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**What Makes a Populist Voter -
Is There a Common Ground?**

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Abstract

Scholars have long debated the characteristics that unify populist parties in Europe, noting that despite differing ideologies, organizational structures, and political styles, these parties often share a common narrative about the divide between the people and the elite. However, there remains a gap in understanding the profiles of populist voters themselves. Are there common traits among those who support populist parties across different regions? And how do these voters compare not only to those of mainstream parties but also to those who choose to abstain from voting altogether? Using quantitative analysis This study examines the voter bases of 46 populist parties across Western, Central, and Eastern Europe to explore these questions. The findings suggest a lack of unifying factors among populist voters overall, with "host ideologies" of the parties playing a more significant role in shaping voter profiles. While Western Europe displays a somewhat more consistent pattern across different types of populist party voters—be they left, right, or centrist—Central and Eastern Europe show greater variation, with fewer clear distinctions between populist and mainstream party supporters and abstainers. These results challenge the notion that the success of populist parties is driven from bottom by "populist attitudes" at the societal level. Instead, they indicate that the profile of populist party voter is more complex and heavily influenced by regional contexts and the specific ideologies of the parties themselves, underscoring the need for a nuanced understanding of populism in Europe.

Streszczenie

Naukowcy od dawna debatują nad cechami, które jednoczą partie populistyczne w Europie, zauważając, że pomimo odmiennych ideologii, struktur organizacyjnych i stylów politycznych, partie te często dzielą wspólną narrację na temat podziału między ludźmi a elitą. Nadal jednak istnieje luka w zrozumieniu profili samych wyborców populistycznych. Czy istnieją wspólne cechy wśród osób popierających partie populistyczne w różnych regionach? I jak ci wyborcy wypadają w porównaniu nie tylko z wyborcami partii głównego nurtu, ale także z tymi, którzy całkowicie powstrzymują się od głosowania? Wykorzystanie analizy ilościowej W tym badaniu zbadano bazy wyborców 46 partii populistycznych w Europie Zachodniej, Środkowej i Wschodniej, aby zbadać te kwestie. Wyniki sugerują brak czynników jednoczących wśród wyborców populistycznych w ogóle, przy czym „ideologie gospodarzy” partii odgrywają bardziej znaczącą rolę w kształtowaniu profili wyborców. Podczas gdy Europa Zachodnia wykazuje nieco bardziej spójny wzorzec wśród różnych typów wyborców partii populistycznych — czy to lewicowych, prawicowych czy centrowych — Europa Środkowa i Wschodnia wykazuje większe zróżnicowanie, z mniejszą liczbą wyraźnych rozróżnień między zwolennikami partii populistycznych i głównego nurtu a wstrzymującymi się od głosu. Wyniki te podważają pogląd, że sukces partii populistycznych jest napędzany od dołu przez „postawy populistyczne” na poziomie społecznym. Zamiast tego wskazują, że profil wyborcy partii populistycznych jest bardziej złożony i silnie uwarunkowany kontekstami regionalnymi i konkretnymi ideologiami samych partii, podkreślając potrzebę zniuansowanego zrozumienia populizmu w Europie.

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What Makes a Populist Voter - Is There a Common Ground?

1. Introduction

In contemporary discourse, both within the academic sphere and the broader public arena, populism commands considerable attention. Yet, the focus predominantly rests on populist movements and their leaders, often overlooking the electoral base that propels these parties into the political limelight. At the heart of populist rhetoric lies a dichotomous narrative: a righteous populace betrayed by a deceitful elite. This narrative's versatility allows it to be co-opted by political entities spanning the ideological spectrum, from the radical fringes to the centrist mainstream. Despite the ideological variance among these parties, they frequently share strategic leadership and stylistic political approaches, hinting at underlying unifying elements. This observation raises a critical question regarding the electorate of such diverse movements: are there discernible commonalities among the voters themselves? The investigation of populism is further complicated by its ideological breadth, encompassing not only the radical right and left but also a third, which is neither left nor right, I will refer to it as centrist for the rest of the text. How do populist voters' preferences vary across these different types? To what extent does the "host ideologies" and regional differences influence populist party supporters' preferences?

So far, the most comprehensive quantitative analysis of populist voters was done in 2017 by Matthijs Rooduijn and Larry M. Bartels in 2023. However, both mainly focus on far-right populist parties. Contrary to widely held assumptions that populist parties draw their strength predominantly from the 'losers of globalisation'—individuals marked by Euroscepticism, diminished political trust, and a penchant for direct democracy—both demonstrate the complexity and heterogeneity of these parties' voter bases. The studies reveal that motivations for backing populist parties are varied, painting a portrait of populist support as both intricate and multifaceted. (Rooduijn, M. 2017, Larry M. Bartels in 2023) Nonetheless,

Rooduijn's analysis encounters its principal limitation in its exclusive concentration on Western Europe, thereby overlooking the political landscapes of Eastern and Central European nations. This focus introduces a potential bias, as Western European populism tends to be dominated by right-wing parties, whereas Central and Eastern Europe exhibit a prevalence of centrist populist movements. (Enyedi, Z., & Mölder, M. 2018) This discrepancy underscores a critical divergence from the traditional left-right populist dynamics observed in Western Europe. While Bartels includes far-right populist parties from Central-Eastern Europe, other types of populist parties, such as centrist ones that are predominant in that region, remain underexplored. Additionally, Bartels mainly focuses on the country level.

The distinct nature of populist parties in Eastern-Central Europe not only challenges established classifications of populism but also calls for a deeper investigation into whether these differences reflect unique electorate preferences and values, thereby enriching our understanding of the populist phenomenon. Allen, T. J. (2015) adopts a distinctive methodology by contrasting the voter bases of far-right movements across Western and East-Central Europe, unveiling that divergent political opportunity structures yield significant differences in the profiles of far-right supporters in four critical dimensions. Firstly, the association between anti-immigrant sentiments and support for the far right is markedly more pronounced in Western Europe. Secondly, far-right constituents in Western Europe exhibit lower levels of religiosity compared to their counterparts in post-communist regions. Thirdly, voters for far-right parties in post-communist countries tend to harbour leftist economic views, in stark contrast to Western Europe, where right-leaning attitudes towards income redistribution modestly correlate with far-right support. A pivotal challenge arises from Allen's categorization of the radical right in East-Central Europe, which distinctly diverges from its Western European counterpart. This discrepancy casts doubt on the consistency of framing the analysis within the bounds of the radical right. When discussing regional divergence, we are not only concerned with the uneven distribution of different types of populist parties but also interested in the additional layers of differences that may exist at the regional level. By controlling for regional effects within the same type of populist parties, we can discern whether distinct characteristics are present and, if so, how Western populist voters differ from their Central-Eastern counterparts.

Another common limitation in much of the empirical research on populist voters is the narrow focus on comparing them solely with mainstream party voters, which provides only a

partial understanding of the populist voter profile. To address this limitation, this paper aims to expand the analysis by not only comparing populist party voters with mainstream party voters but also with abstainers. By doing so, it seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the populist voter. If we define a "populist voter" as someone who suffers from the economic impacts of globalisation, opposes the establishment, and has lost trust in politicians (Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, & Sonno, 2017), an important question arises: how do these voters differ from individuals who choose not to vote at all? Given their shared discontent with the political system, it could be expected that populist voters and abstainers are alike in many respects. However, this comparison is essential to uncover whether significant differences exist between these groups, particularly in their levels of political engagement, ideological motivations, and socio-economic backgrounds. Understanding these distinctions can offer valuable insights into the broader phenomenon of political disengagement and the conditions under which disillusioned citizens choose to either support populist movements or withdraw from the electoral process entirely. There has been some empirical work that compares populist party voters to those who disengage from the voting process entirely (Allen, 2017). However, like many previous studies, this research lacks diversity in its examination of populist parties, focusing exclusively on right-wing voters. Similarly, the empirical research conducted by Koch, Meléndez, and Rovira Kaltwasser (2023), though robust in its methodology and range of variables, is limited by its sample size and its exclusive focus on German cases. This narrow scope highlights a broader gap in the literature: the absence of comprehensive research that thoroughly compares these three constituencies—populist voters, mainstream voters, and abstainers—across a variety of political contexts and party types. This gap underscores the need for more diverse and extensive studies that can provide a fuller understanding of the similarities and differences between these groups, particularly in how they relate to the broader dynamics of political engagement and democratic participation.

To address these questions, this study builds upon the analytical framework established by Rooduijn, aiming to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the populist landscape in Europe by incorporating a wider range of populist parties, including both radical and non-radical entities. This expanded focus allows for a more nuanced analysis that goes beyond the traditional focus on radical populist parties to also include those considered non-radical, thereby offering a broader perspective on populism's appeal. The research further distinguishes itself by comparing not only populist voters with those who support mainstream parties but also with those who abstain from voting altogether. The analysis is structured into two distinct

parts: first, it compares the characteristics of populist party voters with those of mainstream party supporters across different regions and populist contexts; second, it applies the same comparative approach to those who chose not to vote, thus capturing a fuller spectrum of political engagement and disengagement. This dual approach necessitates a thorough exploration of several key conceptual dimensions, such as the definition of populism, the specific traits of populist voters, and the categorization of populist parties into distinct types, while also considering the influence of regional variations within Europe. By broadening the scope of parties and voter types examined, this study seeks to uncover the underlying patterns and variations in populist support across different contexts, facilitating a more intricate exploration of the spectrum of populism. Through this expanded analytical lens, the research aims to identify and differentiate the diverse clusters within the populist electorate, thereby contributing to a deeper and more nuanced discourse on the nature of populism and its evolving role in contemporary political dynamics.

2. Literature review

2.1 What is Populism

There are ongoing debates on how to conceptualise populism. Should populism be regarded as an ideological construct, a political-strategic approach, or a chameleon that adapts to various host ideologies? Even among proponents of the ideational approach, there is disagreement about the exact nature of populism—whether it should be classified as a type of discourse, a thin-centred ideology, or something else entirely. These differing perspectives significantly influence how populism is defined and understood. The various definitions of populism are shaped by the underlying question of its nature. While interpretations vary, many scholars agree that populism is not as consciously programmatic as traditional ideologies. Instead, it tends to attach itself to “host ideologies,” borrowing elements to suit its narrative and goals (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). This adaptability allows populism to manifest across different political landscapes, making it a versatile but elusive phenomenon to define.

Scholars who adopt an ideational definition have a growing consensus on a definition that captures its core characteristics. Mudde conceptualises populism as an ideology fundamentally premised on the division of society into two homogeneous and antagonistic entities: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." This perspective posits that genuine political expression should manifest the general will of the people, advocating for a direct reflection of the populace's collective desires and interests in the political sphere (Mudde, C, 2004). Müller proposes a highly similar explanation. According to him, Populism, at its heart, champions the idea that "the people" are the sovereign bearers of national identity, imbued with moral superiority and a sense of unity. Yet, populists argue that only a particular subset of the populace truly reflects the authentic and legitimate nature of "the people" (Müller, 2016). The latter is similar to the notion of “the real people” theorised by Carl Schmitt, among others. The populist invocation of "the people themselves" suggests an idealised collective that transcends the mechanisms of democratic engagement, often evoked through the notion of the "Silent Majority," a term popularised by Richard Nixon. This group's perceived absence from the political sphere is attributed to their silence, rather than an absence of active democratic

engagement (Müller, 2016). This definition of populism manifests in real political life through the systematic erosion of the checks and balances that are foundational to liberal democracy. Populist leaders and movements often challenge and seek to diminish the independence and authority of the judiciary, a critical component of a balanced democratic system. By undermining judicial power, populists can ensure that their actions and policies face fewer legal obstacles, thus consolidating their control over the political landscape. Additionally, by emphasising a particular subset of the populace as the true and legitimate representation of "the people," populists inherently target those who fall outside this subset. Often, these targets are minority groups whose protections are continually undermined. This undermining occurs either through the direct reduction of legal safeguards or by fostering societal attitudes that marginalise these groups.

Populism, as defined here, contrasts with two ideological counterparts: elitism and pluralism. Elitism mirrors populism's dualistic worldview but advocates for political decision-making based on the values of a moral elite rather than the general public. Pluralism, in contrast, rejects the uniformity of both populism and elitism, viewing society as a diverse assembly of groups and individuals with often divergent perspectives and desires. (Mudde, 2004, Hawkins, Kirk A., and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) The latter is the main feature that puts populist parties apart from the mainstream parties. Even this minimal conceptualization of populism hinges on the assumption that all populist actors share a similar understanding of a homogeneous society, where the general will of the people functions as the guiding principle for political decisions and is not to be infringed by unnecessary institutional boundaries. In this framework, the people constitute the sovereign authority. But who are the people? Are we defining people of cultural or economic base? (Mény and Surel, 2002). This ambiguity extends to the issue of minority exclusion. To what extent does this exclusion spread? Is it spread to political participation, or does it only encompass public contestation and control of power? The answers to these questions vary based on the "host ideologies" (Huber and Schimpf, 2017) that populist parties adopt. This variation within different ideologies further fuels the debate among proponents of the ideational approach regarding the extent to which the host ideology influences the agenda of populist parties.

There are also several definitions of populism that scholars have traditionally utilised that contrast with the growing ideational approach (Barros 2006; Hawkins 2010; Rovira Kaltwasser 2014). One prominent definition is the economic perspective, which views

populism as a set of short-term macroeconomic policies designed for electoral gain, often leading to negative outcomes like demand overstimulation, inflation, and necessary structural adjustments (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991; Edwards 2010). This view is common among journalists and policymakers who often use “populist” as a pejorative term. Another prevalent definition is the structuralist approach, which ties populism to the underdevelopment of Latin American countries. It describes populism as a regime characterised by cross-class, charismatic movements with an anti-status quo ideology that promotes import-substituting industrialization (Di Tella 1965; Germani 1978). This perspective emphasises the political and structural forces behind class formation and highlights how rapid rural-urban migration has facilitated the rise of populist movements by creating large, disaffected populations. A third approach is the political-strategic perspective, which defines populism as mass movements led by charismatic outsiders who use anti-elite rhetoric and govern in a top-down manner (Barr 2009; Weyland 2001). Unlike the structuralist view, this definition does not necessarily involve cross-class alliances or specific economic policies and often regards the use of populist discourse as a strategic, sometimes insincere, tool.

The main distinction of the ideational approach from these other approaches is its emphasis on populist ideas as the primary driving force behind the material features of populist movements (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). This perspective allows for greater flexibility in how populist parties operate. For instance, under the ideational approach, populist movements are not necessarily reliant on top-down leadership, enabling them to adapt more easily to changing political circumstances. To find which approach is more prevalent in contemporary politics, scholars have adopted several methods. Hawkins and Kaltwasser on the bases on Latin American leader speeches found populist discourse has a noteworthy presence across much of the past century among leaders and periods generally regarded as populist. It is found in various ideological combinations, including (more rarely) right-wing and socialism leading to the conclusion of the narrow form of the other three approaches and analytical benefit of ideational approach. (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017).

Studying the populist voter base can significantly enhance our understanding and conceptualization of populism. Different conceptualizations of populism imply different expectations regarding voter trends. For instance, under the economic, structuralist, or political-strategic frameworks, we would expect populist voters to express dissatisfaction with the economic situation, show strong attachments to charismatic leaders, or exhibit specific socio-

political alignments. These approaches, with their narrower definitions of populist parties, suggest a similarly narrow scope of voter characteristics. In contrast, if the ideational approach is more accurate, we would expect a more diverse voter base with variations across different ideologies. This diversity arises because populist parties are not solely defined by their populist elements but also by their host ideologies (Mudde, 2004). These host ideologies allow populist movements to manifest in various forms, leading to different political expressions. This raises an important question: How significant is the influence of the host ideology on populist parties?

Examining the voter base can reveal the extent to which host ideologies shape political parties. If there is significant variation among the different types of populist parties, it would suggest that host ideologies play a substantial role. Conversely, if voter characteristics are similarly distributed across various populist parties, it might indicate that the populist ideology is more cohesive and influential than previously thought, challenging the notion of populism as merely a thin-centred ideology. Even though linking individual attitudes and populist conceptualization might be a delicate endeavour, such studies can substantially benefit the overall research by scrutinising how dominant theories hold up at the individual level. Therefore, The aim of the approach is not to define populism rather to identify the features that facilitate populism on an individual level. For example, Ruth Dassonneville and Ian McAllister examined how members of populist parties differ from those of other parties. Their findings suggest that populist parties recruit members with distinct socio-demographic profiles, particularly in terms of income and religion. However, these differences do not extend to levels of education, gender, and age, where populist and non-populist party members appear remarkably similar. (Dassonneville, R., & McAllister, I. 2023) Most intriguing, they discovered that attitudinal variables among populist party members were not markedly different from those of other party members. This finding is counterintuitive, given that the characteristics and discourse of populist parties—positioning themselves as the "true defenders of the people" against a perceived corrupt and self-serving elite—would lead us to expect that populist party members would be less politically resourceful and more politically dissatisfied with the current democratic situation than their counterparts in other parties. These insights cast doubt on whether the populist quest for more direct democracy is genuinely the primary driving force behind the material features of populist movements. Instead, it raises the possibility that this quest may be a strategic political tool designed to play on popular sentiments for electoral success. Such findings emphasise the importance of questioning and

validating dominant theories of populism at the individual level, revealing complexities and nuances that might otherwise be overlooked in broader analyses.

2.2 From periphery to mainstream - Why is populism so popular?

The resurgence of populism poses a significant challenge to the liberal consensus that had dominated Central-Eastern Europe for over a decade, a trend that is now increasingly visible in Western Europe as well. This shift is reflected in the substantial rise in the proportion of populist party voters across both regions. Between 2008 and 2018, there was an average increase of 10.6% in the share of populist voters among the European electorate. When examining this trend regionally, Central-Eastern Europe experienced a slightly higher average increase of 10.22%, while Western Europe saw a notable rise of 7.5%. These figures underscore the growing appeal of populist movements across Europe, although the extent of this increase varies by region. Interestingly, the only countries that did not experience an increase in the share of populist voters during this period were the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and Belgium. This divergence suggests that while populism has gained ground in many parts of Europe, certain countries have either resisted this trend or have seen it plateau, raising important questions about the factors that contribute to the spread or containment of populist sentiment within different national contexts.

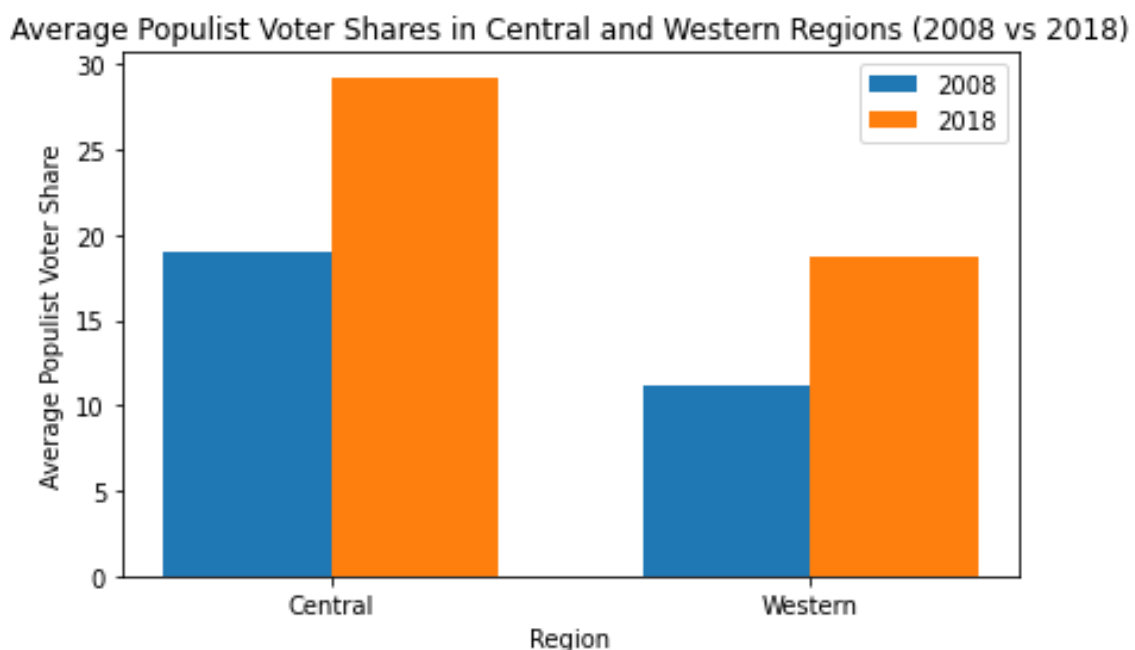


Figure 1.1 Average Populist Voter shares in Central and Western Regions (2008 vs 2018)

The graph is generated based on the data provided by Statistica Europe. This statistic shows the national vote share of populist parties in selected European Union (EU) countries as of March 2018.

Hungary has the highest share of populist votes, with 65.09 percent of its population voting for populist parties. In Greece, Poland, and Italy, the populist vote share exceeds 50 percent. In contrast, in the United Kingdom, populist parties accounted for only 1.8 percent of votes.

