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TITLE: EUROSCEPTICISM WITHOUT POPULISM? THE EFFECTS OF CRISES ON PUBLIC
ATTITUDES TOWARDS EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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Abstract (English)

The thesis investigates the effects of multiple crises on public attitudes towards European integration. Specifically, it shows how Euroscepticism and populism connect during periods of exogenous shock. The analysis considers two major crises: the Euro-crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on multiple Eurobarometer Surveys delivered between 2009 and 2022 and testing the hypothesis with multiple linear regression analyses, we test whether increasing Eurosceptic tendencies are correlated with increasing populist attitudes, checking for the influence of external shocks on their relationship. After a detailed literature review, Chapter 1 introduces the research question. In Chapter 2, Euroscepticism is presented within the framework of two major theories of European integration - neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism. Chapter 3 explores the interplay of crisis scenarios and the emergence of populist movements in Europe. Chapter 4 explains how and why Euroscepticism and populism play a significant role in contemporary European politics. Finally, Chapter 5 is dedicated to the empirical analysis of the hypotheses outlined in the introduction and presents the main findings. The current work contributes to the literature regarding the determinants of support for transnational integration and the explanatory power of major theories of European integration. Furthermore, it offers additional evidence regarding the interdependence between Euroscepticism and populism in relation to different crisis shocks: symmetric and asymmetric.

Keywords: Euroscepticism, Populism, European integration, Neofunctionalism, Postfunctionalism, Euro-crisis, Covid-19 pandemic

Abstract (Italian)

La presente tesi indaga gli effetti di ripetute crisi sulle attitudini pubbliche nei confronti del processo di integrazione Europea. Nello specifico, spiega come i fenomeni di euroscetticismo e populismo si connettono durante periodi di shock esogeno. L'analisi considera due casi principali: la crisi dell'Euro e dei debiti sovrani, e la pandemia di COVID-19. Utilizzando diversi Eurobarometer Surveys somministrati tra il 2009 e il 2022 e testando le ipotesi con diverse regressioni lineari, verifichiamo se un aumento di tendenze euroscettiche è correlato con un aumento di attitudini populiste e quale sia l'influenza di shock esterni sulla loro relazione. Dopo una dettagliata analisi delle letterature, il primo capitolo introduce la domanda di ricerca. Nel secondo capitolo, il fenomeno dell'euroscetticismo è presentato all'interno della cornice teorica offerta da due delle principali teorie sull'integrazione Europea - neofunzionalismo e postfunzionalismo. Il terzo capitolo illustra la relazione tra scenari di crisi e la nascita di nuovi movimenti populistici in Europa. Il quarto capitolo spiega come e perché euroscetticismo e populismo giocano un ruolo chiave nella politica Europea contemporanea. In conclusione, il capitolo è dedicato all'analisi empirica delle ipotesi formulate nell'introduzione e presenta i principali risultati. Il lavoro contribuisce alla letteratura sulle determinanti dell'integrazioni Europea e il potere esplicativo delle varie teorie riguardo tale processo. Inoltre, offre ulteriore evidenza riguardo l'interdipendenza dei fenomeni euroscettici e populistici in relazione a diversi momenti di shock: simmetrici e asimmetrici.

Parole chiave: Euroscetticismo, Populismo, Integrazione Europea, Neofunzionalismo, Postfunzionalismo, Crisi dell'Euro, pandemia Covid-19

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

1.1. Public opinion and European integration

There is extensive academic work investigating the causal mechanisms underlying public opinion support for European integration. The debate on the drivers of Euroscepticism dates back to the 1990s, and various theories have been tested and put forward in the literature. While the utilitarian approach focuses on the economic drivers of support to the European Union, identity-driven approaches put more emphasis on citizens' self-perceived cultural orientations. Another line of research examines the European Union's mobilization effects on voters based on indicators regarding the level of education and/or knowledge of the structure, processes, and decision-making procedures of the Union.

Some scholars argue that the rise of Euroscepticism in the first two decades of the 21st century is based on the increasing mismatch between the pro-European stances of mainstream parties and the growing Eurosceptic tendencies of the electorate (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016). The domestic arena seems to play an important role, as attitudes toward European integration are crucial determinants of voting preferences for the presence of a strong mobilization of European issues by Eurosceptic parties, or by political entrepreneurs. (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016, p. 424). The second-order nature of European parliamentary elections (Reif & Schmitt, 1980) probes this view and shows the importance of the national level within this two-level game (Putnam, 1998).

In the upcoming sections, the main focus is on the economic and ideological approaches, as they fit better within the framework of the neofunctionalist and postfunctionalist integration theories that we aim to provide evidence for in this dissertation. Results from complementary approaches like the cognitive mobilization theory and the institutional approach will also be outlined

1.1.1. Economic interests and European integration

Sociotropic models of economic voting posit that the country's economic situation and its length of membership to the European Community are positively associated with support for politicians at the level of public opinion (Eichenberg & Dalton, 1993). Following this framework, scholars provide empirical evidence for the utilitarian hypothesis. Building on survey questions evaluating: (i) the efforts made to unify Western Europe; and (ii) the membership of the Common Market, either at the present-oriented or forward-looking dimension; all countries except Luxembourg and Denmark are found to be supportive of integrative attempts (Anderson, 1995). Economic indicators, as a measure of the annual change in GDP growth, corroborate the idea that citizens are more supportive of integration when the

economy is performing well: “the better a country’s economy performs, the generally higher the public support for integration and EC membership and the greater the likelihood citizens would regret the dissolution of the EC” (Anderson, 1995, p. 124). Including attitudes towards free trade and price incentives related to the agricultural sector in the analysis, similar and confirming results for cross-sectional and cross-national individual-level support for European integration are achieved by other scholars (Gabel & Palmer, 1995).

Employing individual-level data, other scholars investigate the relationship between subjective economic evaluations and support for regional integration. Put differently, how voters’ self-perceived personal and national financial estimates influence their opinions about European integration (Gabel & Whitten, 1997). On the one hand, and confirming previous expectations, the correlation between national macroeconomic indicators such as real per capita GDP growth, inflation, unemployment, and support is not statistically significant. On the other hand, when measured at a regional level, economic parameters play a more prominent role and exert stronger predictive power on support for integration: wealthier regions display higher levels of support. Most importantly, citizens appear to base their heuristics on retrospective judgments of their national financial status: “the better their evaluations, the higher their support will be” (Gabel & Whitten, 1997, pp. 90-91). On top of this, Gabel (1998) argues that the utilitarian model is better suited to account for citizens’ support for European integration. A large portion of the variation in public support for the European Union and its development is related to actual and future expected economic benefits and the associated personal and/or national financial situations, thus highlighting the importance of the European Monetary Union’s (EMU) advancement (Gabel, 1998, p. 352).

