies more than any other European country, a clear-cut plea for more direct forms of democracy cannot be expected from the SVP. We do notice, however, that the SVP identifies itself strongly with popular initiatives for referenda: “*Die SVP wird auch in Zukunft die Instrumente der direkten Demokratie nutzen müssen, wenn sie in den Parlamenten keine Mehrheit findet*”. The SVP sees as the advantage of direct democracy that “*Probleme dort gelöst werden, wo sie entstehen*”. Instead of arguing for more direct forms of democracy, which are already in place in Switzerland, the SVP emphasises its approval of the frequent use of these instruments as it allows citizens to bring the popular will directly into the political arena.

With regard to strengthening the link between citizens and leaders Front National proposes some institutional changes such as extending the role of referenda and popular initiatives, but a more general democratic rhetoric is missing. The statements that reflect such ideas are few and lack a truly unmistakable democratic content, examples being ‘returning to the French possession of their liberties’ (*‘Rendre les Français propriétaires de leurs libertés’*), and ‘FN puts the interests of France and the French before it all’ (p. 180: *‘[...] Il met l’intérêt du peuple français au premier rang des devoirs du politique’*). FN also promises to reduce the influence of lobbies on decision-making and to fight cliëntelism in French politics (p. 75: *‘La concentration du pouvoir entre les mains d’un petit nombre d’hommes, sans mandat ni contrôle du pays, les rend plus que perméables à l’influence de lobbies de tous ordres, venus les “éclairer” sur les décisions à prendre’*). One further needs to bear in mind that the Head of Government in France is already directly elected; FN does however not put forward a proposal for direct election of mayors.

With regard to our second dimension of the populist ideology, the LPF advocates concrete proposals for the direct election of office-holders, in casu mayors and the prime-minister, is in favour of public consultations and referenda, specifically about EU-issues. These statements are embedded in a general democratically inspired call for transparency (*‘Parlementair taalgebruik moet duidelijk en begrijpelijk zijn voor iedereen’*), and a proposal to reserve speaking time in parliament for citizens. The programme has a clear democratic vocabulary, calling for citizens to have access to government again (*‘Het openbaar bestuur moet weer toegankelijk worden voor de burger’*).

Die Republikaner also call for a general strengthening of democracy (*‘Stärkung der direkten Demokratie’*), which materialises in a call for referenda (*‘Volkabstimmungen’*) and elected officials (Head of Government; mayors are already directly elected in Germany). They also advocate *‘Chancengleichheit für noch nicht in den Parlamenten vertretene Parteien’* and denounce big companies for lack of democratic legitimisation. There is a clear and concrete call

for democratic reforms, but more abstract oratory in favour of democratic deepening could be witnessed as well.

The FPÖ speaks of ‘an ongoing commitment to develop and preserve democracy for the people’ (*‘Aufbauen und erhalten bürgernahe Demokratie’*, FPÖ 1997a: 6). In a separate chapter devoted to reform of democracy, it is stated that ‘Austria’s political system needs on the one hand more free competition between democratic forces within the framework of a multi-party system and the reduction of influence by parties and lobbies’ (*‘Abbauen von Parteien und Verbänden durchdrungenes staatliches System’*, FPÖ 1997a: 13). In its chapter on democratic reform, the FPÖ calls for complementation of parliamentarism by instruments of direct democracy. The FPÖ promises to introduce plebiscitary rights in all fields of provincial and federal legislation. The FPÖ proposes the following instruments of direct democracy: extended possibilities for referenda and public questionnaires; direct election of the members of the Federal Council, whose power should be restored in relation to extra-constitutional (illegitimate) institutions; direct election (‘direct ballots by the people’) of the highest organs of the state (president, ministers, governors, mayors and administrative heads) and premature removal of such organs through a referendum (FPÖ 1997b: 18-19). For the FPÖ, ‘dependence on an overbearing bureaucracy, on a chamber state or on a state apparatus dominated by parties should be reduced according to the principle of freedom’ (FPÖ 1997b: 3). These statements can be interpreted as supporting the populist thought of un-intermediated links between the people and their leader.

We found that the VB both employs abstract democratic rhetoric and proposes the introduction of concrete instruments of direct democracy. With regard to the latter, VB argues for direct elections of the head of government and mayors as well as for the introduction of binding referenda. In more general terms VB calls for ‘revaluation of parliament’ (VB 2002: 9: *‘het parlement [...] herwaarden’*), ‘more democracy’ (p.: 9: *‘meer democratie’*), and ‘more involvement of the people in decision-making’ (p. 8: *‘het volk meer betrekken bij besluitvorming’*). VB’s statement and theme of its 1996 party congress ‘the people decide’ (p. 9 – 11: *‘het volk beslist’*) should further convince voters of the VB’s populist project of bringing back democracy to the people.