When discussing the rising popularity of populist parties, the first questions that often come to mind are: What fuels the growing appeal of populism? What is driving this global shift in demand toward populism? How do populist parties expand their electorate? Scholarly discourse provides multiple perspectives on these issues, with explanations that consider both the demand and supply sides of populism. These perspectives can be broadly categorised into two main views: Populism erodes from the bottom or from the Top. The conventional wisdom on the rise of populism emphasises its anti-establishment roots, suggesting that populism thrives as a reaction to developments that many citizens find threatening or, at the very least, alienating. This reaction is particularly focused on the perceived emergence of a "new elite,". (Mueller, Jan-Werner, 2023) Within this broader narrative, several factors are believed to strengthen the appeal of populism. Economic threats, particularly those associated with globalisation, are often cited as a significant driver. Additionally, cultural concerns, such as the inclusion of minority groups—whether LGBTQ communities or immigrants—are seen as challenging traditional values and further fueling populist sentiments. Despite the diversity of these underlying concerns, the common thread among them is that populism draws its strength from opposition to contemporary developments, regardless of the specific issues at play. Below, we will more broadly discuss the authors that hold that perspective.

Scholars like Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, and Sonno argue that the rise of populism is rooted primarily in economic insecurity. They posit that economic insecurity erodes trust in traditional parties, politics, and institutions, leading individuals to either abstain from voting or shift their support to populist parties, regardless of their position on the political spectrum. This economic perspective suggests that voters experiencing financial instability and uncertainty are more likely to turn to populist solutions, which promise swift and tangible benefits (Guiso, Herrera, Morelli, & Sonno, 2017). From the supply side, populist parties tend to gain traction during periods of heightened economic insecurity by offering short-term protection and quick fixes that appeal to those most affected by globalisation. These parties often emerge with platforms that address immediate economic concerns but may lack sustainable long-term solutions. This dynamic attracts voters who are disenfranchised by the current political establishments and lack the resources or education to critically assess the long-term costs of populist policies. Further supporting this perspective, scholars such as Betz (1998) and Carter

(2005) highlight economic grievances and immigration concerns as key drivers behind the electoral success of right-wing extremism. These factors contribute to a broader narrative of dissatisfaction and perceived threats, which populist parties exploit to broaden their appeal and expand their electorate. Michael Bröning also echoes this assessment in his Foreign Affairs article, stating, "Two core issues lie at the root of today's rising populism: the challenge of migration and the lingering euro crisis." (Bröning, Michael, 2016)

The second class of arguments can be observed in Bartels' study, which posits that any measurable increases in popular illiberalism are not the cause, but rather the consequence, of antiliberal governance. This perspective challenges the notion that populist movements are primarily driven by grassroots discontent, instead suggesting that it is the actions of leaders, rather than citizens, that are the primary driving force behind Europe's current crisis of democracy. Bartels argues that the rise in illiberal attitudes among the populace is a reaction to the policies and rhetoric of antiliberal leaders, who shape public opinion and exacerbate democratic backsliding. In this view, the crisis of democracy in Europe is less about a spontaneous shift in public sentiment and more about the top-down influence of leaders who undermine liberal democratic norms, thereby fostering an environment where illiberalism can thrive. This argument shifts the focus from the electorate to the elite, suggesting that it is the strategic choices of political leaders that are steering Europe away from its democratic foundations, with the populace following in response to this leadership rather than initiating the trend themselves. It's worth mentioning that Bartels here mainly focuses on right-wing populist parties. Building on a similar argument and focusing mostly on right-wing populism, Jan-Werner Müller highlights that views and attitudes typically associated with right-wing populism—such as hostility to immigration and opposition to the euro—have not seen a significant increase in recent years. Furthermore, contrary to expectations during and after the 2009-15-euro crisis, overall satisfaction with democracy and the European Union has not plummeted as dramatically as many anticipated. Müller suggests that the rise of right-wing populism is not so much a reflection of a significant shift in public attitudes, but rather a result of changes within the political mainstream enabling to "mainstream the far right". (Muller, 2023)

Somewhat mix of these two perspectives can be found in the article by Elias, Georgiadou, Konstantinidis, and Rori (2016) where they critique the predominant emphasis on demand-side explanations and argue for a more balanced recognition of supply-side influences.

They contend that the long-term success of populist parties, much like mainstream parties, is determined by factors such as organisational strategies, local party dynamics, and leadership effectiveness. Successful populist parties capitalise on favourable political circumstances by developing robust grassroots networks of support, which are crucial for their entry into and persistence in the central political arena. By building these networks, populist parties can sustain their influence and continue to resonate with voters, even after assuming governmental responsibilities. This ability to adapt and strategically manage their organisational structures allows them to maintain their anti-establishment appeal while effectively navigating the complexities of governance. In conclusion, while Elias et al. acknowledge the importance of public sentiment as a driver of populist voting, they argue that the success of populist parties is more accurately attributed to a combination of demand-side and supply-side factors, with organisational and strategic elements playing a crucial role in sustaining their influence over time.

Among scholars who focus on supply-side explanations, there exists a further divergence of views. Anne Christin Hausknecht (2018) leans on Max Weber's theory of charismatic leadership as a primary explanatory mechanism for populist success. In contrast, Loxbo and Bolin downplay the centrality of party leaders during the radical right's breakthrough phase, focusing instead on the role of candidates as "vote multipliers" and key indicators of a party's organisational maturity. While the latter focuses mainly on the quantity and popularity of candidates in explaining radical right parties' organisational development, other authors focus on other factors. The studies of radical right parties' organisational strategies in Hungary (Jobbik) and Estonia (EKRE) by Pirro, L.P., Rona (2019), and Kasekamp, Madisson, Wierenga (2019), highlights factors such as social media presence, youth activism, and the influence of affiliated social movements.

Additionally Mudde places a strong emphasis on the role of media in the success of populist parties, highlighting how media influences public perception towards increased anti-political establishment sentiments. He argues that media coverage amplifies these sentiments by focusing on the process of cartelization within European party systems, where political parties increasingly resemble each other both sociologically and politically. According to Mudde, this convergence results in politicians across different parties becoming more sociologically homogeneous (primarily middle class) and politically moderate, which in turn fuels public disenchantment and the appeal of populist movements. (Mudde, 2004)

Understanding populist voters is crucial for advancing this debate. If the conventional view holds true, we would expect anti-establishment sentiments—such as Euroscepticism, dissatisfaction with current political institutions and democracy, and opposition to the inclusion of minority groups—to be strong predictors of populist party voting. Conversely, if Bartels' perspective is accurate, we would anticipate seeing an uneven trend when comparing populist voters to other types of voters, reflecting the influence of leadership rather than grassroots sentiment. Additionally, Rooduijn's earlier quantitative work on populist voters, despite its smaller sample size, provides a valuable opportunity to compare shifts in the attitudes and demographics of populist voters over time. Before delving into the specific characteristics of voters, it is essential to thoroughly explore these two different perspectives and establish the theoretical foundations underlying each. This will enable us to address these competing explanations more effectively later in the study, providing a clearer understanding of the forces driving populist support and the implications for democratic governance.

2.3 How do populist voters differ from mainstream party voters?

To identify populist voters, it is crucial to determine which parties are populist. However, this task is as complicated as defining populism itself. When does a party become populist? This complexity is heightened by the fact that parties rarely label themselves as populist, nor do many of them participate in populist networks. Instead, as we discussed above, they often align themselves more closely with “host” ideological labels rather than explicitly adopting the populist label. Similarly, populist voters do not typically identify themselves as populists, further complicating the task of mapping populist parties and their supporters. Therefore, the literature is as divided on the subject of populist voters as it is on the phenomenon of populism itself. The key difference is that the former has been studied far less extensively than the latter. It remains unclear how this standard definition of a populist party translates to the individual level. For example, Conservative voters prioritise preserving traditional values and are often wary of globalisation's impact on these values. Liberal voters champion individual freedoms, including freedom of expression, and tend to embrace progressive changes in society. Socialist voters emphasise economic equality and social justice. Green voters focus on environmental sustainability and combating climate change. What distinguishes a populist voter?

The questions we asked above are closely connected to the topics discussed in previous chapters regarding the reasons behind the rise of populism. Those who attribute the surge in populism to shifts in public sentiment often emphasise the differences among populist voters and sometimes even highlight their similarities to abstainers, who are also seen as opposing established politics (Allen, 2017). On the other hand, proponents of the top-down explanation for the rise in populism tend to downplay the significance of public sentiment, viewing it as a less important factor. Identifying commonalities among populist voters—regardless of their left-right orientation or regional and cultural differences—could further illuminate the global shift toward populism that has become prevalent across much of Europe. The characteristics of populist party supporters have been analysed from various perspectives, raising critical questions: Does the populist voter exist as a distinct entity? If so, what are the commonalities that define them? Understanding whether there are shared traits among populist voters, despite

their ideological or geographical differences, is key to comprehending the broader populist movement that continues to shape the political landscape across Europe. By exploring these commonalities, we can gain deeper insights into the factors driving the populist wave and the extent to which these voters represent a unified political force.

Peter Mair, in his seminal work "Ruling the Void" (2013), highlights the increasing convergence and diminished policy distinctions among mainstream political parties as a catalyst for a significant portion of the electorate to withdraw from the traditional political process. This withdrawal has facilitated the emergence of populism in Western Europe, positing that the electoral ascent of populist movements is intricately linked to the perception among citizens that mainstream parties have become detached from national interests, favouring instead the agendas of international markets and supranational entities (Mair, 2013; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, 2018). If that's the case we should expect populist voters to be individuals who are more likely than those who vote for non populist parties to hold low levels of political trust. But this argument raises further questions. If that's the case, how do populist voters differ from abstainers? What makes them vote for populist parties instead of just choosing not to vote? Similarly, some authors suggest that mainstream political parties in European democracies have become overly consensual, rational, and pragmatic, hindering their ability to address political and social conflicts and discouraging voter engagement in politics (Mouffe, 2005). In contrast, Populist Radical Right parties focus on the issues affecting the common man—such as migration, crime, and globalisation—using straightforward language that is accessible to all (Van Leeuwen, 2009)

In a slightly different vein, Kriesi et al. (2006, 2008) argue that the transformation of the Western European societal fabric can be attributed to the emergence of a new political cleavage that separates the beneficiaries from the victims of globalisation. According to this view, the 'winners' of globalisation include individuals and groups that thrive on international competition, such as highly educated entrepreneurs, while the 'losers' are typically those who perceive globalisation as a threat, including lower-educated workers in traditionally protected sectors. This cleavage underscores a fundamental restructuring of political alignments and voter bases, providing fertile ground for the rise of populist parties that claim to champion the cause of those left behind by global economic shifts. The premise is based on the assumption that those with lower socioeconomic positions are likely to vote for populist radical right parties.

Gender has long been considered an important factor in populist voting behaviour. Empirical studies have shown that populist radical right (PRR) parties receive more votes from men than from women (Harteveld et al. 2015; Immerzeel et al. 2015; Spierings and Zaslove 2015b). These studies often attribute the gender disparity to social differences and political attitudes. However, Hilde Coffé (2019) took a different approach by examining personality traits rather than gender differences. Coffé found that feminine traits had little impact on supporting the Dutch radical right party, while masculine traits had a significant influence. This suggests that individuals with masculine traits are more likely to vote for populist parties, offering a new perspective on the gender dynamics in populist voting. Moreover, the academic landscape reveals a nuanced portrait of populist voters, characterised by distinct sociodemographic and sociopolitical traits. Some research underscores that individuals drawn to populist parties exhibit a keen interest in political processes, challenging the stereotype of the apathetic protest voter (Van Hauwaert & van Kessel, 2018). Furthermore, these voters typically harbour a favorability towards democratic principles, albeit coupled with a pronounced dissatisfaction with democracy's practical implementation, alongside an affinity for direct democratic interventions (Rovira Kaltwasser & Van Hauwaert, 2020).

Additionally, Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (2019) illuminate a tendency among populist supporters towards Euroscepticism and a general discontent with democratic governance. Harmsen (2010) also points to the significant overlap between euroscepticism and populism. This overlap can be explained by their common enemy, the political and economic elite. Eurosceptics criticise the European Union as a distant, bureaucratic elite that undermines national sovereignty, while populists target national elites who are perceived as out of touch with the common people. Both ideologies emphasise the importance of national sovereignty, with eurosceptics viewing European integration as a threat to national decision-making, and populists championing the will of the people against external control. Additionally, both eurosceptic and populist narratives appeal to cultural identity and nationalism, leveraging fears of cultural dilution and immigration. Their mutual scepticism towards globalisation and its institutions further reinforces their alignment, as both see globalisation as undermining local jobs, traditions, and communities. Politically, eurosceptic and populist parties often attract similar voter bases—those disillusioned with the status quo and feeling left behind by economic changes. This convergence of views and shared rhetoric binds euroscepticism and populism together, creating a natural synergy between the two ideologies.

Bernauer and Vatter (2012) explore the relationship between populism and political distrust, highlighting that populist movements often capitalise on widespread political discontent and distrust towards established political institutions. They argue that populist rhetoric typically frames the political elite as corrupt and disconnected from the needs of ordinary citizens, which resonates with voters who feel marginalised or disillusioned by the current political system. This distrust towards the political elite fuels support for populist parties, as they promise to disrupt the status quo and return power to the people. The study suggests that the interplay between political distrust and populism is significant, as it drives the populist appeal by tapping into the dissatisfaction and grievances of the electorate.

Furthermore, Marcinkiewicz, K., & Dassonneville, R. (2021) uncover a complex relationship between religiosity and support for populist movements, revealing significant regional variations across Europe. Their findings indicate that in Western European nations, there is no discernible positive correlation between a voter's religiosity and their propensity to support populist radical right parties. On the contrary, in this region, individuals with stronger religious convictions are often less likely to endorse far-right ideologies. This trend starkly contrasts with the dynamics observed in East-Central Europe, particularly in Poland and, to a lesser extent, Hungary, where higher levels of religiosity are associated with an increased likelihood of supporting right-wing populist parties.

This divergence underscores the critical need for research to broaden its geographical scope beyond Western Europe, highlighting the complex interplay between religious beliefs and political affiliations across different European contexts. However, similar to numerous other scholarly inquiries into this domain, this study confines its analysis exclusively to radical parties, thereby leaving additional questions unanswered. Before addressing geographical discrepancies, it's important to revisit our earlier questions. If populist attitudes are fueled by anti-establishment sentiments and discontent with the current government, how do they differ from those who don't vote? Based on our previous discussion, we would expect to find similarities between the two. Therefore, to create a comprehensive image of populist voters, we need to compare them to abstainers in addition to mainstream supporters.

2.4 Populism, mainstream and non-voters

Whether we attribute the success of populist parties to a shift in public sentiment or to the "mainstreaming" of populism by established political actors, the role of non-voters in this process remains somewhat ambiguous. Is the rise of populism primarily driven by an increase in voter turnout, or are populist parties simply drawing most of their support from segments of the electorate that were already voting for other parties (Lubbers et al., 2002; Elff and Van der Brug, 2012)? The relationship between populist movements and electoral turnout is indeed a complex and nuanced topic, one that is closely tied to the question of what commonalities might exist between abstainers and supporters of populist parties. The existing literature offers mixed findings on whether populist parties are more effective than mainstream parties at mobilising non-voters (Immerzeel & Pickup, 2015; Mutz & Reeves, 2005). Key questions arise: Do populist parties attract abstainers because of their anti-establishment attitudes, or do they perhaps mobilise those individuals who feel compelled to vote in order to keep populist radical right (PRR) ideologies from gaining power? Understanding these dynamics is crucial, as the ability of populist parties to convert abstainers into active voters could have a significant impact on the broader political landscape. This influence extends beyond just electoral outcomes; it could also affect the long-term health and stability of democratic systems. The extent to which populist parties can engage previously disengaged voters will likely play a pivotal role in shaping the future of democracy in Europe and beyond.

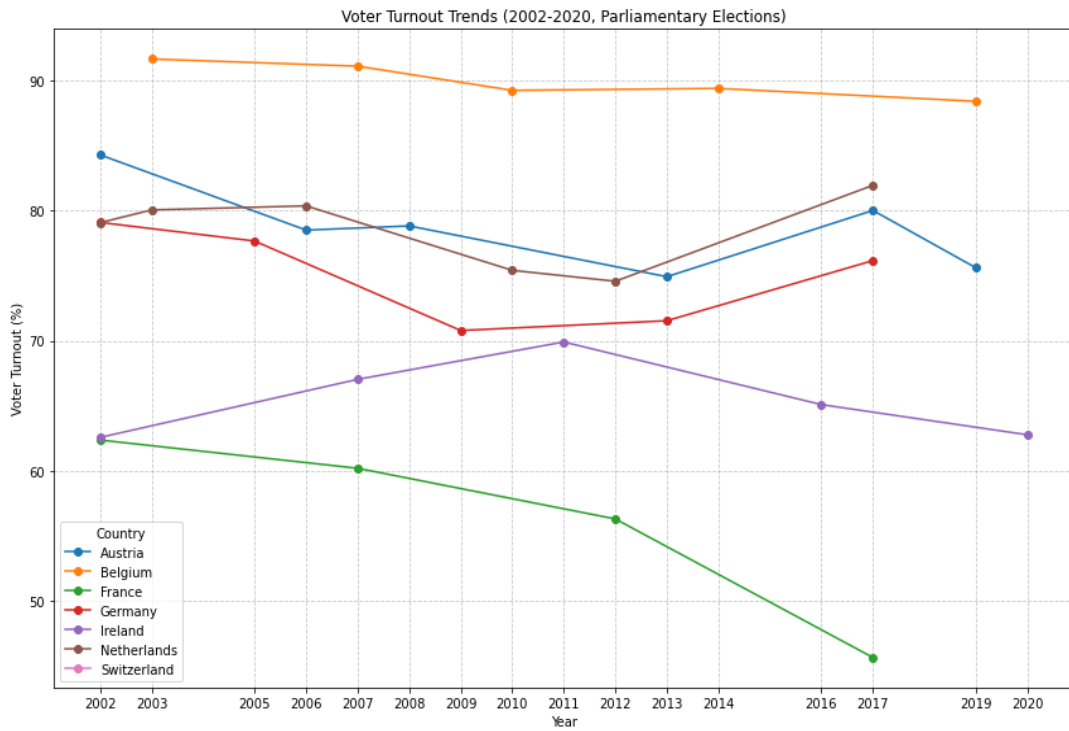


Figure 1.2 Voter Turnout Trends (2002-2020) This plot shows voter turnout trends from 2002 to 2020 in parliamentary elections for several Western European countries. The x-axis represents the years, and the y-axis shows voter turnout as a percentage. Each line represents a different country Source: International IDEA

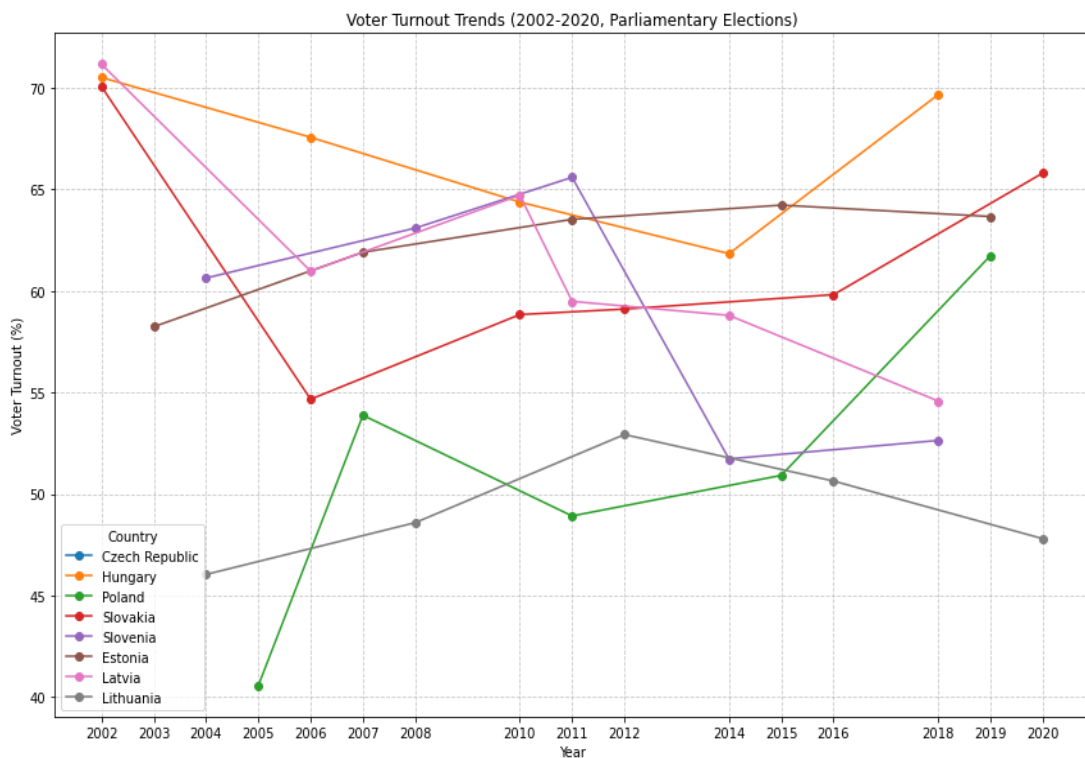


Figure 1.3 Voter Turnout Trends (2002-2020) This plot shows voter turnout trends from 2002 to 2020 in parliamentary elections for several post-communist countries. The x-axis represents the years, and the y-axis shows voter turnout as a percentage. Each line represents a different country

Source: International IDEA

The first plot shows that voter turnout in several Western European countries from 2002 to 2020 generally remained stable or declined, which challenges the expectation that populist parties significantly increase voter participation. While Belgium maintained consistently high turnout, countries like Austria, France, and Germany experienced slight declines, and Ireland saw a temporary increase followed by a drop. This suggests that while populist parties may engage some discontented voters, they do not universally boost overall turnout, indicating that factors other than just populist appeal influence voter engagement. The second plot of voter turnout trends in post-communist countries from 2002 to 2020 shows varying patterns across the region. Countries like Poland and Hungary experienced fluctuations, with Poland showing a noticeable increase in recent years. Slovenia and the Czech Republic maintained relatively stable turnout, while Latvia and Lithuania showed more volatility. Slovakia had a general upward trend, and Estonia remained steady. Overall, these trends suggest that while there may be engagement by populist parties, it does not consistently translate into increased turnout, highlighting diverse factors influencing voter behaviour in these countries.