More recent evidence focusing on the financial crisis corroborates the idea that economic drivers are significant factors in explaining support for integration. Hobolt & Wratil (2015) found a stronger and increasing association between self-perceived benefits from EU membership and support of the EMU. Greater effects were detected at the very beginning of the 2008 financial crisis, confirming that citizens adjust their preferences toward the Euro depending on the evolution of the economics of the Union and their assessment of the benefits coming from further integration. Trust in the EU’s institutional capacity to deliver effective policies to tackle the crisis is also highly significant for citizens’ public support of regional integration. Considering the EU as better suited to take action against the negative consequences of the crisis increases the probability of supporting the Euro by 9 percentage points in 2009 to over 15 percentage points in 2012 and 2013 (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015, pp. 248-250). Most importantly, identity-driven (national) considerations fail to be relevant for citizens’ appraisals of the importance of European integration, with notable shifts from 2005 (before the crisis) to 2010 (after the crisis). The crisis has a significant impact on people’s probability of adopting the identitarian heuristic as their main driver of support for the EU: whereas exclusive nationalists were 21 percentage points less likely to support the euro before the outbreak of the crisis, the

probability decreased to 14-17 percentage points in the aftermath of the emergency (Hobolt & Wratil, 2015, p. 251).

The utilitarian approach is also consistent with the Euro-crisis: the economic consequences of the crisis are both directly and indirectly related to hard-line Eurosceptic parties' achievements. Working on a database of 108 elections in 27 European member states from 2008 to 2015, Nicoli (2017) shows that economic indicators are relevant predictors of electoral support for Eurosceptic parties. This particularly includes negative growth levels, high levels of unemployment, and governance arrangements. Additionally, factors such as the lack of trust in their domestic political system or membership to the European Monetary Union turn out to be less relevant in explaining people's support for the European Union. Based on the 2014 European Election Study's data, Hobolt & De Vries (2016) confirm these results. They present compelling evidence about the role of self-perceived economic losses directly connected to the crisis in people's likelihood to favor Eurosceptic parties over mainstream pro-European parties. 'Hard' and 'soft' Eurosceptic stances are incentivized by the occurrence of the crisis. Job loss and income reduction are increasing by four and two percentage points respectively the probability of voting for a Eurosceptic party compared to individuals that did not have such experiences. Negative evaluations of the national and European economies bring similar effects: those who perceived a deterioration of the economy are seven percentage points more likely to vote for a Eurosceptic party, and those disapproving of the European Union's actions to tackle the crisis are nine percentage points more likely to cast a Eurosceptic vote (Hobolt & De Vries, 2016, pp. 508-509).

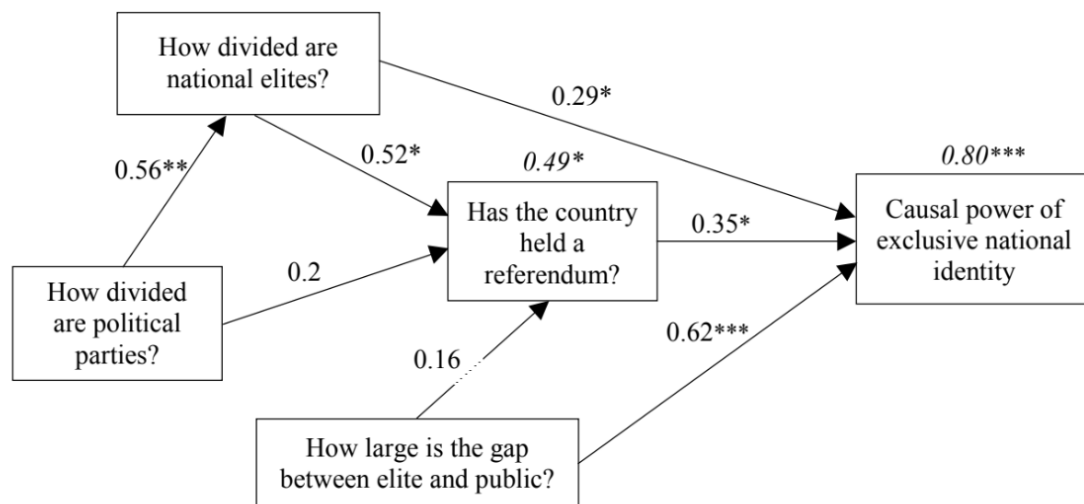
Opposing results have been obtained by other scholars, indicating that economic indicators such as GDP growth and level of unemployment both at the individual and aggregate level don't play a substantial role in spreading Euroscepticism. Conversely, exclusive national identity holds greater explanatory power in clarifying the causes of emerging Eurosceptic attitudes across European states between 2007 and 2010 (Serricchio et al., 2013).

1.1.2. Identity politics and European integration

Identity is an established major driver of support for European integration in the literature. The basic assumption is that, on the one hand, people who share a European-wide sense of solidarity and community are more likely to accept the Union's authority and support its membership. Conversely, the lack of such a European identity brings people to place their solidarity and sense of community at the national level, thus feeding a sentiment of opposition to the EU (Carey, 2002). Empirical evidence sustains these hypotheses; people with an exclusive national identity exhibit higher tendencies to go against the process of European integration, with a probability of being 30 percentage points less likely to express their support. Additionally, the more a person is attached to territorial entities and institutions, the more likely they are to be ambivalent and detached from European institutions and bodies (Carey, 2002, pp. 397-399).

Replicating Gabel's (1998) research design, McLaren (2002) analyzes the importance of perceived cultural threats in citizens' evaluation of integrative steps at the European level. Building the model with a slightly different dependent variable with respect to Gabel's, she measures perceived threats with two different items: (i) realistic threats, referring to a community's perceived threats to their resources by minority groups and related to distributional concerns within the social system; (ii) symbolic threats, referring to a community's perceived threats to their way of life by minority groups and related to religious/ideological concerns. The results demonstrate the significance of identitarian factors vis-à-vis utilitarian ones. While realistic threats reduce citizens' likelihood to support European integration by more or less 16 percentage points, symbolic threats account for a 10 percentage points decrease in support (MaLaren, 2002, pp. 558-563).

Compelling evidence is also offered by other scholars. Working with Eurobarometer data, Hooghe & Marks (2003) show how exclusive national identity negatively impacts support for European integration. Despite some variability across countries, holding an exclusive national identity lowers citizens' support for regionalism at the European level and increases the chances of a referendum about EU membership to have taken place, or to happen in the future - as shown in Figure 1 below. Interestingly, the causal power of exclusive national identity is not only influenced by referendums but also partially and differentially motivated by the level of division between both national elites and different parties and the gap between the elites and the public. As a final remark, their study further reinforces Carey's conclusion on the role of perceived cultural and economic threats, with varying effects depending on national contextual factors (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, pp. 22-24).



Legend:

*** significant at the 0.001 level, ** significant at the 0.01 level, * significant at the 0.05 level.

Italicized figures are squared multiple correlations. Non-italicized figures are standardized regression weights estimated by full information maximum likelihood.

Relative fit index (Delta NFI) = 0.981.