4.4 Anti-establishment statements

Although the SVP constantly makes liberal claims of the type “*Minimum an Staat und einem Maximum an Markt*”, the explicit denunciation of (corrupted, perverted) bureaucratic institutions are not numerous and often not very explicit. One of the clearer examples: “*Staatliche Investitionsprogramme sind höchstens dazu geeignet, die Staatsquote zu erhöhen und befreundeten Firmen staatliche Aufträge zuzuschancen*”. Clearly falling into the anti-intermediaries dimension of populist ideology are typical claims such as “*Unnötige Regulierungen*” and “*bürokratische Schikanie*”. On the anti-elite dimension more numerous and explicit statements were found. The clearest examples of anti-statements are “*Parlamentarier geben für ihre Reisen pro Monat mehr Geld aus, als Schweizer Familien zum Leben haben*” and “*Die Ausgabenfreudigkeit*

von Bundesrat und Parlament”, „Einige wenige diktierten die Meinung, welche die Presse zu vertreten hat” and “Es ist Zeit für eine Trendwende zurück zu einer ordnungspolitisch sauberen, verantwortungsbewussten Politik, frei von Filz und ruinöser Vetternwirtschaft”. While most of the anti-elite statements are focused mainly on the ‘anderen Parteien’ or “so genannten Mittelparteien Bundesrat und Parlament”, this critique broadens itself beyond the political actors, and includes negativism about big companies and the media.

The Front National shoots its arrows both at the elites and at national and European institutions. In the former category we coded 60 statements, the latter comprises of 55 references. FN especially criticises the illegitimacy of the ruling elites, using terms such as oligarchy, despotism, abuse and nepotism (p. 179: ‘*La scène politique actuelle est un théâtre d’ombres où ceux qui dirigent effectivement se situent dans les coulisses, [...] La principale caractéristique de la culture officielle est de faire travailler le cercle des “amis” en dehors duquel il n’y a point de salut.*’). According to FN, the ‘bourgeois dynasties’ are at the heart of an opaque political system, political and economic elites are automatically reproduced through ENA (National school for administration), public and private positions are exchanged and electoral mandates are conveyed from father to son (p. 76: ‘*Jamais les “dynasties bourgeoises” n’ont été autant présentes. [Les] responsables politiques et économiques [...] s’échangent postes publics et directions de grandes sociétés, épouses ou maîtresses de ministres socialistes, journalistes de télévision, mandats électoraux transmis de père en fils*’). The critique of the elites not only focuses on political actors, as journalists, scientists and bureaucrats are displayed as part of the failed system too. FN also condemns the overkill of bureaucracy and institutions, which cannot even produce proper social and economic output: ‘*[...] près de la moitié de la richesse créée dans notre pays est reprise par les administrations étatiques, locales et sociales*’ (p. 116).

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

For Die Republikaner, our broad anti-category is dominated by anti-party and anti-elite statements, numbering respectively 13 and 10 (an example being: “*Monopolisierung politischer Macht bei wenigen Parteien*”). Die Republikaner see a conspiracy of the elites against society, expressed by statements such as ‘*Denkverbote*’, and a plea for ‘*wissenschaftliche Objektivität*’ in order to avoid ‘*politischer Indoktrination*’.

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

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

The VB overwhelmingly directs its anti-establishment statements against the elite, to a lesser extent against intermediaries. The federal system (p. 2: '*de Belgische constructie*') is claimed illegitimate and so opaque that 'even specialists cannot find their way through its labyrinths' (p. 2: '*een doolhof waarin zelfs specialisten hun weg niet vinden*'). The multi-cultural society is deemed utopian and its perceived advocates (p. 17: '*de progressieve multiculturele lobby*' and p. 15: '*Guy Verhofstadt [...] profet van het multiculturele geloof*') accused of working against the ordinary man (p. 15: '*De multiculturele verrijking is [...] uitgedraaid op een dagelijkse nachtmerrie*'). The VB speaks literally of 'behind-the-scenes politics' (p. 9: '*achterkamertjes[politiek]*'), which is claimed to have replaced parliament as the primary and legitimate arena for decision-making. Further, governing parties are accused of denying recommendations made by parliamentary investigation committees. These are all, in the words of VB, 'undemocratic and dictatorial practices' (VB 2002: 9, 11). Stances of 'the ruling political class' (p.9: '*de heersende politieke klasse*') are alleged to often diverge from those of the people, especially with regard to drugs issues, immigration, crime and ethical issues. This leads the VB to claim that 'parliamentary democracy runs short with respect to democratic legitimacy' (VB 2002: p. 9). The crooks in this corrupt system are the Walloons, the government parties (especially the Flemish liberals – which are said to have forgotten their earlier pro-Flanders stance – and the Walloon PS blocking pro-Flanders policies), the media (specifically the Flemish public broadcasting association VRT, which is claimed to have started 'a dirty and holy war against VB', see p. 11 'media and democracy'), the French speaking community, 'Flemish' political parties, 'traditional parties and the media', politics (p. 15: '*de politiek*'), 'democratic' political