The uneven trend in voter turnout suggests that the rise in populist voters cannot be fully explained by the increased participation of former abstainers. However, this does not mean we should overlook the potential similarities between these two groups. In fact, examining the profiles of populist voters in comparison to both mainstream voters and non-voters would provide a more comprehensive understanding of who the populist voter truly is. By exploring these different voter segments, we can gain deeper insights into the characteristics, motivations, and behaviours that distinguish populist voters from others, as well as identify any commonalities they may share with non-voters, thus offering a more nuanced and complete profile of the populist electorate.

2.5 How do populist party voters differ from Abstainers?

To summarise the previous discussion on populist voters, several primary features emerge. Populist party supporters commonly express dissatisfaction with the political system, often perceiving traditional elites as out of touch with ordinary people's needs. They also have specific socio-economic grievances, feeling left behind by globalisation and economic liberalisation, which they believe benefit the elite at their expense. This group frequently includes individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds who perceive themselves as economically marginalised. Additionally, many are concerned about organisations like the EU, viewing them as distant bureaucratic elites that undermine national sovereignty. When we examine the characteristics of those who choose not to vote, we often find similar patterns of political discontent, dissatisfaction, and lower levels of education and social integration (Allen, 2017). Non-voters are frequently seen as disengaged, not because of an inherent lack of interest in politics, but due to a lack of motivation or a perceived irrelevance of elections in their lives. Gallego (2014) explores the socio-economic and educational determinants of voter turnout, noting that lower levels of education and socio-economic status are strongly correlated with higher rates of abstention. She argues that these factors diminish political efficacy and engagement among non-voters, leading them to feel disconnected from the political process. Similarly, Aarts and Wessels (2005) examine electoral turnout in European democracies, highlighting that non-voters often experience alienation from the political system. They emphasise the role of political trust and social integration in influencing the likelihood of abstaining, with non-voters typically characterised by a lower sense of civic duty and political interest (Franklin, 2004). These insights underscore the importance of considering non-voters when analysing populist voter profiles, as both groups share key characteristics of disengagement, albeit for different reasons, thereby enriching our understanding of voter behaviour in contemporary democracies.

Based on these two profiles, both non-voting and populist voting can be understood as forms of rejecting mainstream democratic politics (Koch, Meléndez, & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2023). This rejection indicates that both behaviours—abstaining from voting and supporting populist movements—pose a potential threat to liberal democracy, as they reflect a broader disillusionment with the current political system. However, this raises important questions about what else these two groups might have in common, and what differentiates them from

each other. It is crucial to understand what distinguishes populist voters from those who remain loyal to mainstream parties, as well as from those who abstain from voting altogether.

The literature comparing abstainers and populist voters often highlights a shared disenchantment with democratic practices as a significant commonality between these two groups (Koch, Meléndez, & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2023; Immerzeel & Pickup, 2015). However, it is essential to distinguish between the nature of their disconnection from the political system. Non-voters tend to exhibit a more profound detachment, marked by a fundamental disconnection from and diminished expectations of democratic principles and representative practices. This disconnection often leads to two distinct forms of withdrawal from political engagement: complete disengagement from the political process, characteristic of non-voters, or active confrontation with established political parties, which typifies populist voters. While both groups are disillusioned, populist voters channel their discontent into active political participation by supporting populist movements that promise to challenge the status quo. Consequently, we would expect to see lower levels of trust in political institutions among non-voters compared to populist voters, as the former are more fundamentally disconnected and likely to exhibit deeper cynicism and lack of faith in the efficacy of political institutions. In contrast, populist voters, despite their distrust of mainstream political parties, may still believe in the potential for change through alternative political movements. Koch, Cédric M.; Meléndez, Carlos; Kaltwasser, Cristóbal Rovira (2021)

Koch, Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser conducted comparative analysis of non-voters, populist voters, and mainstream voters in contemporary Germany using data from a survey of 2,783 citizens. The study showed that besides the disenchantment with the current state of democratic practice, there is a lack of commonality between abstainers and populist voters. According to the study, in terms of interest and efficacy Populist voters are often more similar to mainstream voters but they tend to have lower education levels and household income compared to mainstream voters. Non-voters, on the other hand, are generally characterised by lower political interest, lower internal efficacy, and a higher likelihood of being socioeconomically marginalised. The study also highlighted that populist voters often hold distinct and polarised ideological positions, which sets them apart from non-voters, who tend to be less ideologically driven and exhibit weaker partisan identities. This weaker ideological orientation among non-voters contributes to their disengagement from the electoral process, as they are less motivated by strong political convictions.. That suggests that we would expect a

higher number in left-right radicalisation in populist voters compared to abstainers. It is important to note that the aforementioned empirical study is limited to a single-country case, focusing exclusively on German populist parties, thereby excluding other populist party types, such as "centrist" populist parties. Additionally, the relatively small sample of German populist party voters, while providing valuable insights, is insufficient for making broad generalisations. Consequently, the literature seeks to address these limitations by testing this hypothesis on a larger, more diverse sample.

Allen T uses a far broader sample to compare far right voters in Western Europe with citizens who abstain from electoral participation (Allen T, 2017). The author tests 4 hypotheses on the similarity between far-right populist voters and abstainers: young age, level of education, social activity, lack of trust, lack of satisfaction with the parties and politicians, and hostility towards European Integration. When comparing far-right and populist voters, the study found that all measures of social integration, trust in other people, negative attitudes towards immigration, and EU expansion, and political interest are positively predictive of far right support over abstention. However, like previous research, this article also has its limitations. Firstly, it focuses exclusively on far-right populist parties, leaving other types of populist movements unexamined. This narrow focus raises questions about the generalizability of the findings to other forms of populism, such as left-wing or centrist populist parties. Secondly, much of the existing research, including this study, relies on pooled analysis of populist parties across various countries. While this approach provides valuable insights, it can obscure the specific nuances that emerge at the country or regional level. These nuances are crucial for understanding the differences and similarities in populist patterns across different contexts. By not accounting for these variations, pooled analyses may overlook important factors that could influence the dynamics of populism in specific settings, thereby limiting the depth and applicability of the conclusions drawn.

The aim of this research is not only to compare populist party voters with mainstream voters but also to examine how they diverge from or converge with the profiles of non-voters by looking at the larger dataset. This raises critical questions: What distinguishes populist voters from non-voters? Do populist parties specifically target abstainers who, in the absence of such parties, might otherwise not participate in elections? Furthermore, do populist parties achieve their success through increased voter turnout, effectively mobilising individuals who

might otherwise disengage from the political process? These inquiries are crucial for understanding the dynamics of voter behaviour and the role populist parties play in shaping electoral outcomes. To explore this further, it is crucial to assess how closely the characteristics of populist party voters align with those who choose to abstain from voting. For this comparison, we will focus on hypotheses drawn from previous research on populism. These hypotheses examine the potential connections between populist voters and nonvoters, particularly through shared dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs and democracy in general, attitudes toward political institutions, ideological indifference, and levels of political interest. By investigating these factors, we aim to determine whether populist voters and abstainers share a common foundation of disillusionment or if their motivations and behaviours are fundamentally different, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of voter behaviour in the context of rising populism.

2.6 Different type of populist parties

The prevailing literature on populist voters often exhibits a narrow focus on the radical right's populist factions, thereby overlooking the expansive ideological landscape occupied by various populist parties. This analytical gap neglects the nuanced reality that the disaffected victims of globalisation are not solely predisposed towards the radical right. Indeed, the gravitational pull of populism, with its multifaceted ideological expressions—spanning the left, right, and centrist spectrums—commands a broader allegiance (Rooduijn, 2017). Populist movements, irrespective of their ideological orientation, consistently articulate a narrative of representation and advocacy on behalf of 'ordinary citizens.' These citizens, the argument goes, are sidelined, if not outright betrayed, by a political and economic elite perceived as condescending and detached. This narrative, pervasive across the ideological spectrum of populism, underscores a critical oversight in focusing the analysis solely on the radical right. The disenchantment and alienation engendered by globalisation's impacts are not the exclusive province of any single ideological cohort. Rather, these sentiments fuel the rise of a broad array of populist entities, each professing to mend the rift between the governed and their governors. This broader perspective reveals the multifaceted nature of populism and its appeal across different ideological backgrounds. Our discussion thus far highlights the necessity of broadening the geographic and ideological scope of populist research. Including a diverse array of party types in this research is crucial for a comprehensive understanding. While previous quantitative analyses, such as that conducted by Rooduijn in 2017, did not identify a universal base among populist voters, the prospect of discerning distinct clusters within different populist electorates and mapping their distribution across regions remains a compelling avenue for exploration. This approach could reveal patterns and variations in populist support that are obscured by a singular focus on the radical right.

When classifying populist parties, they are often broadly categorised as left-wing or right-wing (Van Kessel, 2015; Rooduijn et al., 2014; Pappas & Kriesi, 2015; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2017). A common characteristic of these two types of populism is that they both claim to represent the "voice of the people" (Mudde, 2004). However, they diverge significantly in their definition of "the people." Right-wing populist parties typically define the

"true people" based on cultural identity, emphasising ethnic, national, or religious homogeneity. In contrast, left-wing populist parties define the "true people" based on class, focusing on economic divisions and advocating for the interests of the working class against perceived elite exploitation (Huber & Schimpf, 2017; Mudde, 2007). Another important distinction is their view of society. Right-wing populists, with their core focus on cultural protection, advocate for the exclusion of "outsiders" not only from political power but also from societal integration. This often translates into policies and rhetoric that are hostile towards immigrants and other minority groups. On the other hand, left-wing populists are more inclusive on a societal level, supporting broader societal integration. However, both left-wing and right-wing populists share an anti-pluralist stance regarding the control of political power, often rejecting the legitimacy of political competition and opposition (Katsambekis, 2016). Based on these distinctions, we would expect left-wing populist voters to be more concerned with the government's economic policies, focusing on issues such as income inequality, social welfare, and labour rights. Conversely, right-wing populist voters are likely to be more concerned about immigration, the preservation of traditional cultural values, and the perceived erosion of national identity.

There exist various other classifications of populism. Margaret Canovan (1981) distinguished between agrarian populism and political populism. Agrarian populism centres on the concerns and values of rural communities and farmers. It emphasises a return to traditional agrarian lifestyles, often romanticising rural life and resisting the forces of industrialization and urbanisation. This type of populism advocates for the protection of agricultural interests against the perceived exploitation and neglect by urban elites and industrial capitalists. Political populism, on the other hand, involves a broader appeal to the "common people" against a corrupt or disconnected elite. It highlights the moral integrity and rightful sovereignty of the general populace, advocating for direct representation and often challenging established political institutions. This form of populism seeks to empower the people by promoting leaders who claim to directly embody the people's will, positioning themselves as champions against the entrenched powers of the elite.

Cas Mudde (2007) further differentiated populist parties into radical right, social, and neoliberal categories. Radical right populism combines nationalist, xenophobic, and often authoritarian elements, emphasising the protection of national identity and culture against perceived threats from immigrants and globalisation. These parties advocate for strict

immigration controls and a strong, centralised state to enforce these policies. Social populism focuses on economic issues, advocating for the welfare and economic rights of ordinary people against the interests of the wealthy elite and large corporations. These parties typically support redistributive policies, social safety nets, and greater government intervention in the economy to address inequalities and protect the working class. Neoliberal populism promotes free-market principles and deregulation, appealing to the people's desire for economic freedom and individual entrepreneurship. These parties criticise government intervention and bureaucracy, advocating for tax cuts, privatisation, and policies that support business and economic growth.

Similarly, Hans-Georg Betz (1993) delineated between neoliberal and authoritarian populist clusters. Neoliberal populism, as described by Betz, aligns closely with Mudde's definition, emphasising free-market economics, deregulation, and limited government intervention. These parties appeal to those who feel constrained by government controls and seek greater economic freedoms and opportunities for individual success. Authoritarian populism combines populist rhetoric with strong authoritarian measures. These parties emphasise law and order, national sovereignty, and often adopt a tough stance on immigration and crime. They advocate for strong leadership and centralised authority to implement their policies and maintain social order, frequently positioning themselves against liberal democratic norms and institutions.

These categorizations often lack quantitative investigation and are more intuitive in nature. More systematic studies have tended to focus solely on the radical right (Bruter, Harrison 2011, De Raadt 2004), but a broader scope can be found in the work of Enyedi and Mölder (2018), who through analysing populist party manifestations and policy papers identified three categories of populism: right-wing populism — centrist, paternalistic-nationalistic, and neoliberal — left-wing populist parties. How are all these different? If the first two types of populist parties take on the dominant “host ideology” of the right and left, centrist populist parties distinguish themselves by their minimal or non-existent “thick ideological” content, leading them to appear more moderate and “centrist” (Stanley, 2017). This is not to suggest that these parties necessarily lack deep ideological commitments or principles. According to Učeň (2007), the centrism of these parties may stem from ideological inconsistency rather than intentional moderation. Their policy stances often comprise a mixture of seemingly contradictory proposals, blending left-wing and right-wing economic policies. The distinguishing feature of centrist populist parties is their pragmatic approach to ideological

aspects, emphasising qualities such as competence, probity, and newness. This pragmatic stance allows them to appeal to a broader electorate by focusing on practical solutions rather than ideological purity. They often present themselves as alternatives to the traditional right and left, leveraging their perceived moderation and ability to transcend conventional political divides. Matthijs Rooduijn uses the similar classification (the Populist 3.0) when identifying different types of populist parties. Yet, it remains to be thoroughly examined whether these classifications apply to the electorates of populist movements, raising the question of whether the ideological divisions observed among populist parties reflect the preferences and characteristics of their voters

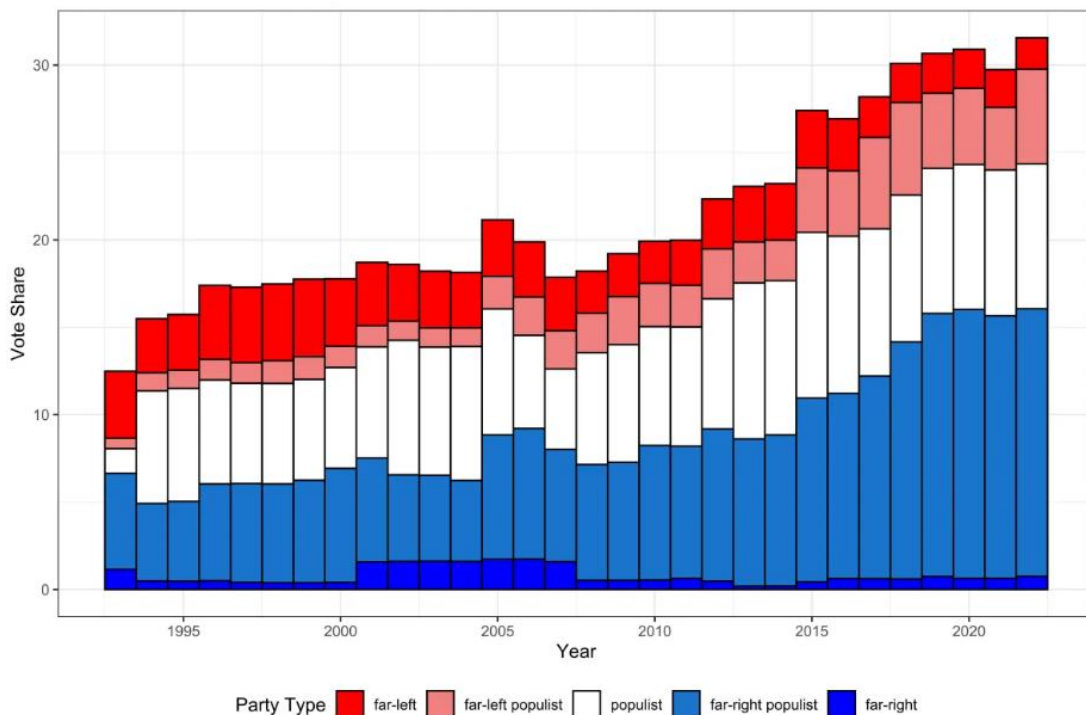


Figure 1.4

Source: Party classification from The PopuList 3.0: Vote shares of (1) far-left, (2) far-left populist, (3) populist, (4) far-right populist, and (5) far-right parties in 31 European countries, weighted by population size

In the following graph, the dark blue area corresponds to far-right voters, the lighter blue area represents far-right populist voters, the white area corresponds to voters of populist parties that are neither right nor left (referred to as "centrist"), the light red area represents far-

left populist voters, and the dark red area corresponds to populist far-left voters. As discussed earlier, academic literature tends to focus on extreme populist right movements due to their predominance in Western Europe, resulting in a bias. This focus has led to the under-studied areas represented by the white and dark red sections in the graph, highlighting the need to examine this portion of the electorate. Since the distribution of different types of populists varies across regions, including parts of Europe beyond the West, we can offer more comprehensive conclusions about the characteristics of populist voters.

2.7 Regional differences

As previously mentioned, the distribution of right, left, and centrist populist parties is correlated with regional differences, which raises further questions about the significance of these regional variations and their implications for populist voters. Specifically, how do Western European populist voters differ from their Eastern-Central and Baltic European counterparts? Before addressing the question of regional differences, it is crucial to examine the principles on which we differentiate Western Europe from Eastern-Central-Baltic Europe. Is this distinction based on geographical, cultural, historical, or political factors? Furthermore, when referring to Western Europe, do we also include Southern countries like Italy and Spain? Understanding the formation of this dichotomous view of Western and Eastern-Central-Baltic Europe is essential. The distinction between Western Europe and Central-Eastern-Baltic Europe is rooted in a complex interplay of geographical, cultural, historical, and political factors. Geographically, Western Europe typically includes countries west of Central Europe, such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Central-Eastern Europe, on the other hand, encompasses nations like Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic states. This geographical delineation sets the stage for further cultural and historical distinctions.

Culturally and historically, Western Europe has been significantly shaped by transformative periods such as the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and the Industrial Revolution. These periods fostered values of liberalism, democracy, and market economies, contributing to a collective identity centred on progress and individual rights (Smith, 1991; Hobsbawm, 1983). In contrast, Central-Eastern Europe's identity has been deeply influenced by centuries of foreign domination and the legacies of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian empires. The impact of communism further shaped its political and social structures, leading to a distinct trajectory of development (Snyder, 2003; Chirot, 1989). Politically, the divide was starkly solidified during the Cold War era. Western Europe aligned with NATO and the European Economic Community, fostering political and economic integration that reinforced democratic governance and market-oriented policies. Central-Eastern Europe, meanwhile, fell under Soviet influence, adopting communist regimes that diverged sharply from Western political and economic models (Brubaker, 1996). This political bifurcation not only defined the ideological landscape of Europe but also entrenched the divide between the two regions. The inclusion of Southern European countries like Italy and Spain within the

concept of Western Europe is often due to their integration into Western political and economic institutions. Despite cultural and historical differences, these countries share a common trajectory of aligning with Western Europe's democratic and market-oriented frameworks, particularly after the mid-20th century (Anderson, 1983; Brubaker, 1996). It's worth mentioning that these imaginary boundaries are not fixed and evolve over time. For example, the political landscape in Europe today is markedly different from the Cold War era, reflecting significant changes in geopolitical alignments, economic integration, and sociopolitical dynamics. The expansion of the European Union (EU) and NATO to include many Central-Eastern European countries has significantly altered the historical East-West divide. This prompts the question: why do we still use this division? To what extent does the historical, especially post-communist, past still influence the social formation of the region? Is it still relevant to look for these differences?

The answer lies in the nuanced understanding of regional cultural, social, and political dynamics. Some authors argue that the early prominence of populism in Eastern-Central Europe compared to Western Europe is linked to the social costs of transitioning from communism and the still incomplete nature of modernization. This transition created a substantial number of "modernization losers" who became susceptible to mobilisation by populist movements. Additionally, the elites were responsible for implementing reforms, leading to strong anti-elitist sentiments in society (Stanley, 2017). The hierarchical implementation of transition reforms, coupled with the numerous frustrations and uncertainties they spawned, provided fertile ground for crafting straightforward and persuasive narratives centred on blame, solidarity, and moral reassurance within the loosely organised party systems of Central and Eastern Europe. This aligns with the earlier discussed theories on the significance of political cleavages utilised by populist groups.