N = 14.

Figure 1: the causal role of exclusive national identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, p. 23)

More recent analysis demonstrates the extent to which national identities affected support for European economic governance during the Euro-crisis, and hence are less likely to sustain European integration (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2015). Specifically, citizens displaying an exclusive national identity are less supportive of the EU's economic measures taken to respond to the sovereign debt crisis by about 4 percentage points. Moreover, the national GDP per capita score is also correlated to the possession of an exclusive national identity: the lower the country's GDP per capita index, the less supportive of European economic governance exclusivist nationalists are in comparison with inclusivist nationalist individuals. It's worth noting here that the negative effects of an exclusive national identity are less pronounced in countries with higher GDPs and overall stable economic conditions, such as Luxembourg and Denmark (Kuhn & Stoeckel, 2015, pp. 634-636).

Exclusive national identity is also related to support for a differentiated EU, both at the constitutional and instrumental levels. Building on YouGov surveys, Moland (2024) confirms that exclusively national citizens are more inclined to support constitutional rather than instrumental differentiation for the EU, even when controlling for Eurosceptic postures, ideological orientations on the left-right spectrum, and sociotropic economic considerations. Nevertheless, Euroscepticism still has some mitigating effects on the weight of exclusive identitarian evaluations concerning European integration. In other words, "there is a direct association between exclusively national identity and support for differentiation that does not rely on its role in creating greater Euroscepticism" (Moland, 2024, pp. 19-20).

In conclusion, both the utilitarian and identitarian approaches provide good evidence for the determinants of citizens' support for European integration (McLaren, 2007, p. 241). Economic considerations, such as occupation and income, relating to the benefits of EU membership continue to have a strong explanatory power in people's preferences for more policy integration at the European level. Exclusive national identity is another main driver of opposition to the European Union and hence a source of Euroscepticism. Two important points should be mentioned: utility-driven concerns seem to have stronger effects when compared to distrust in European institutions, with a maximum impact of -2.41 percentage points and -1-21 percentage points, respectively; identitarian concerns appear unaffected by the general opinion of European institutions' actions and efficacy. In McLaren's words (2007, p. 244):

"We have some evidence to support the notion that trust in EU institutions can be 'bought' by providing benefits to EU citizens, and that this may be a more powerful relationship than exclusive national identity. That is, bias against EU institutions is partly a result of exclusive national identity, but a much bigger component of this bias seems to be related to 'what have you done for me lately?' issues."

Other factors are significant determinants of people's support for European integration. People value things in a hierarchical order and assign more importance

to the ones they care the most about (Inglehart, 1971). On top of this, Inglehart's (1977) theory of a "Silent Revolution" postulates that people in Western democracies have been gradually switching their preferences from material and security-driven concerns to post-materialist values concerning the quality of life. In the pre-Maastricht period, starting from the early 1970s and the expansion of the European Community, a sense of European solidarity developed, even in the face of economic uncertainties due to the global energy and oil crisis (Inglehart & Rabier, 1978). Thus, two hypotheses can be formulated: according to the (i) cognitive mobilization hypothesis, people's increased capacity to absorb and interpret messaging regarding the European political community and with higher levels of education became more favorable towards European integration and the European Union in general (Inglehart, 1970, p. 47); according to the (ii) materialist/postmaterialist hypothesis, support for European integration is driven by feelings of belonging, solidarity, and intellectual affinity between European populations that are on average more economically secure and well-educated (Inglehart & Rabier, 1978, p. 87).

The empirical evidence at our disposal confirms the cognitive mobilization and materialist/postmaterialist hypotheses (Inglehart, 1971; 1977; Inglehart & Rabier, 1978). However, a closer look at the data displays a different and more nuanced picture. Janssen (1991) argues that postmaterialist attitudes are not univocally related to support for European integration and that the concept of cognitive mobilization is valid at the individual level only. Gabel & Palmer's (1995) analysis supports both the human capital and mercantilistic hypotheses: those who have either a higher education and/or a higher income are, on average, more supportive of European integration. An additional test performed by Gabel (1998) corroborates these findings. People doing highly skilled jobs and disposing of a higher financial capital (in the highest income quartile) tend to be more supportive of the European Union. The pattern remained unchanged in the early 2000s, with education still appearing as a major determinant of European support (McLaren, 2007).

Another strand of the literature underlines the importance of institutional factors in shaping public support for European integration. Those are important determinants of support to remember because the strong focus on economic determinants hides the importance of institutional trust (Sanchez-Cuenca, 2000). From a general point of view, people who are more supportive and satisfied with democracy are also more supportive of European integration (Anderson, 1998). In this case, attitudes towards European institutions significantly impact citizens' Eurosceptic tendencies. Contrasting findings are reported. Some scholars show that a lack of trust in the domestic political system and the evaluation of national institutions do not necessarily influence and boost Euroscepticism (Nicolì, 2017b; McLaren, 2007). Other studies, on the contrary, highlight the importance of positive spillover effects in cases of symmetric connection between national and European institutions (Dominioni et al., 2020). This is so because feelings of distrust towards transnational

institutions could be driven by other elements, such as the narratives and discourses of parties and politicians (Hooghe, 2007)

1.2. Research question

1.2.1. Empirical evidence

Research made on European Parliamentary elections points to the fact that “Euroscepticism is here to stay”. Not only are nearly 28% of MEPs elected after 2019 affiliated with eurosceptic parties, but these skeptical formations, especially from the far-right, have also profited in terms of electoral gains and seats in the aftermath of the elections, even making their entrance in the European Parliament for the first time (Treib, 2021). Additional evidence also shows that eurosceptic parties’ principled opposition to the European Union project substantially diminished, hence attracting more voters from centrist coalitions and achieving stronger generalized support (Treib, 2021, pp. 179-180; Hobolt, 2019).

Against this background, scholars found that European citizens were consistently supportive of redistribution policies at the EU level during COVID-19, mainly because of their latent support for the EU and self-interested payoffs. The greater their perceived sociotropic payoffs, the more supportive of EU-wide redistributive health measures citizens proved to be (Unger et al, 2023). One might thus speculate that the European Union’s action to tackle the pandemic had a significant impact on eurosceptic attitudes, favouring their mitigation in people being effectively helped to cope with the negative effects of the crisis. In another study, Bremer et al. (2021) find citizens’ support for a joint European fiscal instrument as a policy solution in the wake of the pandemic, although raising awareness about citizens’ concerns relating to common debt solutions as a financing mechanism to help countries in need. In detail, respondents are more favorable of a broader and expansive recovery fund: if the purpose and scope of the fund are offering support for both the economy and healthcare, there is an 11.4 percentage points higher probability for citizens to support the policy package, with pro-EU respondents more likely to support it than anti-EU supporters (Bremer et al., 2021, pp. 13-14).