parties (p. 9: *'zelfverkleerde democraten'*), and established political parties (p. 4, 9, 27: *'de traditionele partijen'*). When speaking of crimes (perceivably) committed by immigrants, the establishment as an integrative cluster of the government, journalists and scientists, is explicitly placed opposite to 'the people' (p. 28: *'de mensen op het terrain, magistraten en agenten'*) and the VB. 'Whereas the establishment wrongly focused on low-quality scientific reports related to the subject, the people and VB knew better all the time' (VB 2002: p. 28). And, 'what government calls petty crimes often leads to huge traumas for the people involved' (p. 26: *'wat voor de overheid "kleine criminaliteit" is, leidt voor de betrokkene vaak tot grote trauma's'*). VB's anti-establishment statements are thus directed against a wide range of both elites and institutions and practices. The VB sketches the establishment in a broad sense, including political parties and individual politicians, the media and scientists. Trade unions, insurance companies and even the church are accused of illegitimately influencing decision-making processes, thus of disturbing the democratic process.

4.5 Are the usual suspects 'guilty' of populism?

In table 1 we present an overview of the empirical results of our analysis of the SVP, FN, LPF, Die Republikaner, FPÖ and VB. A first and important conclusion that can be drawn on the basis of our analysis of the party manifestoes is that all six parties score on each of the three indicators of populism and can therefore be rightfully labelled as populist parties. Nevertheless, we found substantial differences among the six parties with regard to the intensity and direction of the statements in their manifestoes. This invites us to go into more detail hereunder as well as to develop a preliminary typology of types of populist parties in the next section.

Table 1: Level of populism for six European political parties

	No. of references to 'the people'		Direct Democracy				No. of anti-intermediary statements	No. of anti-elite statements	Total no. of populist statements
	Narrow	Broad	Referendum	Initiative	Mayor	H-o-G			
SVP*	49	51 (4.54)	Y	Y	Y	-	21 (1.87)	56 (4.99)	128 (11.41)
FN	86	106 (2.40)	Y	Y	-	n.a.	55 (1.54)	60 (1.68)	221 (6.18)
LPF	46	62 (6.76)	Y	-	Y	Y	69 (7.52)	3 (0.33)	134 (14.61)
Republikaner	12	35 (8.77)	Y	-	n.a.	Y	10 (2.51)	13 (3.26)	58 (14.54)
FPÖ	13	27 (2.07)	Y	-	Y	Y	15 (1.15)	16 (1.23)	58 (4.44)
VB	78	100 (6.63)	Y	-	Y	Y	11 (0.73)	54 (3.58)	165 (10.93)

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

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

Referendum: Proposing binding or consulting referendum.

Initiative: Proposing citizens' initiative.

Mayor: Proposing directly elected mayors.

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

n.a. = not applicable, already present in institutional framework

* The Swiss democratic system contains a considerable amount of instruments of direct democracy, among them binding referenda (a difference exists between obligatory and facultative referenda, depending on the policy issues raised) and directly elected mayors.

Between brackets: the relative size of the quantitative indicators, i.e. the number of references divided by the number of sentences of that party's programme x 100. Hence, the values between brackets indicate the percentage of sentences containing (that particular type) of populist statements. In bold are the highest relative scores in each category.

The SVP shows a relatively high level of populism, particularly with regard to anti-elite statements. This is surprising when one takes into account that the party leadership has been an integral part of the government-cartel at the national level. Equally paradoxical is the fact that the SVP frequently calls for more direct democracy, while Switzerland champions in the use of people's initiatives and popular referenda. The SVP particularly call for the use of these instrument when, in their eyes, parliament fails to act in accordance with the will of the people. Initiatives and referenda are seen as tools to circumvent or correct parliamentary decisions of the other parties to which the SVP refers as 'centrist'.