A similar logic applies to the growth of the populist radical right in Western Europe within the context of an emergent "integration versus demarcation" cleavage. The social changes brought about by globalisation generated distinct cohorts of relative "winners," who benefited from economic, cultural, and political openness, and relative "losers," who were exposed to greater risks. Mainstream political parties were expected to formulate "integrationist" programs for the winners, combining open markets, cultural liberalism, and support for supranational political integration (Kriesi et al., 2006; 2008). In contrast, the "losers" of globalisation, who faced increased economic insecurity and cultural displacement,

found resonance with populist radical right parties that emphasised demarcation—protecting national sovereignty, restricting immigration, and preserving traditional cultural values. These parties effectively capitalised on the fears and anxieties of those adversely affected by globalisation, offering simplistic solutions and scapegoating external actors, thereby solidifying their support base.

Other arguments are connected to The Inglehart–Welzel Cultural Map which reveals that all former communist societies rank relatively low on the survival/self-expression dimension. This suggests that despite economic integration and political alignment with Western institutions, the social and cultural legacies of the communist era continue to shape the values and behaviours of these societies. Former communist countries often exhibit a greater emphasis on survival values—prioritising economic and physical security over self-expression and quality of life. This contrasts with the Western European focus on self-expression values, which emphasise individual autonomy, diversity, and democratic participation. To connect the above-mentioned argument to populism, it suggests that populism and its nationalist, exclusivist portrayal of the nation result from the re-emergence of deeply ingrained cultural perceptions of social belonging and the foundations of the polity. In Eastern-Central Europe, the social whole is often considered prior to the individual, and local culture is valued differently compared to Western culture. This perspective emphasises a structural difference between Eastern and Western Europe, suggesting that the former can only overcome these challenges by adopting the political model of the latter. (Niels, 2005) Ignatieff's distinction between Eastern and Western nationalism highlights the different foundations upon which national identity is constructed. According to Ignatieff (1995), Eastern nationalism is rooted in ethnic identity and historical grievances, which often leads to exclusivity and potential conflict. This form of nationalism emphasises a shared ethnic heritage and collective memory of past injustices, fostering a sense of unity against perceived external threats. In contrast, Western nationalism is grounded in civic identity and shared values, promoting inclusivity and democratic participation. This approach emphasises citizenship, adherence to democratic principles, and a commitment to shared values as the basis for national identity. These distinctions help to explain the divergent paths and outcomes of nationalist movements in different regions. In Eastern Europe, the emphasis on ethnic nationalism can lead to exclusionary policies and a higher propensity for ethnic conflict, while Western nationalism's civic orientation supports more inclusive and democratic forms of national unity. However, this dichotomous view is often contested. Příbáň (2004) offers a more complex

picture of Central-Eastern nationalism, showing how post-communist societies grapple with both civic and ethnic dimensions of national identity. While not directly opposing Ignatieff's view, Příbáň provides a nuanced perspective that highlights the coexistence and tension between civic (Western-style) and ethnic (Eastern-style) nationalisms in the context of post-communist Central Europe.

Empirical research by Enyedi and Mölder (2018) and Rooduijn (2017) further complicates the simplistic division of nationalism. If different forms of populism were strictly connected to the division of civic (Western-style) and ethnic (Eastern-style) nationalisms, we would expect to see a predominance of right-wing populist parties in Eastern Europe, emphasising the protection of national identity and culture against perceived threats from immigrants and globalisation (Huber & Schimpf, 2017; Mudde, 2007). However, the empirical evidence does not fully support this expectation. The share of right-wing populist parties is actually lower in Eastern-Central Europe compared to Western Europe. Instead, we see an increased number of centrist populist parties in Eastern-Central Europe. On the other hand, the argument that attributes the spread of populism to the political and social cleavage caused by the transition from communism to democracy aligns well with the predominance of centrist parties in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. The legacy of a hegemonic communist party system hindered the development and institutionalisation of ideologically differentiated and electorally distinctive political parties after the end of communism. In this context, the vast majority of parties in the region were built from the top down by political elites. These parties often possessed loose organisational structures, a restricted membership base, and a rather indistinct ideological profile.

In the post-communist era, this lack of robust ideological foundations and grassroots support fostered strong anti-ideological and anti-party sentiments among the electorate. This environment encouraged an "us versus them" narrative of political competition, where political elites were viewed with suspicion and distrust by a populace disillusioned by the rapid and often painful transitions (Stanley, 2017). The resultant political landscape was ripe for the emergence of centrist populist parties, which could capitalise on these sentiments by presenting themselves as pragmatic alternatives to the traditional ideological parties. Centrist populist parties in the CEE region, therefore, often emphasise competence, integrity, and practical solutions over ideological commitments. They appeal to voters' frustrations with the perceived failures of both left-wing and right-wing parties, positioning themselves as the true

representatives of the people's will against a corrupt and ineffective political elite. This pragmatic approach allows them to navigate the complex post-communist political terrain, where traditional ideological distinctions are less pronounced, and voters are more concerned with effective governance and tangible results. The prevalence of centrist populism in the CEE region can thus be seen as a direct consequence of the region's unique historical and political context. The transition from a monolithic communist system to a pluralistic democratic one created a fertile ground for populist movements that eschew rigid ideological frameworks in favor of more flexible, centrist positions. This adaptability allows them to appeal to a broad spectrum of voters who are united not by a shared ideology, but by a common discontent with the existing political order.

This discrepancy suggests that the relationship between forms of populism and types of nationalism is more complex than initially assumed. In Eastern-Central Europe, the presence of centrist populist parties indicates a blending of civic and ethnic elements, reflecting the region's unique historical and cultural context. These centrist populist parties often navigate the dual pressures of ethnic identity and civic integration, addressing both the grievances of ethnic nationalism and the aspirations of civic nationalism.

3. research design

3.1 Case selection

To identify the common denominators among populist party voters, I analysed voter preferences from populist parties across 24 countries. In Austria, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) is examined, while in Germany, the focus is on AfD and Die Linke. Latvia's analysis includes The coalition between NA and TB / LNNK and KPV LV / PCL, and in Poland, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) is scrutinised. Sweden's study involves the Sweden Democrats (SD), and in Spain, both Unidas Podemos and VOX are considered. Belgium's analysis incorporates N-VA and Vlaams Belang, and Bulgaria features GERB. In Switzerland, the Swiss People's Party (SVP) is evaluated, while the Czech Republic includes ANO 2011 and Svoboda a přímá demokracie - Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD). Estonia's analysis covers Eesti Keskerakond and Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond (EKRE), and Finland focuses on the True Finns (PS). France's study examines Front National / Rassemblement National (FN / RN) and La France Insoumise (FI), and in Hungary, Fidesz and Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom (Jobbik) are included. Ireland's Sinn Féin, Iceland's Framsóknarflokkinn (Progressive Party), and Italy's Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), Forza Italia (FI2), Lega Nord (Lega), and Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) are also analyzed. Lithuania's focus is on the Labour Party (DP) and Party Order and Justice (TT), while the Netherlands includes Party for Freedom (PVV), Socialist Party (SP), and Forum for Democracy (FVD). Norway's analysis covers Rødt and Fremskrittspartiet (FrP). Slovenia examines Nova Slovenija – Krščanski Demokrati (New Slovenia – Christian Democrats), Slovenska Demokratska Stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party), Lista Marjana Šarca (List of Marjan Šarec), and Levica (The Left). Finally, Slovakia's study includes Smer – SD, Slovenská národná strana (SNS), while in the United Kingdom, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) is evaluated. Finally, DF is included from Denmark

Populist Type	Party	Full Name	Country
Far right	FPO	Freedom Party of Austria	Austria
Far left	DIE Linke	Die Linke (The Left)	Germany
Far right	AfD	Alternative for Germany	Germany
Far right	TB / LNNK	For Fatherland and Freedom	Latvia
Centrist	KPV LV/PCL	Who Owns the State?	Latvia
Far right	PiS	Law and Justice	Poland
Far right	SD	Sweden Democrats	Sweden
Far left	UP	United We Can	Unknown
Far right	VOX	Voice	Spain
Far right	N-VA	New Flemish Alliance	Belgium
Far right	Vlaams Belang	Flemish Interest	Belgium
Centrist	GERB	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Far right	SVP	Swiss People's Party	Switzerland
Far right	SPD	Freedom and Direct Democracy	Czech Republic
Centrist	Ano 2011	Action of Dissatisfied Citizens	Czech Republic
Centrist	EK	Estonian Centre Party	Estonia
Far right	EKRE	Estonian Conservative People's Party	Estonia
Far right	PS	True Finns	Finland
Far right	FN/RN	Unknown Front National	France
Far left	FI	Unsubmissive France	France
Far right	Fidesz	Fidesz	Hungary
Far right	Jobbik	Movement for a Better Hungary	Hungary
Centrist	SF	We Ourselves	Ireland
Centrist	FSF	Progressive Party	Iceland
Centrist	M	Centre Party	Iceland
Centrist	FIF	People's Party	Iceland
Centrist	M5S	Five Star Movement	Italy
Centrist	FI2	Let's Go Italy	Italy
Far right	Lega	Lega Nord	Italy
Far right	Fdl	Brothers of Italy	Italy
Centrist	DP	Labour Party	Lithuania
Centrist	TT	Party Order and Justice	Lithuania
Far right	PVV	Party for Freedom	Netherlands
Far left	SP	Socialist Party	Netherlands
Far right	FVD	Forum for Democracy	Netherlands
Far left	Rodt	Red Party	Norway
Far right	FrP	Progress Party	Norway
Far right	N.Si	New Slovenia – Christian Democrats	Slovenia
Far right	SDS	Slovenian Democratic Party)	Slovenia
Centrist	LMS	List of Marjan Å arec	Slovenia
Far left	Levica	The Left	Slovenia
Far right	Sme Rodzina	We are family	Slovakia
Centrist	Smer	Direction – Slovak Social Democracy	Slovakia
Far right	SNS	Slovak National Party	Slovakia
Far right	UKIP	UK Independence Party	United Kingdom
Far right	DF	Danish People's Party	Denmark

1.5.1 Populist parties in Europe

Country	year	Wave
Austria	2019	10th wave
Germany	2021	10th wave
Latvia	2018	10th wave
Poland	2019	10th wave
Sweden	2018	10th wave
Belgium	2014	9th wave
Bulgaria	2017	9th wave
Switzerland	2015	9th wave
Czech Republic	2017	9th wave
Estonia	2015	9th wave
Finland	2015	9th wave
France	2017	9th wave
Hungary	2018	9th wave
Ireland	2016	9th wave
Iceland	2017	9th wave
Italy	2018	9th wave
Lithuania	2016	9th wave
Netherlands	2017	9th wave
Norway	2017	9th wave
Slovenia	2018	9th wave
Slovakia	2016	9th wave
United Kingdom	2017	9th wave
Denmark	2015	9th wave
Spain	2019	10th wave

1.5.2 European countries included in the research, along with the year of the elections considered and the corresponding survey wave used

Because my focus is on understanding the commonalities among the voter bases of different types of populist parties, the most crucial criteria for selecting cases are: (1) that the included parties are prototypically populist, meaning there is a consensus among country experts that they can be categorised as populist, (2) the most recent data is no older than 2015, as I aim to compare my results to those of Rooduijn, M (2017) from earlier waves and observe

how populist voter behaviour has evolved over time, and (3) the inclusion of political orientations as an additional dimension, to enable comparisons of differences within various types of populist parties.: far-right, far-left, and populist parties that are neither far-right nor far-left, which I will refer to as “centrist” throughout the study.

In total, the research includes 26 far-right, 6 far-left, and 14 centrist populist parties. The distribution of these populist party types varies significantly between Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and Western Europe. In CEE, the distribution is as follows: 55% far-right populist, 5% far-left populist, and 40% centrist populist out of populist parties in total. In Western Europe, the distribution is 60% far-right populist, 16% far-left populist, and 24% centrist populist.

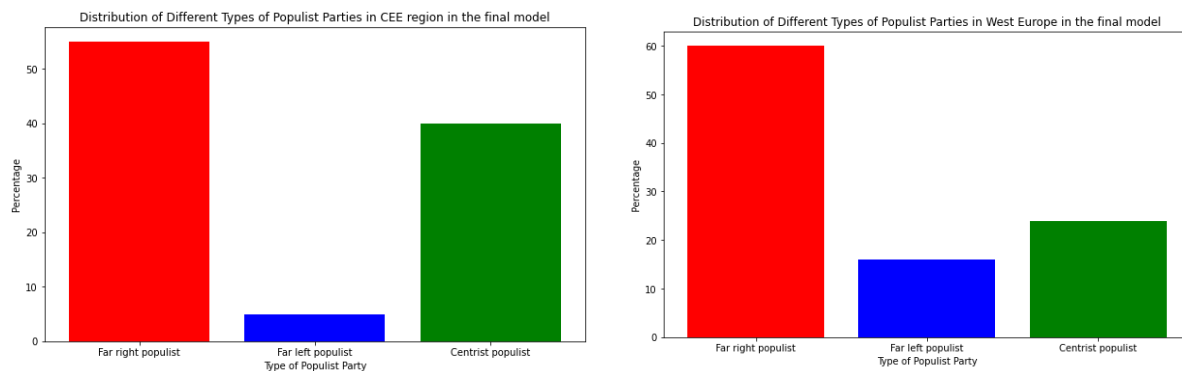


Figure 1.5 Distribution of Different types of populist parties

Bar Chart showing the distribution of the different types of populist parties across Europe

3.2 Data Source

The samples of the populist parties were selected according to the classification system provided by "The PopuList," which categorises political parties in Europe based on their ideological orientation and populist characteristics. "The PopuList" classifies political parties from 31 European countries using indicators for their populist, far-left, far-right, and Eurosceptic tendencies, as well as their parliamentary status. Each entry includes the original and English party names, abbreviations, and binary indicators (1 for presence, 0 for absence) for these characteristics and their current parliamentary status. Exceptional cases are noted with asterisks and specific years indicating periods when the classifications apply. For instance, a party may be marked as borderline populist or Eurosceptic during certain periods, indicated by notes such as "1* (2000-2010)" for borderline populist status from 2000 to 2010. This systematic approach enables comprehensive analysis and comparison of party positions and their evolution over time.

Voter preferences were derived from the European Social Survey (ESS). This combination allowed me to assess how the preferences of populist party voters align with or diverge from those of voters for other parties. The ESS provides comprehensive data on various social, political, and demographic variables across multiple European countries. Each survey round includes questions related to political behaviour, attitudes, and values, allowing researchers to analyse trends over time. We limit the ESS data to the countries for which PopuList2 provides a coding of populist 18 Party Politics 29(1) parties.

The data is meticulously collected and includes variables such as age, gender, education level, income, political interest, satisfaction with the economy and government, attitudes toward immigrants, and left-right political orientation. This combination allowed me to assess how the preferences of populist party voters align with or diverge from those of voters for other parties, providing a nuanced understanding of voter behaviour and preferences across different political contexts.

3.3 Method

Building on Rooduijn, M's approach (2017), instead of performing a single regression analysis on the combined data of populist party voters, I analysed each party separately. This method avoids the risk of observed effects being driven by the specific characteristics of certain parties rather than by populism in general. By examining each party individually, this approach allows for a clearer understanding of what unites the voter bases of populist parties across different contexts without conflating the effects of radicalism with those of populism. To incorporate country-specific elements, I conducted a regression analysis for each populist party within its country of origin. For instance, Belgian populist parties were analysed against other non-populist parties in Belgium. This approach ensures that the unique political contexts of each country are accounted for in the analysis.

In the first part of the research, Initially, I included only populist and mainstream parties in the analysis. Subsequently, I included other non-populist parties to see if this produced different results. However, this adjustment did not cause significant changes. Based on the regression tables, I constructed heat maps to visualise the data points. The symbols "+" and "-" indicate positive and negative directions, respectively, while "0" denotes statistically insignificant data. Statistical significance was determined at the 5 percent level. I used the same approach in the second part of the research, comparing populist party voters to individuals who did not vote. Voting status was determined through a question in the European Social Survey (ESS) that asked whether the respondent voted in the last election. This allowed for a direct comparison between active participants in the political process and those who chose to abstain, providing insights into the differing motivations and characteristics of each group.

In total, I used 16 variables and analysed 46 populist parties. Individuals with missing data for at least one variable were excluded from the final model. Data was considered missing if it included responses such as "Refusal," "Don't know," or "No answer," which were coded with specific values (e.g., 999, 77, 88, 99). These responses were replaced with NaN (Not a Number) to ensure accurate analysis. To maintain consistency across the dataset, some variables were normalised using the MinMaxScaler, which scales the data to a range of 0 to 10. This normalisation process ensures that all variables are on a similar scale, facilitating more accurate comparisons and interpretations. Logistic regression is used to model the probability of voting for a populist party. The logistic regression model is defined as:

$$\text{logit}(P(Y=1))=\beta_0+\beta_1X_1+\beta_2X_2+\dots+\beta_nX_n$$

where $P(Y=1)$ is the probability of voting for the populist party and X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n are the independent variables. The analysis proceeds by fitting a logistic regression model for each populist party in the selected country. Multicollinearity among the independent variables was checked using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF). A VIF value greater than 5 indicates a high multicollinearity problem, suggesting that the variable may need to be considered for removal. This threshold helps identify and mitigate the potential distortions in the regression analysis caused by multicollinearity. By assessing VIF values, I ensured that the independent variables included in the model do not exhibit excessive multicollinearity, which can undermine the reliability and interpretability of the results. Variables with VIF values exceeding 5 were scrutinised and, if necessary, removed to maintain the robustness of the analysis. This step is crucial for producing accurate and reliable regression estimates, as it ensures that each variable contributes unique information to the model without redundant overlap with other variables.

Additionally, parties with fewer than 15 respondents were excluded to ensure the robustness of the analysis. The 16 variables encompassed a range of socio-demographic and attitudinal factors, such as age, gender, education level, income, Euroscepticism, satisfaction with the economy and government, attitudes toward immigrants, political interest, religiosity, political distrust, and left-right radicalism. This comprehensive approach provides a detailed understanding of the commonalities and differences among populist voters across various European countries. Through this careful examination and adjustment process, the analysis maintains its integrity and provides a clearer understanding of the relationships between the independent variables and the voting behaviour of populist party supporters.

3.4 Variable descriptions

The individual-level data utilized in this study is drawn from the 9th and 10th waves of the European Social Survey. The dependent variable in our analysis represents the respondent's choice of party in the most recent national election. This variable is binary, coded such that a respondent is assigned a score of '1' if they voted for a populist party and a score of '0' if they voted for a mainstream party. To construct a comprehensive profile of populist voters compared to mainstream voters and abstainers, we incorporate a range of independent variables, including demographic, attitudinal, and ideational factors. These variables help to create a more detailed and nuanced understanding of the characteristics that distinguish populist voters from others. In the sections below, we will discuss each of these variables in detail, explaining how they are coded in the dataset and how they will be referred to throughout the text and visualizations.

The demographic variables in this study include age, gender, level of education, and household income. Age (*agea*) is a continuous variable measured in years, providing the exact age of the respondent. Gender (*gndr*) is a binary variable coded as 0 for male and 1 for female. The level of education (*eiscd*) is an ordinal variable capturing the highest level of education attained by the respondent, categorised as follows: 1 for less than lower secondary education, 2 for lower secondary education completed, 3 for upper secondary education completed, 4 for post-secondary non-tertiary education completed, and 5 for tertiary education completed. Household income (*hinctnta*) is also an ordinal variable, measured in deciles from 1 (lowest income decile) to 10 (highest income decile), reflecting the household's total net income.

The study also includes several attitudinal variables to capture respondents' views on various socio-political and economic issues. Support for European integration (*euftf*) is measured on an 11-point interval scale, where 0 indicates that unification has already gone too far and 10 suggests that European unification should go further. Attitude toward direct democracy (*votedir*) is another interval variable, ranging from 0 (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important). Satisfaction with the economy (*stfeco*) and satisfaction with the government (*stfgov*) are both measured on a 0 to 10 interval scale, with 0 representing extreme dissatisfaction and 10 representing extreme satisfaction.

Another attitudinal variable, originally labeled as "stfdem," measures respondents' satisfaction with the way democracy functions in their country. This variable is ordinal, with a scale ranging from 0 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied). This variable enables a nuanced analysis of how satisfaction with democracy correlates with other factors, such as voting behavior and demographic characteristics. By examining this variable in relation to others, we can gain deeper insights into how varying levels of democratic satisfaction influence political engagement and broader social attitudes, providing a richer understanding of the dynamics at play in the political landscape.

The variable capturing attitudes toward the government's role in reducing income differences, originally labeled as "gincdif," is measured on an ordinal scale. In its initial form, responses ranged from 1 (agree strongly) to 5 (disagree strongly). However, to enhance clarity in our analysis, we reversed the scale so that 5 now represents "agree strongly" and 1 represents "disagree strongly." This adjusted variable is referred to as "redistribution policy." Consequently, a positive coefficient in the regression tables now indicates more favorable attitudes toward redistribution policies, making it easier to interpret the relationship between this variable and other factors in our study. This modification ensures that the direction of the effects is consistent and intuitively aligned with the broader context of the analysis.