Moreover, Nicoli et al. (2024) show that attachment to the EU rose significantly after the breakout of COVID-19 (i.e. after the first wave of infection in February/March 2020), hence proving that people come closer together when facing symmetric crises. Interestingly, the consequences associated with the immaterial aspects of the crisis are more strongly related to higher levels of attachment to a shared European sense of belonging. The study also points to a ‘rally around the flag effect’ between March and July 2020, that is to say, during and after the breakout of the first wave of infections, showing a 1.3 percentage point increase in the level of attachment to a perceived common European identity. Additionally, attachment levels are particularly significant for people directly affected by the crisis - in this case, people registered as being virus contractors (Nicoli et al., 2024, pp. 14-15).

This seems to be also corroborated by surveys delivered between the first and second wave of the virus infection, in which the majority of the people in all surveyed countries show more favorable tendencies towards further European integration in comparison to their attitudes before the beginning of the crisis. Notably, people displaying lower levels of trust in national institutions regarding the pandemic's response were more positive about the impact and action of the European Union in dealing with the issue (Krastev & Leonard, 2020). At the same time, people continued to be skeptical about how the EU initially replied to the health emergency: (i) around 60 percent of interviewed citizens in Italy and France declared themselves to be unsatisfied with the EU's response to the crisis; (ii) around 50 percent of interviewed people in Spain, Italy and France declared to have lower confidence in European institutions after the crisis breakout. While the latter findings seem to indicate a rise in nationalist Euroscepticism, the authors suggest a generalized rise in pro-European federalist attitudes (Krastev & Leonard, 2020, pp. 10-11).

Contrary to the findings mentioned above, Gianmarco et al. (2021) detect generalized decreasing trusting attitudes towards the European Union. The strongest effect is observed in their Pro-EU Speech variable, with a 14.4 percentage points contraction in support for the European Union. A slightly smaller negative decline is also observed on matters regarding the European Union's membership benefits, its efficacy, and the citizens' perceived identitarian attachment to the project - drops respectively of -10.5, -10, and -7.9 percentage points. Most importantly, there is evidence that exposure to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic significantly lowered support for populist leaders, and that favored a general decrease in populist attitudes. Specifically, there is a drop of about 5 percentage points in support for both a strong leader and for the idea of people's power sovereignty - respectively -5.6% and -5.2% - as well as a negative impact on voting intentions for populist parties with a drop of about 4.6 percentage points (Gianmarco et al., 2024, pp. 12-14).

Using a variety of different indicators, another study measures an overall collapse of support for populist parties during the pandemic in Europe, in the wake of both the first and second waves of infections (Foa et al., 2022). Precisely, during the first year of COVID-19 (2020), they measured shrinking populists' approval ratings from mid-2020 until the end of the same year, with a decline of about 10 percentage points; an event that is also accompanied by a (stable) decreasing endorsement of populist ideas such as "the will of the people" or the the Manichean division of society between a "corrupt elite" and the "ordinary people". Moreover, people not only reject core populist beliefs, but they display lower levels of commitment to these concepts: fewer and fewer portions of the European population strongly agree with populist core ideas after the breakout of COVID-19 (Foa et al., 2022, pp. 21-22). Populist parties suffering more losses in their electoral support are the ones currently in government at the time of the pandemic. While the vote intention for populist parties is almost picking at a 40% probability at the beginning of 2020, its score lowers down to a 30% probability in the wake of 2022. This is also true for populist parties being in opposition in the unfolding of the crisis, which generally failed to

capitalize on the failures of incumbent parties relative to the management of the emergency (Foa et al., 2022, pp. 18-19).

The literature also presents remarkable evidence of the effect of economic and financial shocks on eurosceptic and populist attitudes. From a broader perspective, Algan et al. (2017) find a relationship between the European economic decline and both the rise of political extremism and a decrease in trusting attitudes toward political institutions. Using the European Social Survey (ESS) data from the year 2002 to the year 2014, they show how economic insecurity is related to the rise of populist attitudes and the demand for populist political platforms. In particular, the increasing levels of unemployment during the years of crisis are significantly explaining emerging political and institutional distrust, as well as a growing appreciation for non-mainstream parties (Algan et al., 2017, p. 15). While “a 1 percentage point increase in unemployment is associated with a 1 percentage point increase in the populist vote”, with a stronger effect in Southern Europe and a negligible effect in the North, the impact of economic insecurity on levels of trust for the EU and support for Eurosceptic platforms is somewhat less trivial and stable across regions (Algan et al., 2017, pp. 332-334).

Other scholars have found supporting evidence. Dustmann et al. (2017) find that a higher probability of voting for a populist party, either on the left or the right end of the political spectrum, is negatively correlated with a positive view of European integration and trust levels in European institutions. Pointedly, the Trust Ratio comprising national and European institutions increases, meaning that the decline in trust for national parliaments was higher than the decline in trust for European institutions. This points to unstable and non-trivial patterns of distrust against European integration or the European Parliament since national public opinions reacted differently to the crisis (Dustmann et al., 2017, p. 26). Moreover, the effect of the macroeconomic shocks seems to hold bigger consequences at the national level rather than the European one, being almost twice as big in the former vis-a-vis the latter and hence improving the Trust Ratio. In detail (Dustmann et al., 2017, p. 52):

“An increase in GDP per capita by 1 percent increases trust in the national parliament by about 0.4 percentage points, a bit less than 1 percent of the overall sample average. However, if benchmarked against the change in trust towards European and national parliaments, the effects are larger, particularly in the case of trust in national parliaments. Over the period between 2002 and 2014, trust in the European Parliament and national parliaments decreased by 6.3 and 2 percentage points, respectively. Hence, a 1 percentage point increase in the regional unemployment rate explains 4.2% of the decrease in trust in the European Parliament and 22.8% of the decrease in national parliaments. Conversely, a 1% decrease in GDP per capita explains 3.2% of the decrease in trust in the European Parliament and 20.1% of the decrease in national parliaments.”

More recent analyses seem to confirm these results, suggesting that populist preferences are correlated with economic insecurity - unemployment, income loss, and exposure to globalization (Guiso et al., 2024). The ones who decide to go vote at the elections are more likely to cast a ballot for populist parties: increasing levels of economic insecurity are positively related to decreasing levels (-6.3%) of turnout and increasing levels (+17%) of populist voting preferences. Even if the probability of participating in the elections decreases substantially (24%) for a person who did not experience a condition of previous economic insecurity, these individuals are also significantly more likely to vote for a populist party by 12.7 percentage points (Guiso et al., 2024, pp. 593-594).

The aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between Eurosceptic and populist attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic and the Euro-crisis - broadly speaking during periods of exogenous crisis. Euroscepticism and populism are widely discussed in the political sciences literature, but not always meaningfully connected (Kneuer, 2018). They are two distinct but frequently related terms: the former indicates a stance towards European integration as a political issue; the latter refers to a set of ideas regarding the functioning of democracy (Van Kessel & Roduijn, 2019). Despite the differences, populism and Euroscepticism usually go hand in hand, especially for extremist parties holding either radical left socioeconomic positions - usually against the neoliberal economic agenda - or radical right sociocultural stances against migration and minority groups. In other words: "many populist parties are Eurosceptic, and many Eurosceptic parties are populist" (Van Kessel & Roduijn, 2019, p. 12).