While in absolute terms the Front National scores high on populism (with 106 references to the people and 115 anti-establishment statements), the proportion of populist sentences in only 6 per cent of the party programme. The FN condemns the unrepresentativeness of the political elites, the illegitimacy of existing political institutions and the overall lack of democratic control by the people. The anti-establishment statements against political intermediaries and the incumbent elite are not confined to political actors alone. Journalists, researchers (political scientists in particular!) and bureaucrats are also pitted against the people. With regard to direct

democracy, the FN proposes a consultative referendum and the introduction of popular initiative on local and national issues. Overall, the FN scores relatively low in term of populism.

In the overall ranking of populism, the LPF comes out on top with almost 15 per cent of their party programme being populist statements. Particularly when the proportion of references to the people and anti-establishment statements are taken into account, the Lijst Pim Fortuyn clearly scores higher than all the other parties in this study. Only the proportion of anti-elite statements is relatively low. In their platform, the LPF frequently calls for cutting back bureaucracy, deregulation, the lowering of government subsidies and for diminishing the influence of NGO's. From this we conclude that the character of the LPF's populism is highly anti-institutional, instead of being anti-elitist as is the case with the SVP. The LPF proposes institutional changes for direct democracy, which are combined with a large amount of more general democratic statements in the spirit of 'bringing back democracy to the people'.

Overall, the Republikaner score very high on populism, being second in the overall ranking on the proportion of populist statements in their party platform. The Republikaner score particularly high on references to the people, far more than any of the other parties. Also the proportion of anti-elite and anti-intermediary statements is relatively high in their elections programme. Less emphasis is put on proposals for a direct people-leader link as the Republikaner only present a limited number of proposals for instruments of direct democracy.

The results for the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich shows relatively low levels of populism. Their overall score is lowest of all six parties. Only around four per cent of their party platform contains statements with a populist character. In general the FPÖ wants to bring 'democracy closer to the people' (*Bürgernahe Demokratie*), but institutional proposals are not numerous.

The Vlaams Blok scores relatively high on references to the people and the party frequently expresses a radical anti-elite attitude. The VB perceives the corrupted elites not only in control of the political sphere, but also controlling the media and academia (particularly political scientists!). All of them are perceivably acting in their own self-interest, and even more: against the interest of the people and the 'nation'. Compared to the other parties, the VB scores high on anti-elite statements, whereas its critique of intermediary institutions and bureaucracy is comparatively modest. The VB does not attack the political system in general – although the Belgian federal 'construction' is criticised severely – but more the corrupt elites, both in politics and other sectors. With this radical anti-elite character the Vlaams Blok presents itself as the underdog that is kept out of government through a 'cordon sanitaire' by the other parties. The VB advocates more direct democracy, through several proposals to create a more direct link between the people and its leaders.

While all the parties included in this research score on all three dimensions and can thus be labelled populist, we found substantial differences with respect to the general level of populism as well as the specific elements of the populist ideology that the various parties emphasise. We understand populism as a democratic ideology calling for the sovereignty of the people and a restoration of the supremacy of their will. Clearly the LPF, Republikaner the SVP

and the VB meet that definition. The Front National and particularly the FPO display lower levels of populism than is often suggested by political observers. In order to make sense of the variation in emphasis on specific elements of the populist ideology, we develop a typology of populism in the section below.

4.6 Types of populism

Close examination of our findings leads us to make a preliminary typology of populist parties. Our typology is based on the specific character of rhetoric that political parties display in their election programmes and the specific dimensions of populism they emphasise. Our typologies should be read as preliminary categories, to be reinforced and potentially diversified through further research.

With regard to the dimension of references to ‘the people’ we found that parties either hold a regionalist/nationalist notion of the people they represent (FN, FPÖ, VB and Republikaner), or leave such an explicit view unmentioned (SVP, LPF). Parties in the former category overwhelmingly define ‘the people’ in a nationalist (or, in the case of VB, regionalist) sense, pitting them explicitly against the national elites, immigrants and European organisations. The SVP and LPF however tend to speak of the people in a more neutral way, using the notion ‘citizens’ oftentimes. This distinction regarding the character of references to the people calls for an (initial) typology of ethnic nationalist versus civic populism.

Secondly, parties either tend to speak of the people in a general ‘vis-à-vis government’ way most of the times (FN, LPF and VB), or refer more often to *partes-pro-toto* for the people in general such as particular occupational groups, the working population, and tax-payers (SVP, FPÖ and Die Republikaner). The emphasis on this type of references by the latter three parties might be explained by their historical roots within liberal-conservative or agrarian movements. We propose a division between collectivist versus particularistic populism here.