The attitude toward allowing gays and lesbians to live as they wish, originally labeled as "freehms," is measured on an ordinal scale where 1 represents "strongly in favor" and 5 represents "strongly against." For clarity in our visualizations and analysis, we will refer to this variable as "Anti-LGBT Rights." In the regression tables, a positive coefficient for this variable will indicate more negative attitudes toward LGBT rights. Similarly, the attitude toward immigrants, originally labeled as "imsmetn," is measured on a scale from 1 (many should be allowed to come) to 4 (none should be allowed to come). We will refer to this variable as "Anti-Immigration Attitudes" throughout the analysis. This labeling and coding approach will help ensure consistency and ease of interpretation when discussing the relationship between these attitudes and other variables in our study.

Political interest, originally labeled as "polintr," is measured as an ordinal variable that captures the respondent's level of interest in politics, ranging from 1 (very interested) to 4 (not at all interested). To enhance clarity in our analysis, we will refer to this variable as "Political Apathy." In this context, a negative coefficient in the regression tables will indicate greater political interest, aligning with the original coding but providing a more intuitive understanding

of the relationship between political engagement and other factors in the study. Religiosity (rlgdgr) is measured on an interval scale ranging from 0 (not at all religious) to 10 (very religious).

Finally, political trust, labeled as "political_trust," is a composite measure that combines respondents' trust in both parliament and politicians. This variable is measured on a scale ranging from 0 (complete trust) to 10 (no trust at all), providing a nuanced view of how trust in political institutions correlates with other factors. Additionally, left-right radicalism, labeled as "left_right_radicalism," captures respondents' general political orientation. This variable is recorded on a scale from -5 (extreme left) to 5 (extreme right), with the values squared to emphasize the degree of radicalism. This squared transformation allows us to better identify and analyze extreme political positions, offering deeper insights into how radical political views may influence voting behavior and other attitudinal measures.

4. Results

4.1 PART I

4.1.1 All types of populist party voters against mainstream party voters:

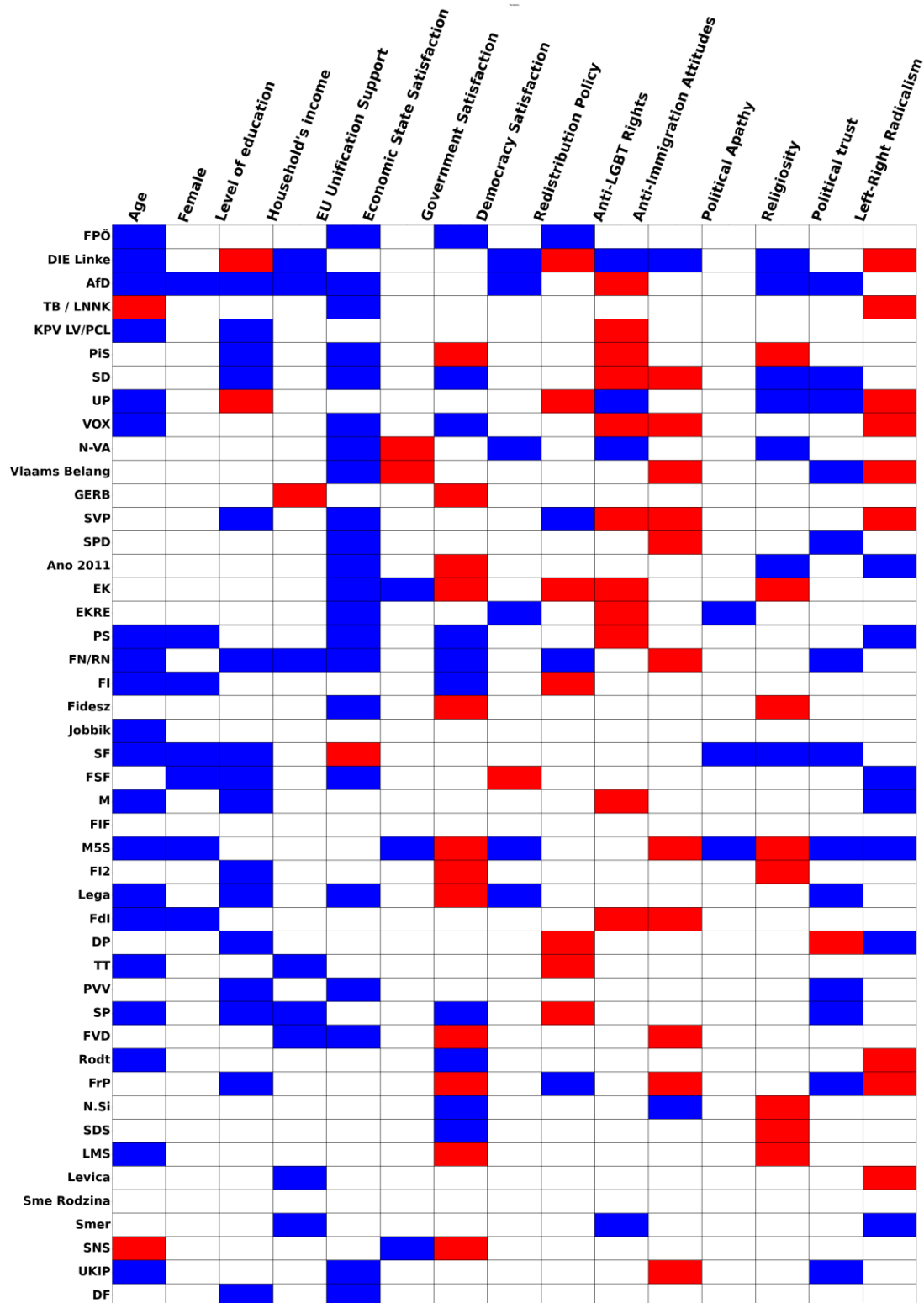


Figure 1.6 Heatmap of All types of populist party voters against mainstream party voters red and blue colors depict the direction of the regression coefficients. Red indicated positive direction, blue - negative

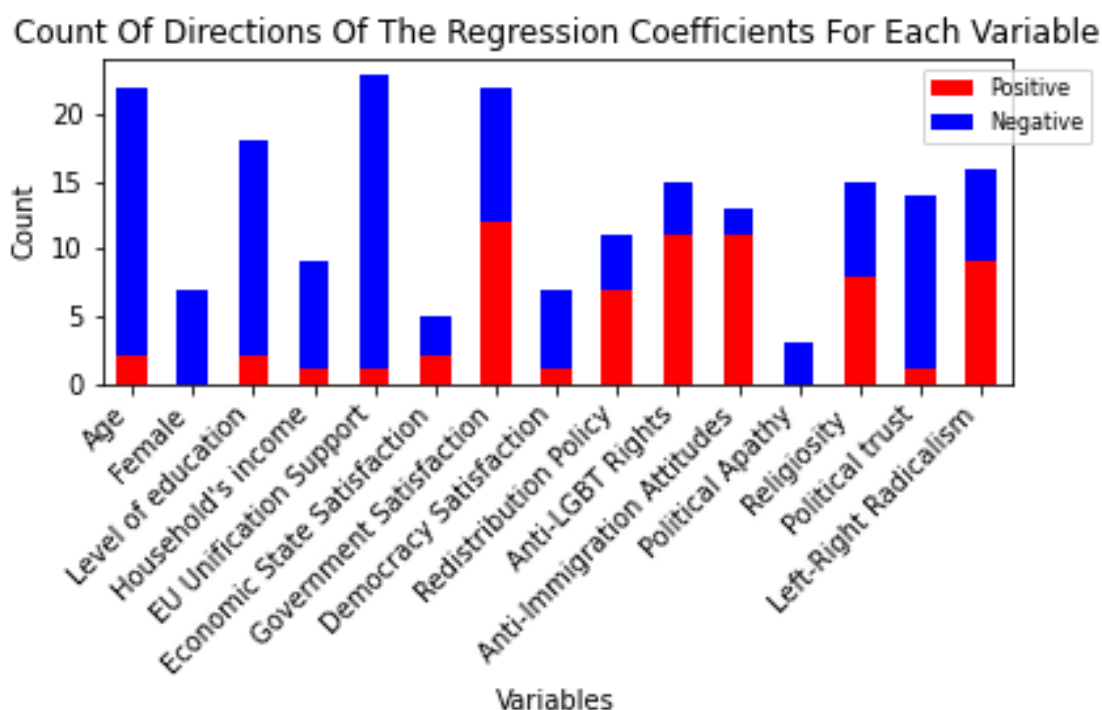


Figure 1.7 Bases of Electoral Support for Populist Parties. the plot shows the count of positive and negative directions of Regression Coefficients for each variable per party

The following heatmap provides an insightful overview of the direction of the regression coefficients, indicating whether the effects are positive or negative (red – positive, blue – negative). Statistically insignificant data is left white. The heatmap integrates data from the 9th and 10th waves of the European Social Survey, providing a robust dataset for analysis. Notably, the 9th wave survey lacks the variable 'votedir,' which captures attitudes toward direct democracy measured on a scale, resulting in its omission in the heatmap. Given that we only have a few observations of attitudes toward direct democracy (9 out of 46), we decided to exclude this variable entirely from the analysis to maintain the robustness of our results. Similarly, the Hungarian survey did not include the variable 'Attitude toward immigrants,' which assesses attitudes toward immigrants, leading to its absence in the corresponding section.

This heatmap encompasses all types of populist parties across Europe, offering a comprehensive visual representation of the regression results. It provides a clear depiction of the directionality of the regression coefficients for various variables, aiding in the understanding of how different factors influence voting for populist parties. The displayed effects in the heatmap represent the directions of the regression coefficients for different variables that we will discuss in detail below.

socio-demographic variables

First, let's begin our inquiry into how socio-demographic variables affect populist party voting behaviour. These variables include age, gender, level of education, household income and religiosity. Understanding the impact of these factors is crucial for comprehending the broader patterns of support for populist parties.

Age appears to have a statistically significant negative effect on voting for populist parties in 20 out of 46 cases, indicating that older individuals are less likely to support populist parties in a substantial number of contexts. This negative relationship suggests that age is an important factor in understanding voter behaviour toward populist parties, with older voters showing a tendency to avoid populist options. Conversely, age has a positive effect in only 2 cases, underscoring the predominance of the negative relationship. Similarly, the **level of education** exhibits a predominantly negative relationship with voting for populist parties. In 16 out of 46 cases, higher education levels correlate with lower support for populist parties, while only one case shows a positive effect. This indicates that individuals with higher levels of education are generally less inclined to vote for populist parties, possibly due to a greater alignment with the values and policies of mainstream parties or a higher level of political awareness and critical thinking skills that discourage populist support. On the other hand, the influence of **gender** on voting for populist parties shows very limited statistically significant results. Out of the total cases, gender has a statistically significant negative effect in only 7 instances, indicating that gender is not a strong predictor of populist voting behaviour in most contexts. This limited impact suggests that other socio-demographic factors, such as age and education, play a more substantial role in influencing voter preferences for populist parties.

Additionally, **household total net income** exhibits a negative and statistically significant relationship with voting for populist parties in 8 out of 46 cases, with a positive relationship observed in 1 case. This indicates that while there is some evidence to support the

notion that voters of populist parties tend to have lower incomes, the relationship is not consistent across all countries and populist parties. The mixed results suggest that lower socioeconomic position, as measured by income, is not a uniformly strong predictor of populist voting behaviour. This warrants further investigation into other factors that may contribute to the support for populist parties. The findings regarding **religiosity**, income redistribution and satisfaction with the government are mixed and lack clear or consistent patterns. In 8 out of 46 cases, religiosity has a positive effect, suggesting that individuals with higher religious involvement are more likely to support populist parties. This may be due to the alignment of certain populist parties, particularly right-wing ones, with traditional religious values and moral conservatism. However, in 7 out of 46 cases, religiosity has a negative effect, indicating that in some contexts, more religious individuals are less inclined to support populist movements. This variability suggests that the impact of religiosity on populist support is context-dependent, influenced by the specific religious landscape, the nature of the populist party, and the broader socio-political environment.

Political Attitudes and Opinions:

Next, we move onto an examination of Political Attitudes and Opinions, which are crucial in understanding the rise of populism. Key questions include whether the surge in populist support is due to growing political distrust, increased left and right radicalism, or dissatisfaction with the economy or government. Additionally, we will investigate how political interest, attitudes towards immigration, gay people, and views on income redistribution influence populist voting.

Political trust plays a significant role in predicting support for populist parties. Political trust exhibits a negative and statistically significant relationship with voting for populist parties in 13 out of 46 cases, with only one case showing a positive relationship. This pattern suggests that individuals who distrust political institutions and elites are more likely to support populist parties, which often position themselves as challengers to the established political order. This aligns with the narrative of populist parties presenting themselves as the true representatives of the people against a corrupt and unresponsive elite. Variables capturing satisfaction with the state of the economy show very limited statistically significant results, with only two positive cases and three negative cases. This indicates that economic satisfaction does not consistently

predict support for populist parties, suggesting that other factors might be more influential in shaping populist voting behaviour. Similarly, the results for left-right radicalism are varied, with nine cases showing a positive relationship—implying that increased left and right radicalism is connected to populist voting—and seven cases showing a negative relationship. This mixed evidence indicates that radical political views can both drive and deter support for populist parties, depending on the context. Satisfaction with the government displays an equally uncertain influence, with ten cases of a negative relationship and twelve cases of a positive relationship. This ambivalence suggests that while dissatisfaction with government performance can drive populist support, in some contexts, populist voters might also be those who are satisfied with government actions that align with their populist ideals.

Political Apathy shows minimal influence, with no positive relationships and three negative relationships in two cases. This indicates that political interest does not uniformly drive support for populist parties and might interact with other variables in more nuanced ways. The mixed results highlight the complexity and diversity of populist voter bases, suggesting that these factors do not uniformly influence support for populist parties and may vary significantly based on regional and contextual differences. In addition to the variables used by Rooduijn in his earlier work, my model includes a variable that captures attitudes toward allowing gays and lesbians to live their lives as they wish. The analysis reveals that in only five cases were there positive statistically significant results, while 11 cases showed negative attitudes. This trend suggests a possible inclination towards social conservatism among populist voters. The negative significant results highlight a consistent pattern of resistance to LGBT rights within these voter bases, pointing to a broader conservative social outlook that may characterise many populist party supporters.

Moreover, negative attitudes toward immigrants exert significant effects in 11 out of 44 cases, with positive relations in only two cases (Hungarian parties are missing this variable). This suggests that negative sentiments toward immigrants are a more consistent predictor of populist voting behaviour compared to socioeconomic factors like household income. While not universal, the relatively higher frequency of significant results indicates that anti-immigrant attitudes are an important factor uniting voters of populist parties across various contexts. Additionally, we had to exclude the variable 'attitude toward direct democracy' since it is only available in the 10th wave of the survey (showing a positive direction in 3 out of 9 cases, with none exhibiting a negative direction). Due to the absence of this variable in the 9th wave, our

analysis is restricted to the limited cases from the 10th wave. However, this small sample size does not provide sufficient evidence to draw definitive conclusions. While the limited data suggests a trend towards favouring direct democracy among populist voters, the small number of cases prevents us from making robust assertions. Further research with a larger sample size is necessary to thoroughly test this hypothesis.

In light of this limitation, we decided to include variables like attitudes towards the current democratic situation, given the theoretical models that often incorporate democratic attitudes when discussing populism. The variable 'satisfaction with democracy' has shown a negative relationship in 6 cases and a positive relationship in only one case. This pattern suggests that dissatisfaction with the current democratic situation can be a predictor of support for populist parties. Analysing these findings, we observe that dissatisfaction with democracy aligns with the broader narrative of populist parties, which often criticise the existing democratic institutions as being unresponsive, corrupt, or disconnected from the people. Populist movements typically position themselves as the champions of true democracy, advocating for reforms that purportedly better reflect the will of the people. This critique resonates strongly with voters who feel disillusioned with the performance of their democratic systems.

Euroscepticism

Support for European integration exhibits a significant negative relationship in many cases. Specifically, negative attitudes towards EU expansion are observed in 22 out of 46 cases, which is nearly half of the instances studied. Conversely, there is only one case showing a positive relationship. This suggests that Euroscepticism is a consistent and significant predictor of support for populist parties.

These findings indicate that the voter bases of populist parties commonly consist of individuals who are more likely to be Eurosceptic compared to those who support mainstream parties. The relatively high frequency of significant negative relationships between attitudes toward EU expansion and voting for populist parties supports this hypothesis. The consistent presence of Euroscepticism as a significant factor underscores its importance in the appeal of populist parties across different contexts. This implies that cultural and political attitudes

towards the European Union play a crucial role in shaping populist support, reflecting broader discontent with the EU's influence and integration policies.

The presence of Euroscepticism and political distrust as significant predictors of populist support highlights the broader themes of disillusionment and dissatisfaction that populist parties exploit. Euroscepticism reflects a broader scepticism towards supranational governance and a preference for national sovereignty, while political distrust indicates a rejection of existing political institutions and processes

Now, let's focus on the different types of populist parties and test whether there are any patterns within each type. Is there something that unites the voter bases of these particular parties? It's especially interesting to examine the variables that showed mixed results in the unified data. Below, I will separately analyse heatmaps for specific kinds of populist parties to uncover any unifying trends or distinctive characteristics within each type.

4.1.2 Far right populist party voters against mainstream party voters:

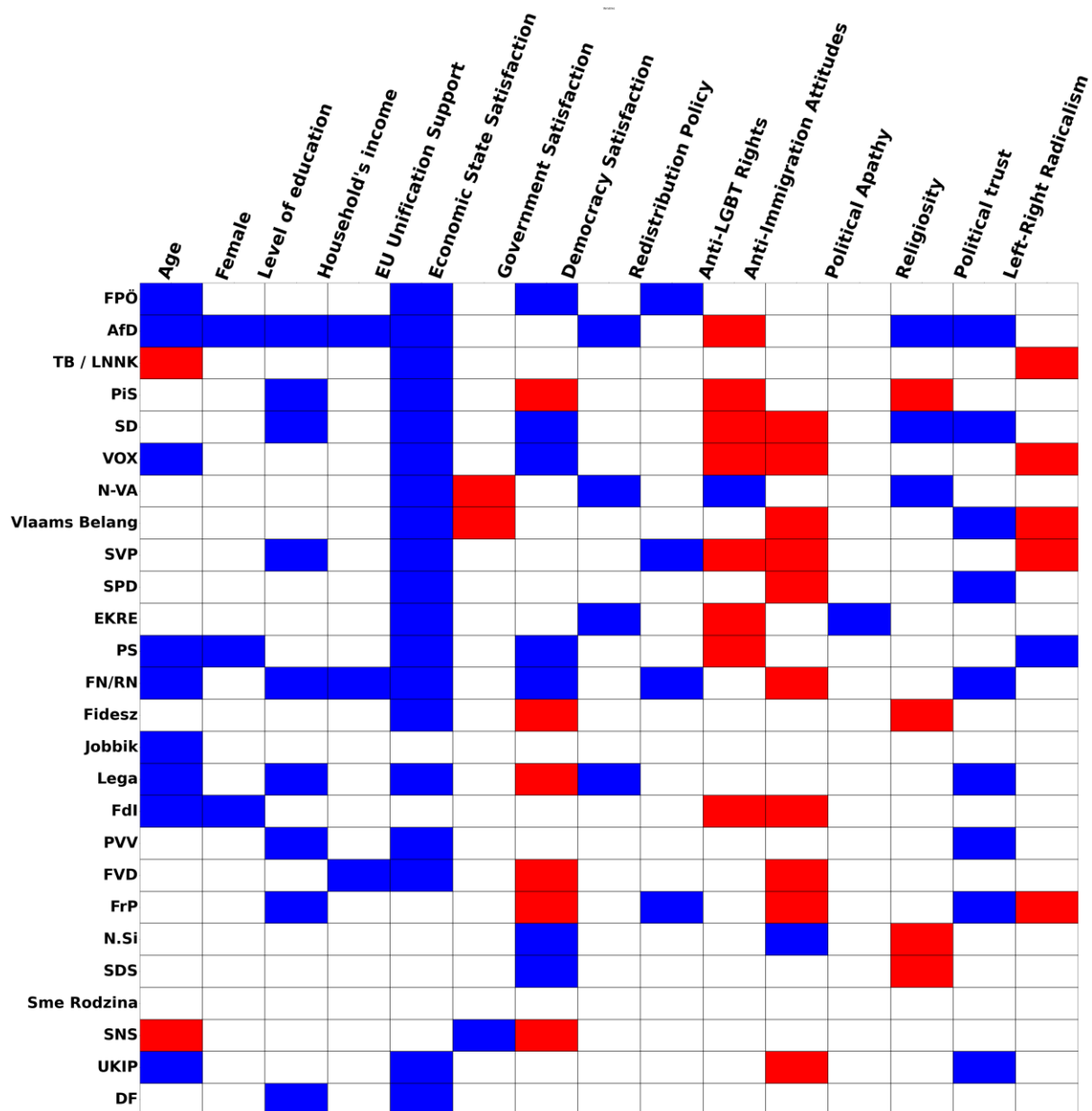


Figure 1.8 Heatmap of Right-Wing populist party voters' preferences red and blue colors depict the direction of the regression coefficients. Red indicated positive direction, blue - negative

Examining the heatmap for far right populist parties, we observe stronger effects in the variables where we previously identified significant trends. Euroscepticism exerts statistically significant effects in 19 out of 26 cases, indicating a robust pattern of scepticism towards the EU among far right populist voters. Negative attitudes towards immigrants are significant in 10 out of 23 cases, demonstrating a consistent trend of anti-immigrant sentiment within these

voter bases. Political distrust is significant in 9 out of 26 cases, further highlighting the pervasive distrust in political institutions among supporters of far right populist parties.