Multiple crisis scenarios have a considerable impact on the interplay between Euroscepticism and populism. While left-wing populist parties expressed opposition to European financial austerity measures in the aftermath of the sovereign debt crisis, right-wing populist parties capitalized on European member states' coordination problems regarding the irregular inflows of migrants and portrayed Brexit as the victory of ordinary people over technocratic governance guided by transnational elites. For different reasons, populists from both parts of the political spectrum criticized European integration, selectively enhancing their Eurosceptic arguments to exploit the opportunities offered by various crises and the EU's policy-making incapability and/or paralysis (Pirro et al., 2018). This is not to say that Euroscepticism is the main driver of increasing electoral share for populist parties. For the majority of these populist parties, European integration is not as important as other issues and is sometimes hardly integrated into their ideological frameworks. However, European integration and EU membership became more and more salient in public discourses due to recurring emergencies, proving their efficacy as an instrument to advance populist anti-elitist and anti-establishment messages (Pirro et al., 2018, pp. 387-88).

Scholars acknowledge the gap in the literature and the lack of research on the relationship between Eurosceptic and populist attitudes concerning public opinion's

transformations (Van Kessel & Rooduijn, 2019). Marianne Kneuer (2018: 27) offers a possible explanation, arguing that deeper investigations into their intersection are still missing because of the reluctance of older populist parties to exhibit Eurosceptic postures explicitly. Taking into account the Dutch National Election Survey 2017, she provides evidence for the significance of the theoretical and political affinity between these highly correlated but distinct terms (Kneuer, 2018, p. 21). Thus, the importance attributed to this study.

1.2.2. Theory

As a theory of European integration, neofunctionalism stresses the importance of emerging and supranational institutions, as well as the creation of a new governing center resulting from functional and external pressures faced by national states (Haas, 1958). Regional integration is thus characterized by the interaction of different actors, with pluralistic and evolving strategies building coalitions across national states (Niemann, 2021). Political integration is best seen as a process that rests on the participants' perceptions of interests and values, rather than through altruistic or idealistic motives. At the onset of the European Coal & Steel Community, thanks in part to the sustained pressures and growing positive expectations of national elites, a process of spillover into new political and economic sectors was reinforced. This was characterized by events such as the reform in the direction of Euratom, thereby fostering greater demand for an increasingly prominent role of supranational institutions (Haas, 1958).

Neofunctionalists' frameworks point their attention to crisis-induced decisional cycles, or, national and regional authorities' policy-making initiatives in response to recurring crisis confrontations, generated either by endogenous contradictions or exogenous tensions (Schmitter, 1970). At a later phase of the decisional cycle, when the spread of interest coalitions and participating actors greatly widens up, joint strategies are more likely to favor spillover mechanisms - or a phenomenon of build-up if there is a greater push towards a 'coordinated intersectoral-planning' (Schmitter, 1970, pp. 842-843). Moreover, the unintended consequences resulting from functional pressures would push national governments to expand the scope of regional integration and increase the devolution of competencies to supranational institutions. As a result, citizens would become more supportive of integration efforts at the supranational level, sowing the seeds for political integration stemming from spillover patterns related to previous economic and social integration (Schmitter, 2002).

The Euro-crisis has been discussed as a relevant case of neofunctional crisis-driven European integration. Some scholars argue in favor of the advancement of the pre-crisis institutional framework of the EU along the lines of a neofunctionalist logic, thus drawing attention to the functional pressures caused by the lack of crisis-management tools before the emergence of the crisis (Niemann & Iannou, 2015). At the time of the unfolding economic instability in the EMU, not only political

elites around Europe considered both the status quo and spillback scenarios as undesirable and inadmissible, but they also framed the dominant political discourse in almost all major EU countries with functional spillover logic. Significant and differential efforts were made by a variety of business-oriented interest groups and organizations, with all of the central EU institutions also playing a substantial role in cultivating spillover pressures coming from the crisis scenario. While the European Commission seems to have played a marginal role, the European Parliament and especially the European Central Bank were decisive in contributing and designing the new integrative steps (Niemann & laonnou, 2015, pp. 209-212).

Based on a revised neo-neofunctional framework built upon Schmitter's theory (1970; 2002), and assessing the empirical evidence offered by major legislative acts and on a dedicated expert survey, Nicoli (2019) provides a dynamic analysis of the crisis, arguing for cases of both spill-arounds and spillovers as a direct consequence of the crisis' functional pressures. The first case of spill-around is the European Financial Stability Mechanism (EFSM), created in the early period of the crisis in 2010 via regulation 407/2010 and rooted in the solidarity clause explicit in article 122 of the TFEU, as a way to ensure an assistance mechanism, of debt mutualization, for states in financial needs (Nicoli, 2019, p. 10). A second case of spill-around is the creation of the European Stability Mechanism, as a rescue fund provided by all the member states in the form of "paid-in capital and further guarantees". The third case of spill around is the European Semester, a policy coordination mechanism informally introduced by an ECFIN (Directorate-General Economic and Financial Affairs) agreement in 2010 granting an extended harmonization of existing tools of economic crisis management. A final case of spill-around is exemplified by the Macroeconomic Imbalances Procedure (MIP) of 2011, and grounded in articles 121 and 126 of the TFEU, and regularly examining the macroeconomic situation of member states to possibly propose sanctions against potential internal balances (Nicoli, 2019, pp. 11-12).

Additional instances of spillover effects are reported. Firstly, the mandate of the European Central Bank (ECB) has been reinterpreted and expanded in the direction of not only safeguarding price stability within the EMU but also the preservation of the Euro system and the common currency itself. Secondly, the European Banking Union (EBU) was set up and equipped with a supervisory and resolution pillar - respectively the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM) and the Single Resolution Mechanism (SRM). Thirdly, the creation of the EFSI (European Fund for Strategic Investments) constitutes a case of political-technocratic spillover, intending to mobilize private investments supporting public expenditures and overcoming potential investment gaps in the EU (Nicoli, 2019, pp. 14-15).

Concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, Brooks et al. (2023) find patterns of general build-up, with different policy areas affected by current or potential spillover developments. Overall, these results prove the neofunctionalist theory theoretically and predictively meaningful in this specific crisis scenario. Besides an initial period or potential spill-back, the European Commission clearly stated its support for integration measures and Member States recognized their interdependencies and

thus the need to implement shared mechanisms of crisis management. Overall, this led to a new European Health Union (EHU) legislative package of reforms and initiatives.