As for our second dimension – proposals to create a direct relationship between the people and the government – we found some significant differences too. All parties score on the sub-category of ‘concrete’ proposals for the introduction of instrument of direct democracy. Not all however complement these proposals with abstract promises to ‘change politics’ or alter the ‘present culture’. The LPF, Die Republikaner and the VB score high on both types of proposals, whereas the FPÖ party programme shows a particularly high number of concrete initiatives. In a general sense, the FN election manifesto lacks an explicit pro-democratic nature, only materialising in some institutional proposals. Here, the preliminary typology consists of ‘pragmatic’ populists (SVP, FN and FPÖ) versus ‘abstract romanticist’ populism (none of the parties in this study) and a category combining both (Republikaner, LPF and VB).

We divided our third category, anti-establishment statements, into anti-elite and anti-intermediaries statements. This division provides for the last typology we suggest on the basis of our findings. We distinguish between ‘anti-elite’ populism (VB and SVP) within parties that in their critique of the establishment emphasise the perceived undemocratic behaviour of

a political class, and ‘anti-intermediaries’ populism (LPF), which is particularly directed at intermediary organisations and the institutional framework that stand between the people and their leader. We further recognise a category of populists that divide their critique relatively equally between elites and institutions (FN, FPÖ and Die Republikaner). An overview of this preliminary categorisation into varieties of populism is presented in table 2.

Table 2: A preliminary typology of populisms

	References to ‘the People’				Direct Democracy		Anti-establishment	
	Ethnic Nationalist	Civic	Collectivist	Particularistic	Pragmatic	Abstract	Elite	Intermediaries
SVP	-	X	-	X	X	-	X	-
FN	X	-	X	-	X	-	X	X
LPF	-	X	X	-	X	X	-	X
Republikaner	X	-	-	X	X	X	X	X
FPÖ	X	-	-	X	X	-	X	X
VB	X	-	X	-	X	X	X	-

X = party scores on this element

- = party does not score on this element

5 Conclusion

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

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

needs protection against this establishment, and a direct connection between the people and the government as the populist solution that should restore the sovereignty of the people.

We operationalised these three aspects for our analysis of party programmes. We labelled political parties populist on the basis of three elements: (1) the number of references to ‘the people’; (2) proposals for a direct link between the people and government; and (3) anti-establishment statements. Subsequently, we analysed party programmes of six European parties: Schweizerische Volkspartei (Switzerland), Front National (France), Lijst Pim Fortuyn (Netherlands), Vlaams Blok (Belgium, Flanders), Die Republikaner (Germany) and the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich (Austria). Our case selection was based on the fact that these parties are often labelled populist by political observers.

Our conclusions were twofold. In the first place, we found that the six political parties score on each of the three dimensions, justifying their classification as populists. Secondly, we found that these parties scored differently on the three dimensions, both in terms of intensity and with regard to the character of their statements. We thus proposed that these parties should not be lumped together under one single heading without further differentiation. As for the extent of populism we found that the LPF, Die Republikaner, SVP and VB score high on our scale of populism, whereas the FN and particularly the FPÖ lag behind in their relative level of populism. Variation among the six parties could further be witnessed with regard to the manner in which they defined ‘the people’, the character of their anti-establishment statements and their proposals for direct democracy. Whereas the Front National, Die Republikaner, the FPÖ and Vlaams Blok formulate the ‘people’ in nationalist or regionalist terms, the SVP and LPF lack such an exclusivist vision of the people. Based on that distinction we tentatively concluded that the four former parties display an ethnic type of populism, whereas SVP’s and LPF’s populism can be described as civic. Further typologies that were made are: ‘collectivist’ (FN, LPF and VB) versus ‘particularistic’ (FPÖ, SVP and FN) populism, ‘pragmatic’ (all parties) versus ‘abstract romanticist’ (none in this study) populism (and in a mixed category: LPF, Die Republikaner and VB), and anti-elite (SVP and VB) versus anti-intermediaries (LPF) populism (in between category: FN, FPÖ and Republikaner). In sum, the concept of populism can be measured empirically, but only if one uses an operationalisation that is sensitive to the substantial differences among political parties that all belong to the populist party family.

Note

¹ It should be noted here that we analysed the 1997 FPÖ programme of principles, rather than its most recent election programme. Since the document is so pertinently present on the FPÖ website we assumed that this document is directed at potential voters and therefore comparable to the election manifestoes of other political parties we analysed. It is thereby our aim in further research to include this type of documents, as well as speeches and other sources.

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