There are more consistent attitudes observed in the variable that captures the belief that the government should reduce differences in income levels – when focusing on a narrower sample of far right populist voters. In this group, 4 out of 26 cases show a negative direction, with none exhibiting a positive direction. This indicates that voters of far right populist parties are generally less in favour of government redistribution policies. The consistent opposition to income redistribution underscores a broader economic conservatism among far right populist supporters. Additionally, the variable representing negative attitudes towards allowing gays and lesbians to live their lives as they choose is prevalent in far right groups, with statistically significant results in 8 out of 26 cases and only one case of different direction. This confirms a strong pattern of social conservatism within these voter bases. As for age, younger individuals tend to vote more for far-right populist parties, with statistically significant results in 10 out of 26 cases. To sum up, These findings highlight the consistent patterns of Euroscepticism, distrust in political institutions, and social conservatism within the voter bases of far right populist parties, along with a notable opposition to government redistribution policies.

4.1.3 Far left populist party voters against mainstream party voters:

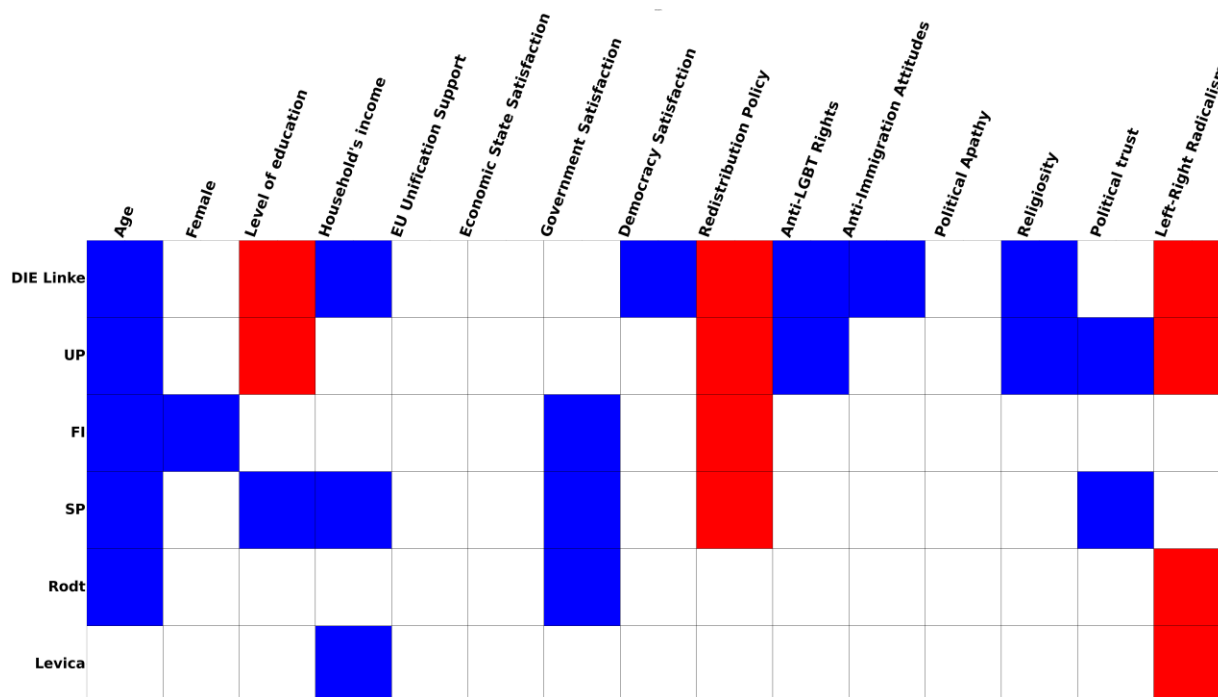


Figure 1.9 Heatmap of Left-Wing populist party voters' preferences. red and blue colors depict the direction of the regression coefficients. Red indicated positive direction, blue - negative

For far left populist parties, we observe a strong correlation with age: in 5 out of 6 cases, there are statistically significant results, indicating that younger people are more likely to vote for far left populist parties. Unlike the far right populist party data, we do not see any significant effect of Euroscepticism among far left populist party voters, suggesting that Euroscepticism is not an inherent trait of populist voters but rather specific to far right populist voters. Another difference is the effect of left-right radicalism. In this case, greater radicalism is associated with voters in 4 out of 6 cases with statistically significant results. Regarding attitudes towards immigration, there is only one case of statistically significant influence, contrasting with the significant anti-immigrant sentiment observed among far right populist voters, suggesting that populism has different meanings to voters on the left and on the right. Alternatively, in 4 out of 6 cases, there is a statistically significant trend towards favouring government intervention to reduce income inequality. This stands in stark contrast to far right populist party voters,

where there is a statistically significant trend against redistribution in 8 out of 24 cases. This suggests a strong influence of the type of populist party when discussing the characteristics of populist voters, with far left populist voters favouring more progressive economic policies. Moreover, political distrust does not have much importance among far left populist party voters, with only 2 cases out of six showing a statistically significant relationship. This lack of significant association with political distrust further differentiates far left populist voters from their far right counterparts, emphasising the unique factors that influence the support bases of different types of populist parties. These findings highlight the distinct political, economic, and social attitudes that characterise the voter bases of far left populist parties, underscoring the importance of distinguishing between different forms of populism when analysing voter behaviour

The main commonality between far right and far left populist parties is the influence of age. In both cases, younger people show a higher tendency to vote for these particular parties. Specifically, younger individuals are statistically more likely to support far left populist parties in 5 out of 6 cases and far right populist parties in 10 out of 24 cases. This shared trend underscores the appeal of populist ideologies to younger demographics across the political spectrum.

4.1.4 Centrist populist parties

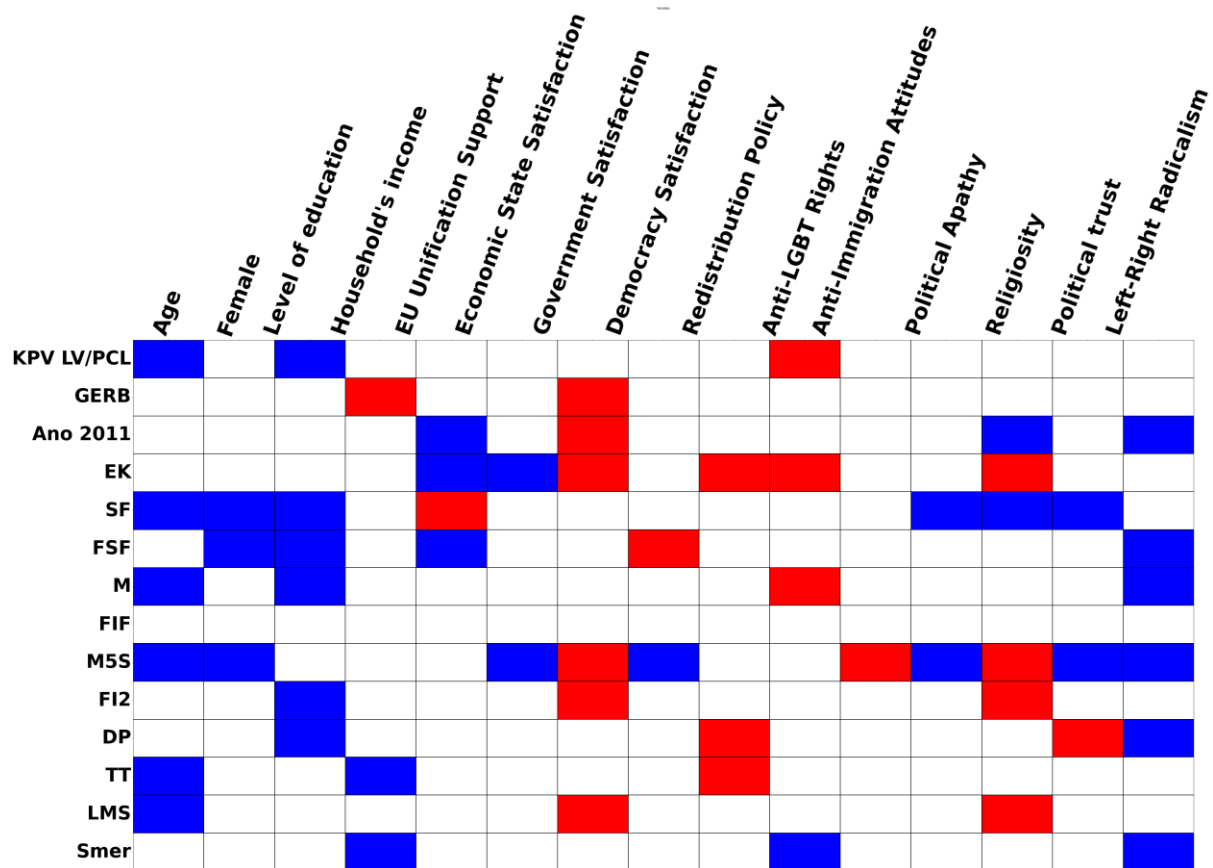


Figure 2.0 Heatmap of Centrist populist party voters' preferences. red and blue colors depict the direction of the regression coefficients. Red indicated positive direction, blue - negative

In the case of populist parties which are neither far right nor far left, and which we will refer to as centrist parties, the results are less concentrated and more varied. Age still remains an important factor, with 6 significant negative effects out of 14 cases and only one positive case, suggesting that younger people are indeed voters of populist parties. Similar to far right populist party voters, there is a predominance of negative direction in the level of education, indicating that lower educational attainment and younger age is associated with support for these centrist populist parties. However, in other variables, the results are more diffuse and do not show clear patterns. Left-right radicalism shows negative relation with statistically significant results in 6 cases. This aligns with the theoretical explanations we laid out before. Centrist populist parties attract moderate voters.

The main deviation from the other types of populist parties is seen in the variable that captures satisfaction with the government. While in far right and far left populist parties this relationship was mostly negative, indicating dissatisfaction, centrist populist party voters show a different trend. Here, 6 out of 14 cases exhibit a positive relationship with government satisfaction, suggesting that voters of centrist populist parties may have a more complex or nuanced view of government performance. Additionally, most of the parties with the positive direction, have strong political influence in their countries which further explains the link between the support and satisfaction with government's performance.

4.1.4 Summary

The voter bases of populist parties exhibit distinct characteristics that vary depending on the type of populism. Far-right populist parties attract voters who are Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, and socially conservative, often with lower levels of education and high levels of political distrust. Conversely, far-left populist parties appeal to younger voters who support progressive economic policies and are less concerned with immigration and political distrust. Centrist populist parties, while also appealing to younger voters and those with lower education levels, differ by having a positive relationship with government satisfaction. These variations highlight the nuanced nature of populist support across the political spectrum, indicating that the appeal of populist parties is influenced by a complex interplay of socio-economic factors and political attitudes.

These results bolster the argument that populism is a "thin" ideology, one that subsists on and adapts to other "dominant" ideologies. The preferences of both left-wing and right-wing populist party voters align with the ideological distinctions we discussed earlier. For example, right-wing populist voters tend to exhibit exclusivity on a societal level, notably by opposing the rights of gay and lesbian individuals. In contrast, this relationship is significantly weaker among left-wing populist voters. Moreover, left-wing populist voters show strong support for government redistribution policies, highlighting their alignment with progressive economic views.

Centrist populist voters, however, present a more diffuse set of preferences. This confirms the notion of centrist populism as having minimal or non-existent "thick ideological" content. Instead, centrist populist parties often blend seemingly contradictory proposals, merging elements of both left-wing and right-wing economic policies. This ideological fluidity allows them to appeal to a broader voter base by not committing to a specific, rigid ideology. These findings underscore the adaptable and eclectic nature of populism, revealing how it can integrate and exploit diverse ideological elements to mobilise support across different segments of the electorate.

One consistent factor across all types of populist parties is the influence of age. Younger people are more likely to vote for populist parties, whether far-right, far-left, or centrist. This

trend suggests that populist ideologies resonate more strongly with younger demographics, who may be seeking alternative political solutions. This observation prompts further research to understand the underlying reasons behind this attraction. Several questions arise: Is populism appealing to younger voters because they are less concerned with long-term consequences and more susceptible to short-term promises made by populist leaders? Alternatively, could it be that younger individuals are more dissatisfied with the current political establishments, leading their discontent to drive them towards populist movements? Another possibility is that the style and rhetoric adopted by populist parties may be more engaging or relatable to younger audiences. Understanding these dynamics requires a deeper exploration into the socio-political attitudes and motivations of younger voters. By doing so, researchers can gain insights into the specific elements of populist ideologies and strategies that resonate with this demographic, ultimately shedding light on the broader implications for political engagement and the future of populist movements.

4.1.5 differences between Western and Central-Eastern populist voters

The empirical findings above have highlighted the significant role of “host ideologies” in understanding populist voters. In this section, we will examine whether regional differences yield similar results. Given the uneven distribution of various types of populist parties across regions, we anticipate discovering some variations. However, it will be intriguing to see how these differences align with the previous findings. Our investigation will focus on whether regional variations exist within the scope of different types of populist party distributions or if additional differences emerge that are specific to particular regions. Understanding these regional dynamics is crucial, as it will help determine if the patterns observed are consistent across different geographical contexts or if unique regional factors influence populist support. By analysing regional differences, we aim to uncover whether the distribution of populist parties reflects broader socio-political trends or if localised factors play a more significant role.

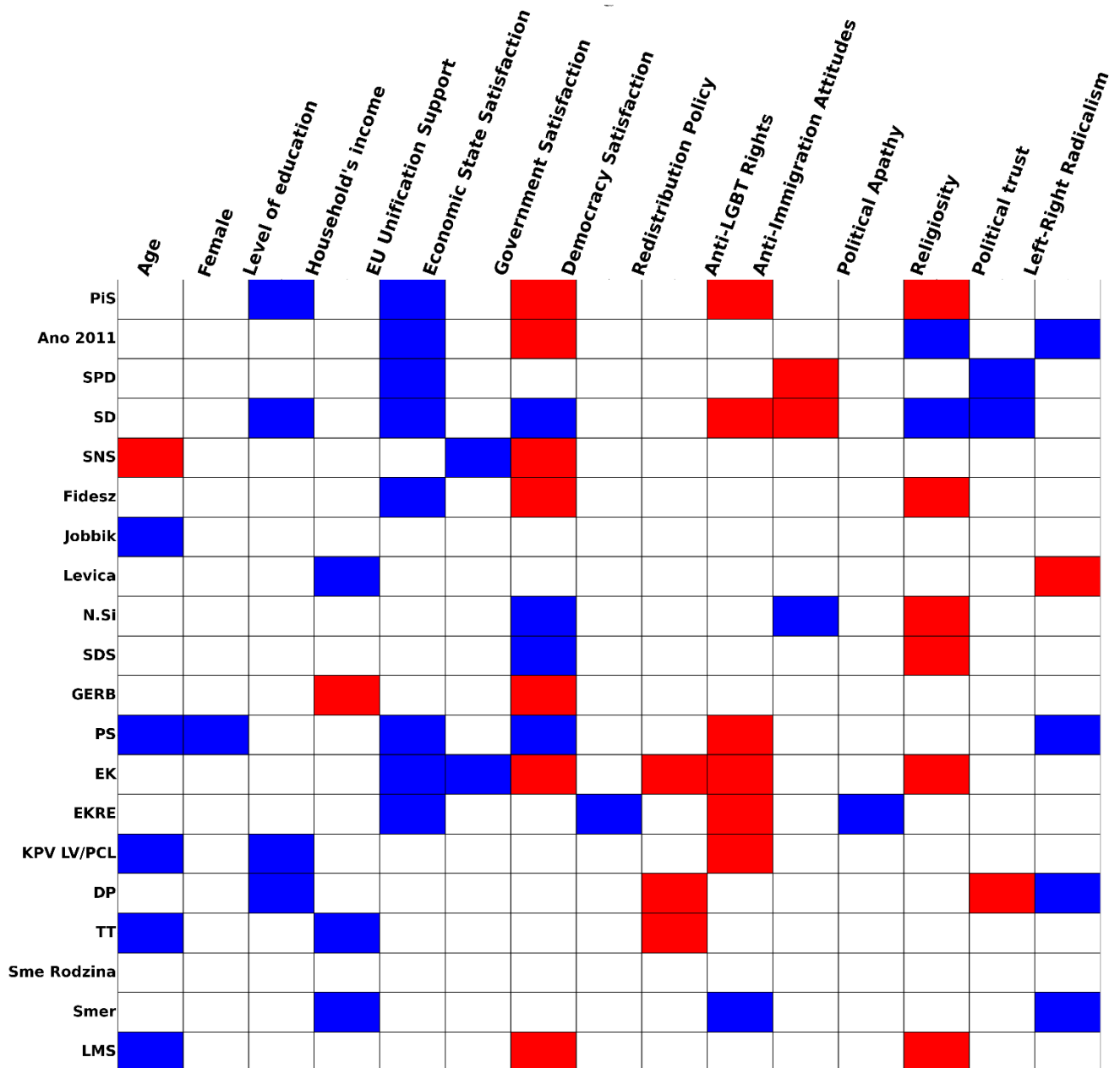


Figure 2.1 Heatmap of Eastern-Central Europe political parties. red and blue colors depict the direction of the regression coefficients. Red indicated positive direction, blue – negative

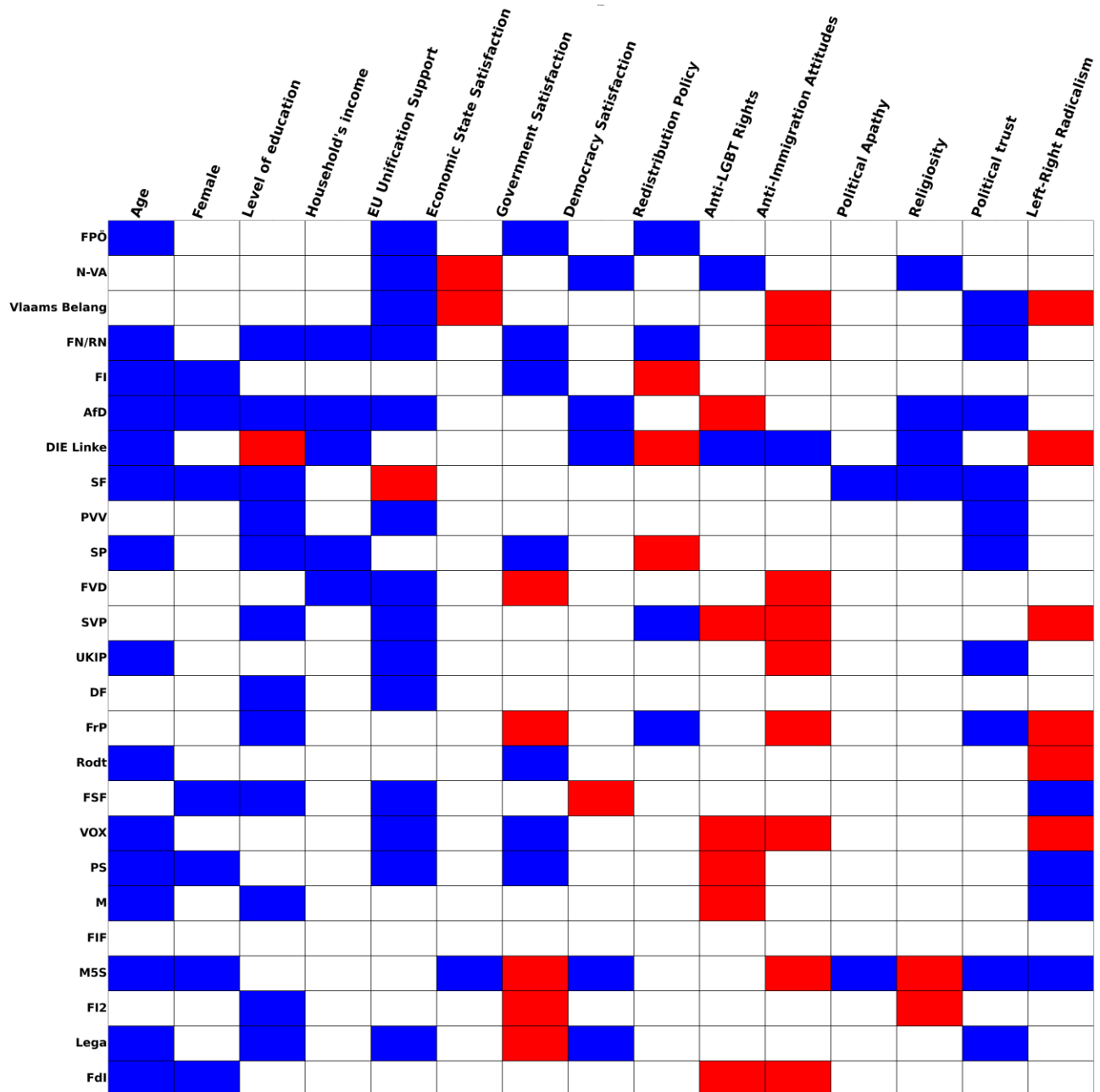


Figure 2.2 Heatmap of Western European political parties. red and blue colors depict the direction of the regression coefficients. Red indicated positive direction, blue - negative

The first noticeable difference in these plots is the number of statistically significant data points, which is considerably higher among Western European party voters compared to those in Eastern-Central Europe. This aligns with our expectations of less concentrated results in Eastern-Central Europe due to the predominance of centrist populist parties that lack ideological depth. Focusing on demographic variables, age demonstrates many statistically significant negative results in the Western European context, with 15 out of 25 cases showing

a negative direction. This indicates that populist party voters in Western Europe tend to be younger. In Central-Eastern Europe, age also shows a predominantly negative relationship but in fewer cases (5 out of 20), and there is one instance of a positive relationship. This makes age a weaker predictor of populist party support in Central-Eastern Europe. These findings highlight the regional variations in the demographic profiles of populist party voters. In Western Europe, younger individuals are more strongly associated with populist voting behaviour, whereas in Central-Eastern Europe, the relationship is less pronounced

A similar pattern emerges when examining the effect of education. In the Western European context, there are 12 out of 25 cases showing a statistically significant negative relationship between education and populist party voting, with only one case showing a positive relationship. This suggests that in Western Europe, lower levels of education are more strongly associated with populist party support. In contrast, among Eastern-Central European populist party voters, only 4 out of 20 cases show a statistically significant negative relationship between education and populist voting. This indicates a much weaker association between education levels and populist support in this region. Additionally, there is a weaker relationship between household income and populist voting in Central-Eastern Europe, with only three negative and one positive relationship observed. In contrast, in Western Europe, there are five negative relationships, indicating that lower household income is a stronger predictor of populist voting in Western Europe compared to Central-Eastern Europe.