The European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) experienced a build-up in its powers and a spillover with its expansion into new areas of disease-related risk management: the creation of the Early Warning and Response System and the new European Health Data Space; and the involvement of the ECDC in national preparedness and response planning are the major exemplification of this pattern of development (Brooks et al., 2023, pp. 727-729). Furthermore, the European Medicines Agency (EMA), with the creation of an Emergency Task Force (ETF) and the expansion of its regulatory role in the management of medicines, experienced a similar pattern of build-up and spillover. As a follow-up, the former C3 Health Threats Unit in DG Sante within the European Commission has been replaced by the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), to prevent, detect, and respond to different kinds of health threats, but also centralizing and coordinating the EU's crisis and response mechanism. Within the HERA framework, another spillover initiative was suggested by the Commission: the former Health Security Committee (HSC) was set to broaden its activity in information sharing and coordination, to better advise, audit, and monitor national plans on emergency preparedness and response, but also to enhance the EU's power to declare a public health emergency under the revised Health Threat Decision (Brooks et al., 2023, pp. 732-733).

Postfunctionalism is another grand theory of European integration highlighting the importance of politicization in the integration process and the critical role of identities in shaping the cleavages around which the contestation against such a process substantiates (Hooghe & Marks, 2009). From the point of view of parties, the new and emerging political dimension in European contemporary politics, cutting across GAL (green/alternative/libertarian) and TAN (traditionalist/authoritarian/nationalist) positions, and replacing the left/right divide (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019) has become a more significant factor of mobilization and party support due to its salience with respect to national identity (Hooghe & Marks, 2004).

On top of such premises, postfunctionalism posits the importance of ideological cues - either deriving from the media, political parties, and trade unions or coming from the individuals' political position on the old and new cleavage lines - as a source of complementary evaluation along economic interests and concerning the European integration process (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 10-11). Contrary to neofunctionalism, the merit of this theory is to underline the importance of citizens' (exclusive) collective identities and their politicization in the process of European integration. Theresa Kuhn (2019) argues that some key factors favoured this development: (i) the switch from a form of technocratic and isolated decision-making to the mass politics arena; (ii) the expansion of transnational integration into the domain of core state powers, involving issues of solidarity and national sovereignty;

(iii) the unequal and stratified exposure to Europeanization of public opinions in member countries.

Building on Lipset & Rokkan's (1967) original work on the crystallization of a European cleavage structure and its consequent party system transformation in post-WWII continental Europe, Hooghe & Marks (2017) explores the impact of the economic and migration crises on the development of the new transnational cleavage. They emphasize the strategic interactions among parties in response to voters' changing preferences: in the contemporary scenario, new challenging parties are more likely to appear vis-a-vis mainstream parties as a consequence of citizens' demands; differently from the past, territorial identity has come to play (again) a decisive role as both a source of contestation and conflict. The more recent cleavage builds up on the anxieties of losers of globalization - unskilled, self-perceived culturally threatened, uneducated individuals - pitting themselves against a liberal, cosmopolitan, and transnational elite, thus seeking nationalist protection and holding eurosceptic and populist beliefs (Hooghe & Marks, 2017, pp. 4-8). Both the Euro and migration crises exercised extensive exogenous pressures on European citizens, inflating the saliency of the integration process and incentivizing the formation of an organized political opposition going against it. Instead of asking for a realignment of mainstream parties, the electorate moved towards more extreme movements on the political spectrum of the new cleavage (Hooghe & Marks, 2017, p.15).

Other scholars emphasize the populist and eurosceptic challenge posed by these crises, arguing that the neofunctionalist reactions to such crises in the direction of more supranational coordination and delegation favored the flourishing of extreme parties all over Europe - on the left in the Southern part of the continent and on the right in its Northern and Eastern part (Borzel & Risse, 2017). Whereas elites' reaction towards the expansion of fiscal coordination and integration attempted to challenge the postfunctionalist (identitarian) challenge by depoliticizing the debate over austerity measures and sovereign debt deficits, they failed to depolarize the public discussion on illegal migration and the Schengen borders from the very beginning through the means of supranational delegation. Postfunctionalism is seen to explain better the dynamics undergoing the latter case, showing how eurosceptic and/or populist parties exploited exclusivist national identities to undermine the joint supranational measures discussed in the Council of Ministers and during the European summits (Borzel & Risse, 2017, pp. 10-11). This partially proves the postfunctionalist predictions about a 'constraining dissensus' (Down & Wilson, 2008) and the growing clash of competing European and/or national identities. The polarization pits opposing cleavages (TAN and GAL) together and refers to the distinction between a 'modern liberal Europe' and a 'nationalist Europe, fueled and sustained by eurosceptic and populist challenges' (Down & Wilson, 2008, p. 18).

Postfunctionalist expectations seem to apply differently to the health crisis. Security concerns replaced efficiency pressures at the functional level, contracting the functional scale of governance to the sub(national level) and raising community concerns at the transnational level (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2021). The argument lies on the importance of contingent factors in triggering the security concerns as

opposed to solidarity ones, hence stressing the issue-dependency of the postfunctionalist trade-off. Under certain conditions, the scope of community crosses national borders and favors supranational and joint policy-making even in the presence of national societies holding exclusivist identities (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2021, p. 365). As noted by some scholars, postfunctionalism doesn't account for periods of crisis and their related intergovernmental bargaining activity and the development of positive neofunctional spillovers resulting from crisis pressures (Schimmelfenning, 2014).

1.2.3. Hypotheses

Building upon neofunctionalist integration theory, we examine the degrees of convergence towards similar policy positions over European Integration. Given that the COVID-19 pandemic is an exogenous crisis with respect to either European public opinions or European-specific subnational parties, one would expect a degree of crisis-driven convergence towards the European Union on matters involving the devolution of health policies and member states' core powers. As shown in Paragraph 1.2.1, the crisis had a significant influence on populism, and populist attitudes as well as support for populist leaders also decreased in the aftermath of the pandemic. Because the crisis boosts people's transnational solidarity and feelings of belonging to a wider community than the national one, a diminishing impact and presence of populist attitudes on peoples' political behavior concerning European integration during the first and second waves of COVID-19 infections could be expected in March 2019 and October 2020 respectively.

Given the strong connection between populist and Eurosceptic ideas in contemporary politics, and following postfunctionalism's idea of a 'constraining dissensus' over European integration, one would expect a positive relationship between Euroscepticism and populism during the crisis. Nevertheless, it is suggested that Euroscepticism is less mediated and mobilized by populism. The idea is that Eurosceptic political agendas are less likely to be positively mobilized by populist entrepreneurs during crisis scenarios as opposed to non-crisis ones. As neofunctionalism predicts, at every cycle of integration new crisis-related pressures would likely produce positive spillover effects, thereby pushing people closer together at the European level and weakening the effects of populist agendas on Eurosceptic positions and their ability to challenge the European integration process.

The evidence presented in Paragraph 1.2.1 also suggests a significant impact of the economic crisis on both Eurosceptic and populist attitudes. Thus, to account for a wider generalization of the hypothesis, we do not only take into consideration the COVID-19 pandemic but also the relationships between Eurosceptic and populist attitudes during the Euro-crisis, another clear example of an exogenous crisis for both European countries and citizens in the continent. Again, the mobilizing power of populist narratives regarding the unsatisfactory status of European integration was weaker during the sovereign debt crisis compared to the preceding and following periods. On top of this, I formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Populism has a stronger effect on Euroscepticism during non-crisis scenarios vis-à-vis crisis scenarios

Interesting insights show that individuals exposed to economic shocks in the past are less likely to manifest populist attitudes when faced with a current crisis. Put differently, past and current exposure to crisis scenarios, specifically economic-led external shocks, mitigates populism (Gavresi & Litina, 2023). Some scholars also argue that the COVID-19 pandemic is a good instance of joint action and transnational crisis-management response compared to other scenarios, such as the Euro-crisis (Ferrera, 2023). In the former case, different interests and visions among European member states were overshadowed by high levels of support for shared instruments, driven by an in-group feeling of European solidarity generated by the crisis itself. In the latter instance, a coordinated, supranational, and resolute action faced the activation of national and ideological concerns.

Such difference is the consequence of the diverse nature of the external shock. While the COVID-19 crisis is a symmetric crisis affecting every state and its citizens equally, the nature of the Euro-crisis was asymmetric due to the economic imbalances within the Eurozone and the European Monetary Union. On the one hand, some countries were less affected by the economic shock because of their financial stability and low levels of public debt. On the other hand, other countries with high levels of public debt were heavily exposed to economic uncertainties and the European Central Bank's austerity regime (Ferrara & Kriesi, 2023, pp. 1364-1367).

The argument is that asymmetric crises have a higher impact on populist and Eurosceptic attitudes. Put differently, the nature of the crisis and the difficulty of finding a common solution increases the potential for politicization and the salience of European integration. Compared to symmetric crises, populist ideas are more likely to mobilize Eurosceptic beliefs driven by economic or identitarian concerns during asymmetric shocks, paving the way for a potential 'constraining dissensus' in the subsequent years as foreseen by postfunctionalism. Further to these considerations - and to better differentiate the magnitude of the effects of populism on Euroscepticism in different crisis contexts - I elaborate a second hypothesis.

(H2): Populism has a weaker impact on Euroscepticism during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the Euro-crisis

Chapter 2

2. Euroscepticism and European integration

2.1. Defining Euroscepticism

The Oxford English dictionary defines a Eurosceptic person as anyone who has “a tendency to have doubts or reservations regarding the supposed benefits of increasing cooperation between the member states of the European Union (and formerly the European Economic Community); opposition to greater political or economic integration in Europe” (Oxford, 2008). Researchers have also been refining the term over the past three decades. For clarity and simplicity, we will focus on the concept's most significant and established conceptualizations.

From a general viewpoint, Euroscepticism possesses some key features: (i) it has become a pervasive and long-standing phenomenon in the EU, but; (ii) it is exhausting its power and attractiveness in some countries - such as Ireland, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta; (iii) it plays with public sentiments and it is engaging both on the left and right ends of the political spectrum, taking a variety of different forms (Keading et al., 2021). For these reasons, the word Euroscepticism is considered a vague term broadly referring to some generic resistance against the European integration process, without any further specification concerning the type of opposition involved, its context, and purpose. Put differently, Euroscepticism is warranted by disparate ideologies and shaped by many factors (Leruth et al., 2018). Originally, Euroscepticism developed in England on top of the anti-integrationist stances of the Conservative and Labour parties in the scenario of post-WWII, distinguishing British people and culture from Continental Europe, and especially the Franco-German axis (Harmsen & Spiering, 2004). Slowly and gradually, Euroscepticism became a widespread phenomenon all over Europe and has been subsumed in pre-existing forms of contestations, along the lines of long-standing cleavages in European states. Moreover, at the beginning of the new millennium, and in the decade following the 1992 Maastricht treaty, skepticism towards the European Union didn't play a substantial role in reshaping parties' strategies and platforms around the Continent (Harmsen & Spiering, 2004, pp. 21-24).

The most widely used conceptualization of Euroscepticism is offered by Taggart & Szczurbiak (2002) in their analysis of the evolution of Central and Eastern European party systems and the emerging patterns of political dispute in Europe. Arguing about Euroscepticism as a comprehensive feature of candidate states' party systems, they notably differentiated between 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism. The former entails a principled opposition to both the political and economic sides of the European integration project, hence contending the country's membership to the Union. In practice, hard Euroscepticism substantiates the resistance to the actual and current form of integration taking place at a specific time and expresses people's reluctance to accept new and/or different values - be they liberal, socialist, or

capitalist. The latter implies a more contingent and qualified form of opposition to European integration, meaning that parties' hostility is directed to specific areas of policy intervention directly affecting distinct national interests. In other words, not every issue involves rejecting European integration, since not every domain is negatively affected by such a process (Taggart & Szcznerbiak, 2002, pp. 27-28).

Given the openness of the above framework for analysis, other scholars diagnosed some problems (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002). In this view, soft Euroscepticism becomes an ambiguous concept including every sort of disagreement about European policy-making. Moreover, under certain conditions (principled opposition to the EU) the distinction between soft and hard Euroscepticism becomes even more blurred, paving the way for theoretical confusion. That way, it is unclear when Euroscepticism is to be ascribed to negative feelings about the integration project or directly to the European Union as the incarnation of its ideas (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, p. 300). As a consequence, Kopecký and Mudde elaborated an inclusive topology, structured on the dimension of 'diffuse support' on the one hand, and 'specific support on the other'. The first encompasses support for the general ideas of European integration. The second denotes support for transnational integration, that is, the EU as it currently stands and develops. As a result, they outline the following matrix:

		Support for European integration	
		<i>Europhile</i>	<i>Europhobe</i>
S u p p o r t f o r E U	<i>EU-optimist</i>	Euroenthusiasts	Europragmatists
	<i>EU-pessimist</i>	Eurosceptics	Eurorejects

Figure 2: Typology of party positions in Europe (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, p. 303).

On the support for the European integration dimension, one can find Europhiles and Europhobes. Briefly, Europhiles are the ones believing in the ideas of transnational integration such as institutionalized cooperation between sovereign states at the political level, and liberal market economy integration at the economic level. Generally, those people support integration irrespective of the exact path of development the integration process is facing. Differently, Europhobes show a lack of support and even signs of opposition to European integration based on various positions, be they nationalist, socialist, liberal, isolationist, or exclusivist stances. On the European Union's support dimension, you find EU-optimist and EU-pessimist. On the one hand, EU-optimists support the EU because either its current status or the direction of its development matches with their personal preferences. On the other hand, EU-pessimists don't support the EU because they either think that the EU is currently deviating from its original purpose or that it's shrinking as a consequence of some policies. It is also worth noticing that EU-pessimists are not necessarily completely against European membership (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, p. 301).