This finding is counterintuitive given our earlier discussion on the foundations of regional differences, where we highlighted the social costs of transitioning from communism as a significant factor creating "modernization losers" who are susceptible to mobilisation by populist movements. However, the data suggests that economic factors, specifically household income, may not be the best predictor of populist support in Central-Eastern Europe. These results reveal that while lower household income is somewhat associated with populist voting in Western Europe, this relationship is much weaker in Central-Eastern Europe. This suggests that other factors beyond economic status may play a more critical role in driving populist support in post-communist countries. As for the other attitudinal variables, political distrust plays a more significant role in Western Europe than in Central-Eastern Europe. In Western Europe, 10 out of 25 cases show a negative relationship between political distrust and populist voting. In contrast, in Central-Eastern Europe, there are only 2 negative relationships and 1 positive relationship, highlighting a substantial difference between the regions.

This difference can be explained by the fact that in Central-Eastern Europe, populist parties often hold greater political power and, in some cases, represent the major political force, such as in Hungary. This indicates that populist voting is not merely the product of angry voters disillusioned with the mainstream establishment and swayed by populist leaders' short-term promises. These findings suggest that in Western Europe, political distrust is a more critical factor driving support for populist parties. However, in Central-Eastern Europe, where populist parties are more entrenched in the political landscape, other factors may be more influential. This underscores the importance of understanding the specific political contexts in which populist parties operate, as the drivers of populist support can vary significantly between regions. It highlights that populist voting is a complex phenomenon influenced by a range of factors beyond simple voter dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The predominance of oppositional directions is evident in the case of religiosity. In Western Europe, there are four instances of a negative relationship between religiosity and populist voting, indicating that a decrease in religious attachment increases the likelihood of populist voting. There are only two positive relationships in this region. In contrast, in Eastern-Central Europe, there are six positive relationships between religiosity and populist voting, suggesting that more religious individuals in this region are more likely to vote for populist parties. Only two cases show a negative relationship. These findings uncover cultural differences between Western and Eastern-Central Europe that influence populist party voter preferences. In Western Europe, lower religiosity is associated with higher populist support, possibly reflecting a more secular voter base that is disillusioned with traditional religious and political institutions. Conversely, in Eastern-Central Europe, higher religiosity correlates with greater populist support, indicating that religious individuals may find populist parties more aligned with their cultural and moral values. These regional differences underscore the importance of considering cultural context when analysing populist support. The varying role of religiosity highlights how cultural factors can shape political behaviour and voter preferences, contributing to the complex landscape of populist voting across Europe.

4.1.6 Different types of populist parties within two regions

Previously, we discussed the populist party preferences across two regions without isolating the different types of populist parties within each region. Since "Centrist" populist parties are predominant in Eastern-Central Europe, and the number of far-left populist parties are very low in eastern-Central Europe, the observed differences might be attributed to this factor. Additionally, examining different types of populist parties within each region will provide insights into whether the patterns identified earlier remain consistent when viewed at the regional level. In the following analysis, we will present the preferences of radical right and centrist populist party voters within each region. far-left populist parties are excluded due to the limited number in Eastern-Central Europe (We have only 1 sample in the database). This comparison will allow us to determine if the earlier identified patterns hold true across different types of populist parties on a regional level. By doing so, we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how various forms of populism manifest in Western and Eastern-Central Europe and the specific voter preferences associated with each type of populist party.

Far-right populist parties in Western and Central-Eastern Europe

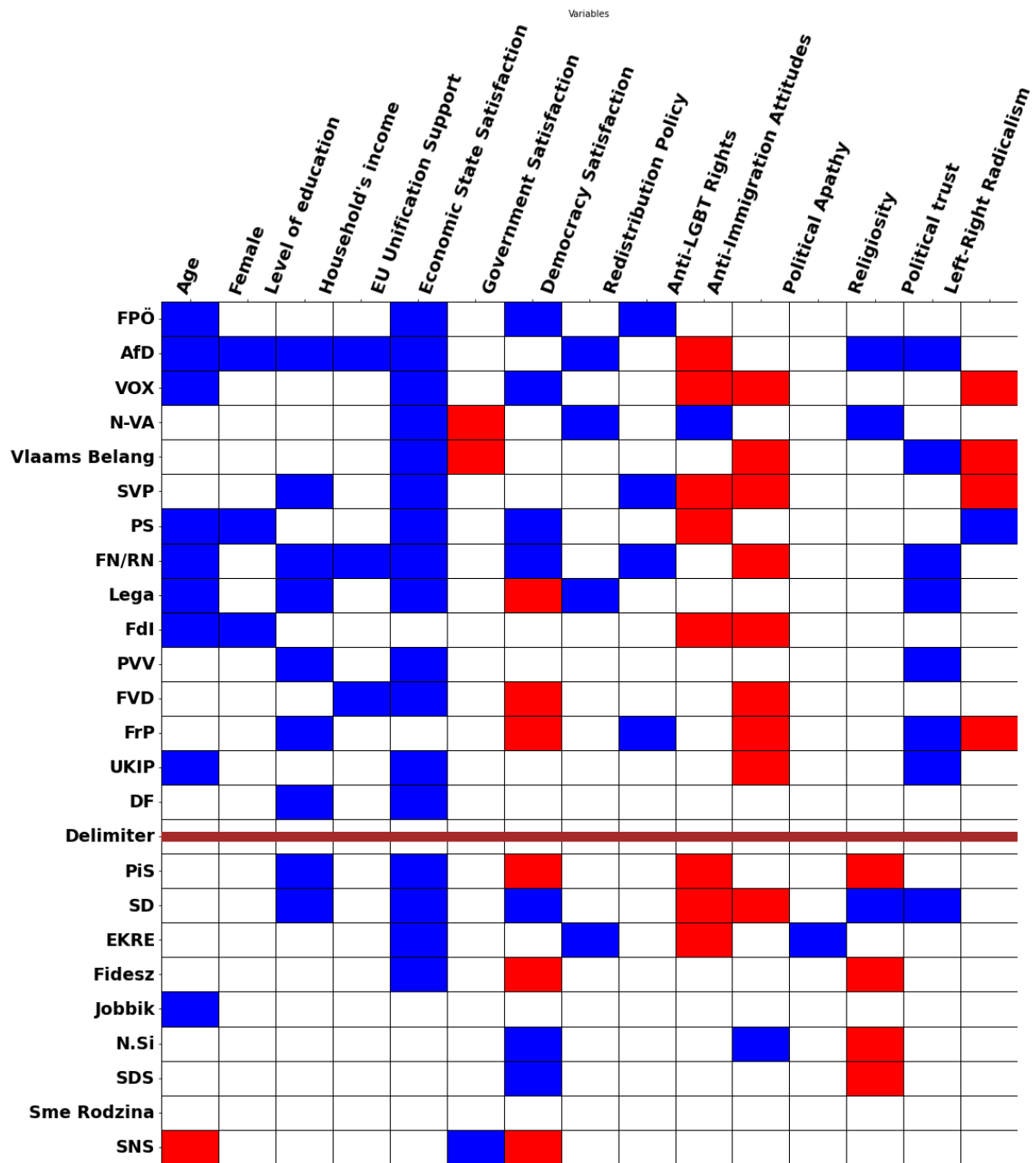


Figure 2.3 Heatmap of right wing populist party voters across regions. Black line divides two regions. On the left side we have Western European populist party voters' preferences. With Center-Eastern populist party voter preferences on the left side

The most significant differences between Western and Eastern-Central European far-right populist party voters are observed in the effects of age, attitudes towards immigration, religiosity, political distrust, and left-right radicalization.

Starting with age, Western European far-right populist parties predominantly attract younger demographics, with more than half of the cases showing a negative relationship (8 out of 15). This indicates that younger individuals are more likely to support far-right populist parties in Western Europe. In contrast, the effect of age is mixed among Eastern-Central European far-right populist parties, with 1 negative and 1 positive case, suggesting that these parties attract a broader range of age groups.

Attitudes towards immigration also differ significantly. In Western Europe, far-right populist party voters exhibit predominantly negative attitudes towards immigration, with more than half of the cases showing a statistically significant negative relationship (measured on a scale from 1, meaning "many should be allowed to come and live here," to 4, meaning "none should be allowed to come and live here"). This result aligns with theoretical expectations about the importance of demand-side factors in the success of populist parties. Conversely, in Eastern-Central Europe, far-right populist party voters' preferences on immigration are mixed, with 1 negative and 1 positive case, indicating a less uniform stance on this issue.

In the case of religiosity, similar to the combined heatmap for all types of populist parties, we observe that religiosity has predominantly negative relations in Western Europe (2 negative cases and 0 positive cases). Conversely, in Central-Eastern Europe, religiosity shows a positive relationship (4 positive cases and only 1 negative case). The opposite directions mean that religion has a different influence on populist voting in various regions.

Political distrust is also a dominant factor in the case of Western Europe, with 7 negative relations indicating a lack of trust among far-right populist party supporters towards their parliament and politicians. This finding perfectly aligns with the theoretical framework described in earlier chapters, where political distrust is a key characteristic of far-right populist supporters in Western Europe. In contrast, Central-Eastern European far-right populist parties show a different pattern. There is only one negative relationship observed, suggesting that political distrust is not as strong a predictor of far-right populist support in this region. This divergence highlights the varying importance of political distrust in driving populist support across different European regions. Additionally, left-right radicalisation has mixed effects in western Europe, while it has no statistically significant direction in Central-Eastern Europe. The only variable with statistically significant results in the same direction and in a quantity close to half is Euroscepticism. In both Western and Central-Eastern Europe, Euroscepticism is associated with an increased likelihood of populist voting. This suggests that, in contemporary

politics, the success of far-right populism may be driven by concerns related to the fear of EU expansion. This consistent finding across regions highlights the central role that Euroscepticism plays in shaping the support for far-right populist parties, indicating a shared apprehension about the European Union's influence and policies.

To sum up, the variables that have nearly half of the statistically significant data in the same direction for Western Europe are age, Euroscepticism, level of education, attitudes towards immigration, and political distrust. On the other hand, in Eastern-Central Europe, only Euroscepticism shows statistically significant results in nearly half of the cases. Other variables either show the mix directions, or few statistically significant results. This highlights a stark contrast between the regions, with Western European populist voting influenced by a broader range of factors, whereas in Eastern-Central Europe, Euroscepticism stands out as the predominant driver of populist support.

Centrist populist parties in Western and Central-Eastern Europe

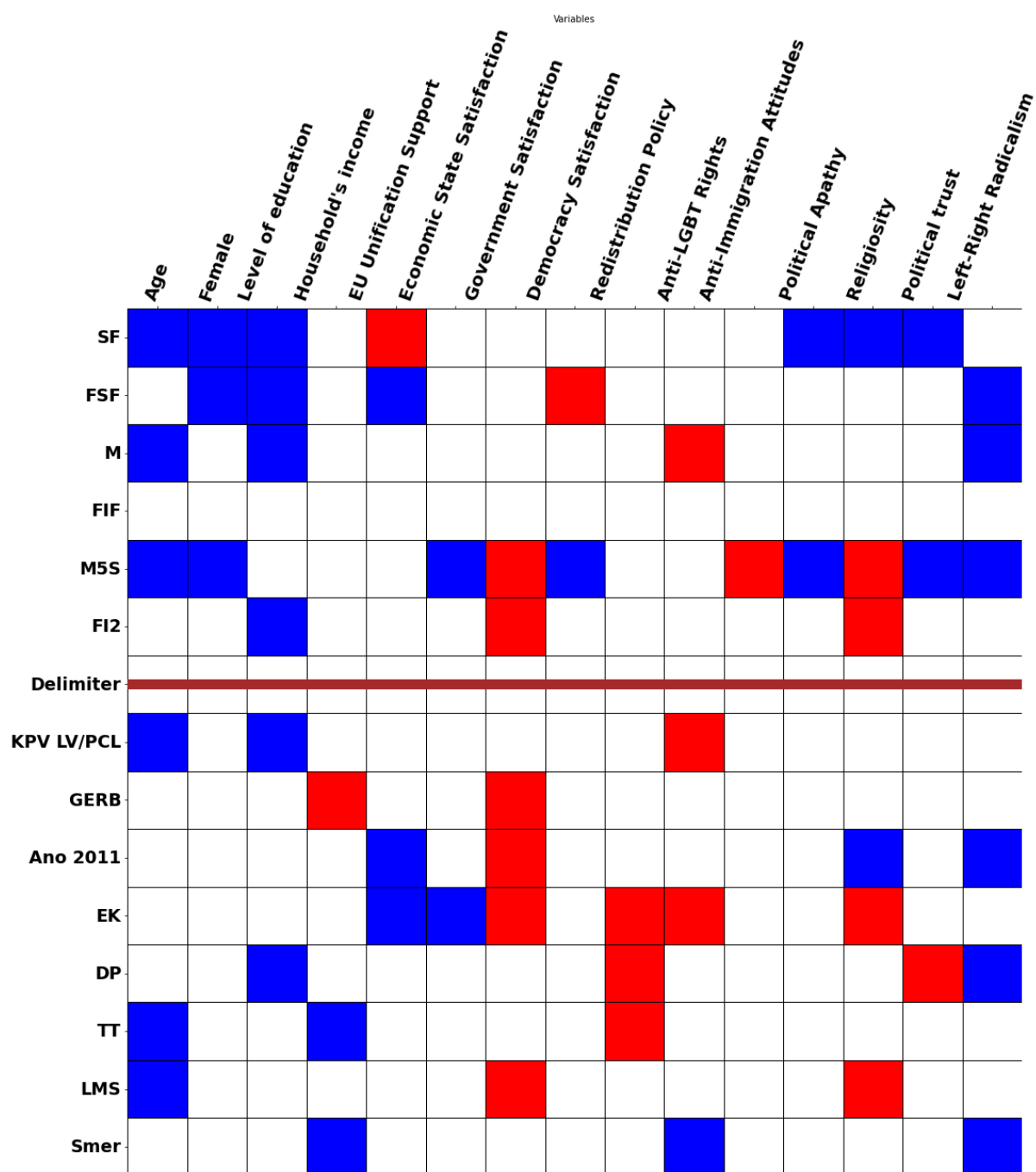


Figure 2.4 Heatmap of Centrist populist party voters across regions. Black line divides two regions. On the left side we have Western European Centrist populist party voters' preferences. With Center-Eastern Centrist populist party voter preferences on the left side

Moving on to centrist populist party voters, we observe less concentrated patterns, which aligns with the expectation due to the lack of a strong ideological foundation among centrist parties. However, some discernible patterns still emerge.

In Western Europe, age and level of education remain important indicators of populist voting. At least half of the statistically significant cases show a negative direction, suggesting that younger individuals with lower levels of education are more likely to vote for centrist populist parties in this region. This trend is similar to what was observed among far-right populist voters in Western Europe.

Additionally, we observe that both gender and left-right radicalism have strong negative relationships with centrist populist voting. The negative relationship for left-right radicalism suggests that individuals with more extreme (radical) political views are less likely to vote for centrist populist parties. This finding aligns with the intuition that centrist populist parties tend to attract more moderate voters who are not on the extremes of the political spectrum. Similarly, in Central-Eastern Europe, we see a consistent negative relationship with left-right radicalism, reinforcing the idea that centrist populist party voters are generally more moderate in their political views.

In the case of Central-Eastern Europe, satisfaction with the government shows a statistically significant positive relationship in half of the cases. This is not surprising, given that all four parties examined—GERB, ANO 2011, EK, and LMS—are the dominant political forces in their respective countries. This finding prompts further investigation into the question: How does a populist party maintain its voter base and their satisfaction? Other variables, such as religiosity, attitudes toward gay and lesbian couples, and household income, exhibit mixed directions, indicating variability in their influence. While age, level of education, and the government's involvement in income redistribution tend to have a negative relationship with populist support, they have fewer statistically significant cases, limiting our confidence in assessing their influence on the electoral behaviour of populist party supporters.

4.1.7 Summary

The analysis of populist party voters across different European regions and party types revealed a complex landscape with some notable common patterns. far-right populists are Eurosceptic, anti-immigrant, socially conservative, less educated, and highly distrustful of politics; far-left populists are younger, support progressive economic policies, and are less concerned with immigration and political distrust; centrist populists are also younger and less educated but have a positive view of government satisfaction.

This aligns with the theories and expectations we discussed earlier regarding populist voter characteristics and the reasons behind the rising popularity of populist parties. When we analysed parties within the specific types, Both left and right wing populist parties exhibited more consistent patterns in voter behaviour, aligning with our initial hypotheses. In contrast, centrist populist parties demonstrated the least concentrated patterns, which is not surprising given their nature of being less focused on ideological consistency that we also discussed in the introduction. One of the most important insights from this study is that the lack of concentrated patterns is not unique to centrist parties. When we controlled for far-right populist parties regionally, we observed a similar lack of concentration in the expected influencing variables in Central-Eastern Europe. Out of all the variables we used, only Euroscepticism showed close to half the number of statistically significant results with consistent directions. Other variables either exhibited mixed attitudes or had fewer statistically significant cases.

This indicates that both far-right and centrist populist party voters in Central-Eastern Europe do not differ significantly from mainstream party supporters. The distinction among far-right populist voters is much more pronounced in Western Europe than in the Central-Eastern-Baltic region. This aligns with our earlier theoretical expectations regarding the transition from communist regimes, which led to a lack of robust ideological foundations and fostered strong anti-ideological and anti-party sentiments among the electorate. Since the vast majority of parties in the region were built from the top down by political elites, it hindered the development of various political parties with distinct agendas, leading them instead to adopt diverse political profiles. In the case of left-wing populist parties, the lower number of observations in Central-Eastern Europe limits our ability to make definitive inferences. However, the lack of consistency in voter preferences for both centrist and right-wing populist

parties in this region suggests that ideology, grievances, political distrust, and economic grievances play a limited role in populist voting behaviour in Eastern-Central Europe.

These findings indicate a significant gap in the literature regarding Eastern-Central European populist parties and their voters. How can we explain the diffuse results of populist party voters' preferences from this region? Why do these preferences appear as diffuse as those of centrist populist parties? Is the premise that right- and left-wing populist parties have stronger ideological foundations than centrist parties faulty?

We can't fully answer these questions in this research, but this inquiry further indicates that the regional context plays a critical role in shaping populist voter behaviour, and the patterns observed in Western Europe do not necessarily hold in Eastern-Central Europe. This study highlights the importance of considering regional contexts and the specific characteristics of different types of populist parties when analysing populist voter behaviour. The findings suggest that while ideological factors are significant, they are not the sole determinants of populist support. The broader socio-political environment, including historical legacies, economic conditions, and cultural attitudes, plays a crucial role in shaping the appeal of populist parties.

4.2 PART II

4.2.1 Populist party voters against those who didn't go to the election

In the first part of the research, we conducted a comparison between populist voters and mainstream party supporters, carefully controlling for party types and regional effects. Our analysis revealed a lack of consistent features that unify all populist party voters. However, we did identify some common characteristics at the party type level, as well as certain similarities when the voters were clustered regionally. To create a more comprehensive profile of populist voters, the study also extended the comparison to include abstainers. This extension is particularly interesting as it allows us to explore whether the similarities and differences observed between populist and mainstream voters persist when compared to non-voters. The key questions we sought to answer include whether there are distinct features that differentiate populist voters from those who abstain from elections and how similar their profiles really are. This deeper exploration aims to uncover whether populist voters share common traits with non-voters, or if they represent fundamentally different types of political disengagement and dissatisfaction.

As discussed in the literature review, the variables under consideration in this study encompass a range of attitudinal and socio-demographic factors. Specifically, we focus on attitudinal variables such as political interest, political trust, and satisfaction with government and democracy, as well as ideational factors like attitudes toward immigration. Additionally, we examine socio-demographic variables to explore whether there are discernible patterns that link populist voters and abstainers. By analyzing these variables in combination, we aim to determine if there are underlying commonalities between these two groups that might explain their respective positions within the political landscape. This comprehensive approach allows us to delve deeper into the motivations and characteristics of populist voters and abstainers, providing a more nuanced understanding of their potential connections and distinctions.

For clarity and simplicity in viewing regression results, I divided the heat maps based on three types: far-right, far-left, and centrist. Throughout the analysis, I also address potential unifying factors that distinguish all types of populist voters from abstainers.

4.2.2 Far-right populist party voters compared to non-voters

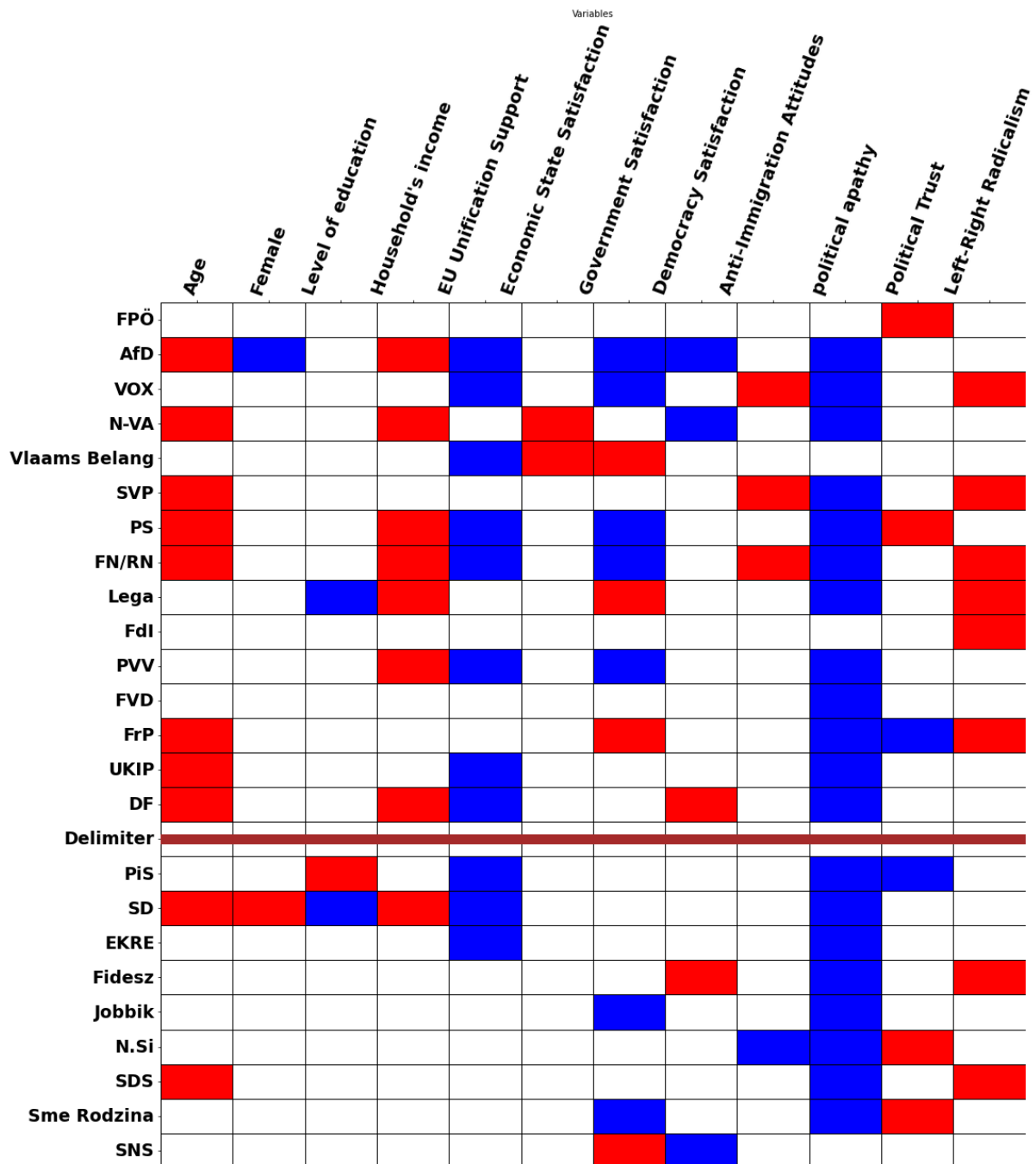


Figure 2.5 Heatmap of Far-right populist party voters against Abstainers in Western and Central-Eastern-Baltic Europe. Brown line divides two regions. On the left side we have Western European populist party voters' preferences. With Center-Eastern populist party voter preferences on the left side

socio-demographic variables

First, let's begin our inquiry into how socio-demographic variables affect populist party voting behaviour. These variables include age, gender, level of education, household income. Understanding the impact of these factors is crucial for comprehending the broader patterns of support for populist parties. Age shows a predominantly positive relationship when comparing populist voters to those who did not vote, with 11 positive cases and 0 negative. This indicates that younger people are more likely to abstain from voting. In contrast, when comparing populist voters to mainstream party supporters, the analysis showed the opposite effect, with younger people tending to support right-wing populist parties more. This suggests that young demographics are more inclined either to abstain from voting or to support populist parties, highlighting their distinct political engagement patterns. However, it's important to mention that this is less consistent in the Central-Eastern-Baltic region with fewer statistically significant cases (2 out of 9 cases), while in Western Europe we have more than a half statistically significant cases (8 out of 15 cases).

In both regions Level of education and gender produces mixed results suggesting that there isn't much difference in these parameters when it comes to either abstaining from voting or supporting far-right populist parties. On the other hand, household income showed a strong positive relationship in Western Europe, with 7 statistically significant cases, suggesting that wealthier voters are more likely to vote for populist parties than to abstain. In contrast, in the Central-Eastern-Baltic region, the relationship is weaker, with only 1 statistically significant positive case, indicating insufficient evidence to support this trend in that region as well.

Political Attitudes and Opinions:

Next, we move onto an examination of Political Attitudes and Opinions, which are crucial in understanding the rise of populism. Key questions include whether the surge in populist support is due to growing political distrust, increased left and right radicalism, or dissatisfaction with the economy or government. Additionally, we will investigate how political interest, attitudes towards immigration, gay people, and views on income redistribution influence populist voting compared to abstainers. It's important to highlight that satisfaction with the government, economic conditions, political distrust, and attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights do not have consistent effects or enough statistically significant cases to

differentiate between these two types of voters in either region. This result aligns with our earlier expectations that both abstainers and right-wing populist voters share similar dissatisfaction with the government and high levels of political distrust.

Attitudes toward immigration and governmental redistribution show statistically significant positive relationships in three cases in Western Europe, which is not sufficient to confidently distinguish between the two groups. In Eastern-Central Europe, there is even one case showing the opposite direction on attitudes toward immigration and no statistically significant data regarding attitudes on government redistribution.

The strongest effects are produced by Euroscepticism (8 out of 15 cases in Western Europe and 3 out of 9 cases in Central-Eastern Europe) and political interest (12 out of 15 cases in Western Europe and 8 out of 9 cases in Central-Eastern Europe) in both regions. This indicates that a key feature distinguishing far-right populist party supporters from non-voters is their higher interest in politics. Since this variable didn't show much statistical significance when comparing populist party voters to mainstream voters, it highlights a general distinction between voters and nonvoters. Euroscepticism, on the other hand, showed statistically significant results in comparisons with both mainstream party voters and nonvoters, indicating that it is an important characteristic of right-wing populist voters.

4.2.3 Far-left populist party voter compared to Abstainers

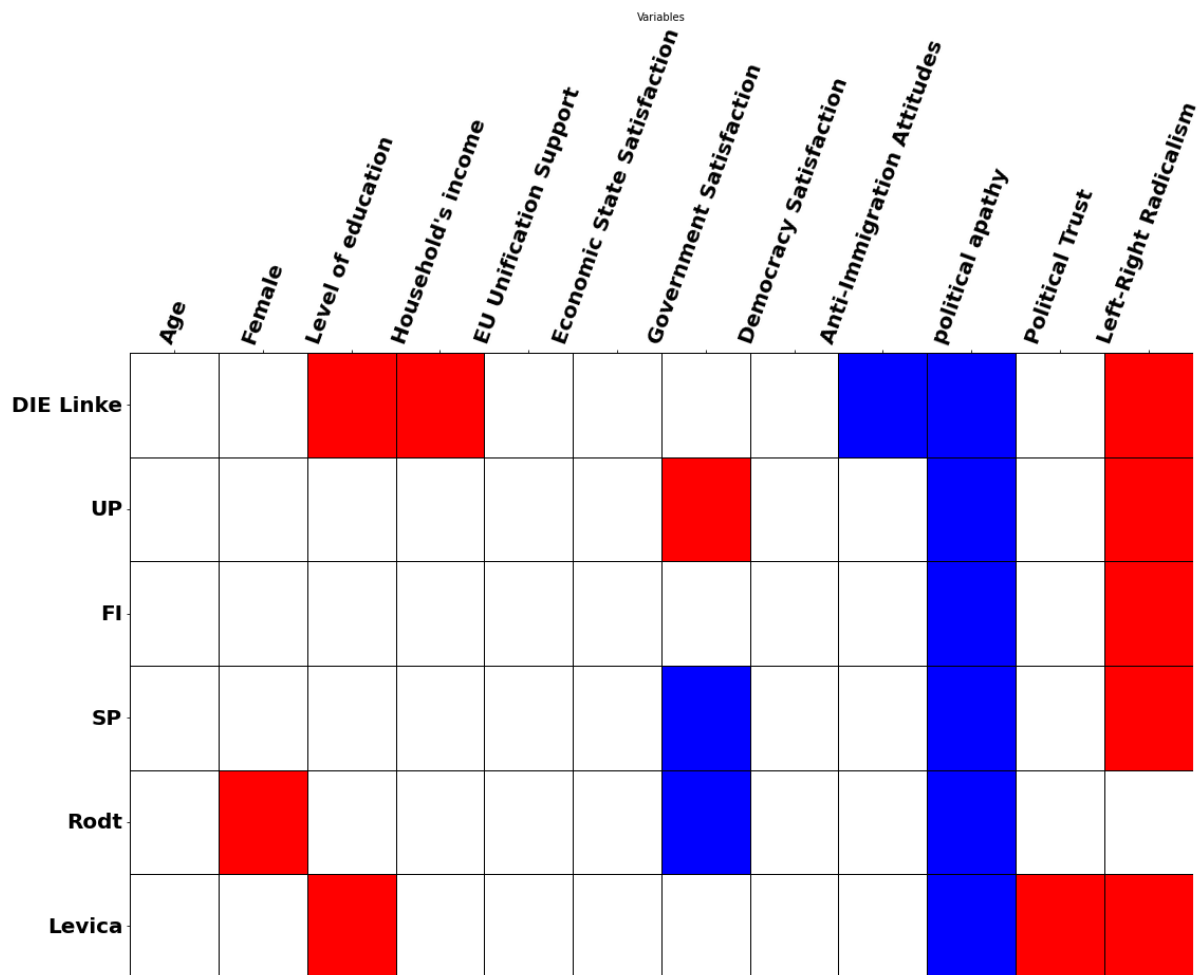


Figure 2.6 Heatmap of Far-left populist party voters against Abstainers

In case of left-wing populist party voters' heatmap we haven't used delimiter since only one party Levica is from Eastern central Europe giving us the limited capabilities to include regional comparisons as well. If age and household income had a strong effect on far-right populist parties in Western Europe, the socio-demographic variables here generally show a limited effect. Most of them simply don't have enough statistically significant cases to assert their influence on the difference between left-wing populist voters and abstainers. Based on this analysis, according to socio-demographic values, left populist voters appear closer to abstainers. On the other hand, the belief that the government should be involved in income redistribution and positive attitudes towards gays and lesbians show many statistically significant cases. These features were also evident when comparing left-wing populist party

voters to mainstream supporters, marking them as inherent characteristics of left-wing populist voting.

Left-right radicalism also shows a positive relationship in many cases (5 out of 6), suggesting that greater radicalism is associated with voting for populist parties. Similar results were observed when comparing these voters to mainstream supporters. Similar to what we observed with far-right populist voters compared to abstainers, the variable capturing political interest also plays a major role here, with statistically significant results in almost all cases. This reinforces the argument that political interest is a strong feature that differentiates voters from non-voters. To sum up, far-left populist party voters, when compared to abstainers, show similar results to those seen when compared with mainstream party voters. The only significant difference is age, which was prevalent in the comparison with mainstream voters but shows no statistically significant results here.

4.2.4 Centrist populist party voters compared to Abstainers

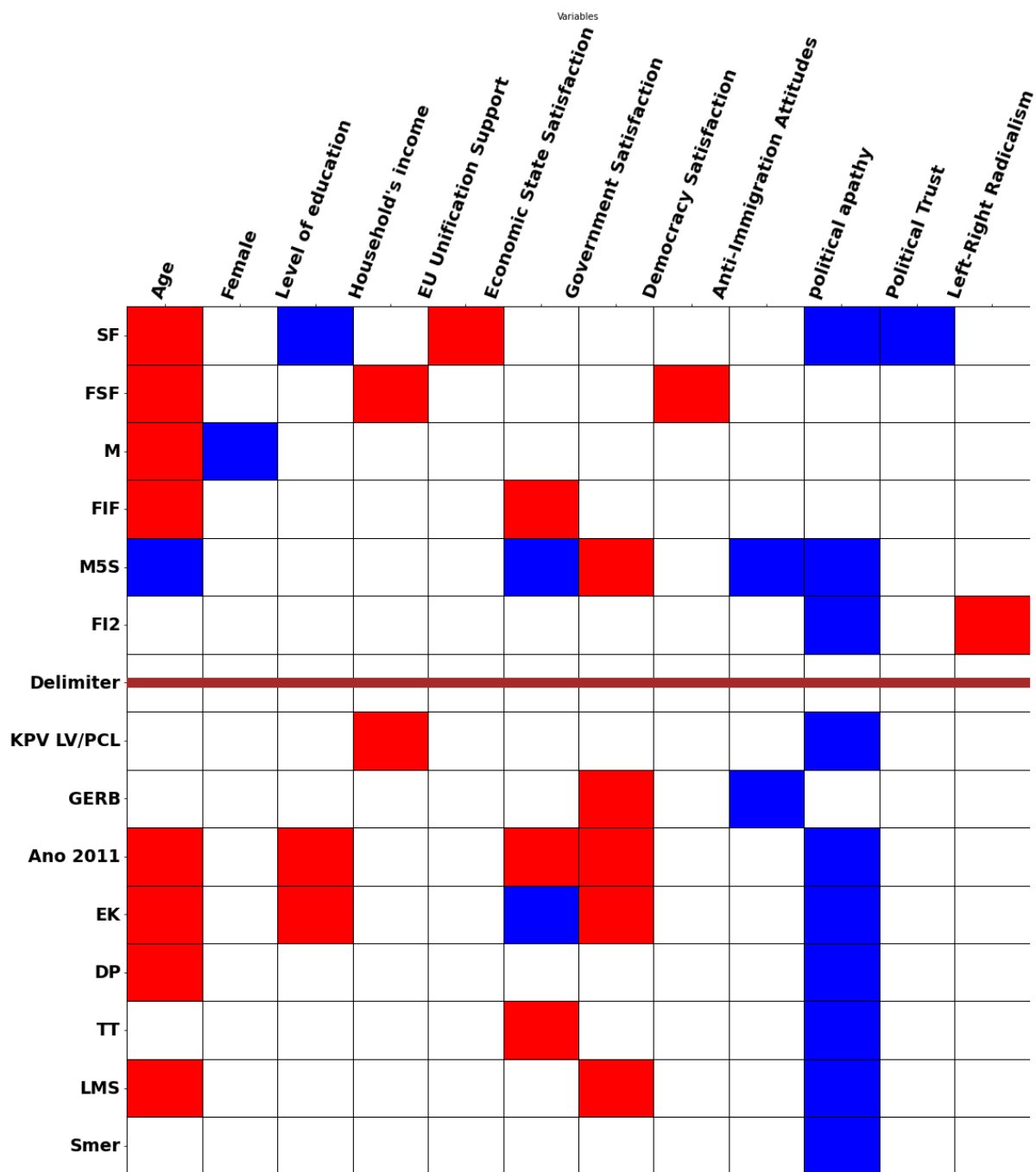


Figure 2.7 Heatmap of Centrist populist party voters against Abstainers
 Black line divides two regions. On the left side we have Western European populist party voters' preferences. With Center-Eastern populist party voter preferences on the left side

For centrist populist parties, age shows a positive relationship in both regions, indicating that as age increases, so does the likelihood of voting for populist parties compared to abstainers. Other socio-demographic variables like household income, gender, and level of education have limited statistically significant cases. Most other variables also show limited effects, except for political interest, which has a dominant effect in Central-Eastern Europe but only two significant cases in Western Europe. Additionally, similar to the comparison with mainstream supporters, centrist populist voters in Central-Eastern Europe exhibit more satisfaction with the government. This is unsurprising, as centrist populist parties hold significant political power in many of these countries. Overall, this confirms our previous claims about centrist populist parties. Due to their lack of a strong ideological foundation, they show the least differences compared to both mainstream supporters and abstainers on the variables we examined.

5. Conclusion

To analyze populist voters, we conducted a comparative study involving mainstream party voters, other non-populist voters, and abstainers. We controlled for the host ideologies of populist parties and considered regional differences to uncover the nuanced complexities at various levels. These comparisons revealed a multifaceted profile of populist voters. Notably, populist voters displayed significant variations depending on the type of populist party, with age emerging as the only common characteristic across all three types of populist parties when contrasted with mainstream party voters. This finding challenges the simplistic labels of populist voters as "losers of globalization" or as merely dissatisfied with current economic or political conditions. For instance, far-right populist voters might prioritize issues such as immigration and national sovereignty, whereas far-left voters may focus on economic inequality and social justice. Reflecting on Rooduijn's (2017) findings from earlier elections, we observe that despite the rise of populism, core "populist attitudes" have remained relatively stable. The ongoing absence of unifying factors among populist voters indicates that their preferences are more strongly influenced by ideologies beyond anti-establishment sentiments. Furthermore, our study found that younger voters were more inclined to support populist parties over mainstream ones, but when compared to abstainers, a different pattern emerged: younger people were more likely to abstain than vote for populism. This suggests a broader trend of the younger generation's disillusionment with mainstream politics, positioning them either as supporters of populist parties or as abstainers altogether.

When controlling for regional effects, the analysis revealed an even more complex landscape of populist voter behavior. In Western Europe, the profile of populist party voters compared to mainstream voters is more distinct and rigid. Conversely, in Central-Eastern Europe, both centrist and far-right populist parties demonstrated fewer statistically significant results or showed mixed directions. This suggests that there are fewer differences between populist and mainstream party voters in Central-Eastern Europe compared to Western Europe. For example, in Western Europe, over half of the cases involving far-right populist party voters exhibited statistically significant differences concerning age, education level, Euroscepticism, attitudes toward immigration, and political distrust. In contrast, in Central-Eastern Europe, only Euroscepticism and religiosity showed statistically significant differences in half of the cases.

This indicates that there may be fewer distinct differences between populist party voters and mainstream party supporters in Central-Eastern Europe regarding the variables analyzed. This finding challenges the assumption that the prevalence of populist parties in Central-Eastern European countries is due to a stronger "populist sentiment" in the region. Instead, our research suggests that the rise of populism may not necessarily stem from increased anti-establishment sentiments. When comparing populist voters to abstainers rather than mainstream party supporters, we observed similar trends. Populist voters in Central-Eastern Europe appear more similar to both abstainers and mainstream party voters than their counterparts in Western Europe, highlighting the need for further exploration of this region in the study of populism.

In conclusion, the attitudes and political preferences of populist party voters appear to be shaped more by their "host ideologies" than by any overarching "populist sentiments." The only consistent trend observed was within the younger generation. However, this trend shifted when comparing populist voters to mainstream voters, suggesting that it reflects a broader opposition to mainstream politics among younger people, rather than being an inherent characteristic of populist voters. Given the significant influence of "host ideologies" on populist party voters, even at the individual level, it would be valuable to further compare populist voters to non-populist voters of the same ideological orientation. For instance, comparing far-right populist parties with non-populist parties of the same ideological leaning could shed light on the unique aspects of populism at the individual level. This raises an intriguing question: how different are far-left or far-right populist voters from their non-populist counterparts on the far left or far right? This approach could provide deeper insights into the distinct elements that define populism beyond its ideological roots.

This study has broadened the understanding of the populist voter profile by incorporating a wider range of European regions, moving beyond the previously narrow focus on Western European parties. By analyzing a diverse sample, we have developed a more comprehensive view of populist voter behaviors and demonstrated that the rise of populism in Europe is not necessarily driven by increased populist sentiments within society. Furthermore, we compared populist voters not only with mainstream party supporters but also with abstainers, exploring the similarities and differences in their profiles. This multifaceted approach provides a nuanced understanding of populist voters and adds depth to the ongoing discussions about the nature of populism and its rising popularity across Europe.

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