Combining these variants, one obtains four different results, as shown in the table above: (i) Euroenthusiasts, both supporting European ideals and the EU's development; (ii) Eurosceptics, supporting European ideals but disagreeing with the EU's development; (iii) Eurorejects, dissenting both European ideals and the EU's development; (iv) Europragmatist, not necessarily opposing European ideals but not directly supporting them, but still approving the EU's development (Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, p. 302).

Another way to look at the motivational forces behind the employment of Eurosceptic stances, thus sustaining and driving partisan strategic orientations for European integration. On one side, ideological motivations could go hand in hand with any type of ideology. On the other, strategic motivations are very context-specific and can vary a lot depending on temporary factors (Rovny, 2004). Whereas Euroscepticism is warranted by both ideological and strategic considerations, parties are less likely to soften their stances and adapt their narratives in the first scenario vis-a-vis the second scenario, within which flexibility is often a must. To better visualize this reasoning, and complement Taggart & Szczerbiak's framework about 'soft' and 'hard' Euroscepticism, Jan Rovny offers a two-dimensional axis combining the motivational and impact-driven justifications for party-based Euroscepticism, reported in Figure 3 in the next page.

Emphasizing the role of public opinion, Catharina Sorensen (2004) defined Euroscepticism by way of six different popular attitudes that connect with other dimensions of the dyadic correspondence between citizens and European institutions. The first one (i) relates to the issue of national sovereignty and its preservation. On another level (ii) you have the ideological dimension attached to the integration project. While the third one (iii) tackles the functional dimension of competence transfer from the national to the transnational level and its degree of performance, the material payoffs and economic utility of integration are related to the fourth (iv) popular concern. The fifth (v) and sixth elements respectively deal with the emotional connection between citizens and European institutions and, similarly to

Taggart & Szczerbiak, to the principled opposition toward the project in the first place (Sorensen, 2004, p. 3). Similarly, a thin and value-neutral typology, allowing for a broader and flexible understanding of Eurosceptic positions is also offered by Flood & Usherwood (2005), of which a summary table is reported in Figure 4.

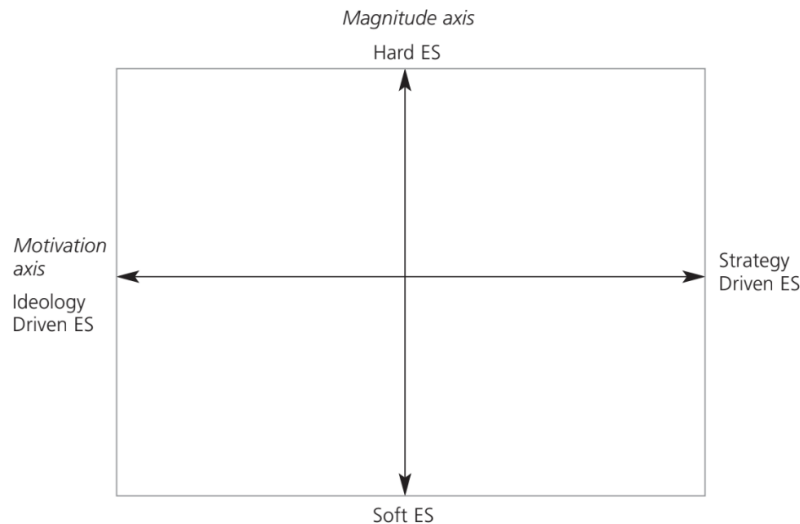


Figure 3: Theoretical Eurosceptic space (Rovny, 2004, p.37)

Table: Categories of EU Alignments	
Maximalist	pushing integration as far and as fast as is feasible towards the practical realisation of a chosen model
Reformist	endorsing advance of integration, subject to remedying the deficiencies of what has already been achieved
Gradualist	accepting advance of integration, as long as it is slow and piecemeal
Minimalist	accepting the <i>status quo</i> , but wanting to limit further integration as far as possible
Revisionist	wanting to return to an earlier state, usually before a treaty revision
Rejectionist	outright refusal of integration, coupled to opposition to participation

Figure 4: categories of EU alignments (Flood & Usherwood, 2005, p. 6)

Some years later, and in response to critiques, Szczerbiak & Taggart (2008a) offered new specifications to their terminology. In their view, differentiating between 'hard' and 'soft' Euroscepticism helps not only to identify and to differentiate those against actual and ongoing integration policies from people rejecting European integration

per sé but also offers feasible yet accurate items to researchers to build their research design around (Szczurbiak & Taggart, 2008a, p. 8). Partially rebutting to Kopecký & Mudde (2002) criticisms, they argue that a rigid distinction between principled (hard) and contingent (soft) objections to transnational integration doesn't match with a more conventional and less sophisticated popular usage of the term. Put differently, cases such as the UK Independence Party are not easily reconcilable with the 'Eurorejects' and 'Europhobes' categories, thus confounding qualitative assessments (Szczurbiak & Taggart, 2008b). Another problem with this terminological finesse lies in the fact that the 'Europragmatist' category results in incoherent classifications. Instead of creating ad-hoc compartments to fit extravagant positions of a small minority of parties around Europe, they believe it's better to accept that there could be some instances that are simply not worth further defining. Conversely, the category of 'Euroenthusiast' seems too broad and inclusive to point to any specific substantiations of party-driven European (integration) oppositional platforms (Szczurbiak & Taggart, 2008b, p. 244).

Another strand of literature connects Euroscepticism with the debate over the functional legitimacy of the European Union project. As a result of depoliticization attempts induced by mainstream political elites, opposition to the European Union became less and less viable. As states become less distinguishable from supranational organizations in terms of representation and accountability, the divide between the national and the European levels fades (Mair, 2007). In a situation of increasing popular dissatisfaction regarding the current governance mechanisms and decisions, opposition at the national level could easily translate into opposition at the European level, since the two areas are tantamount. This is so because the functional space for opposition within the system (the national level) decreases and paves the way for the only alternative way of opposition, i.e. opposition to the system itself. That way, Euroscepticism is another way to manifest a general sense of 'polity-scepticism' (Mair, 2007, p. 16).

Along these lines, other scholars posited a firm relationship between the process of democratic legitimation of the EU and the emergence of Eurosceptic narratives in the public discourse denouncing the validity of such a development (de Wilde & Trenz, 2012). In other words, Euroscepticism is best conceived as a by-product of the EU's democratization. It is caused by the underlying uncertainties about the quality and scope of the European polity and its ability to tackle the issue of popular sovereignty and advance some concrete answers to the problem. Where the system lacks spaces for conventional (and traditional) decision-making and representation, Eurosceptic narratives open a window of opportunity for elements of 'popular democracy' to emerge (de Wilde & Trenz, 2012, p. 550).

Euroscepticism cuts across the left and right political axis also. From a party-based point of view, Euroscepticism mostly engages extremist parties. Operationalizing party-based euroscepticism as a one standard deviation measure below the mean level of party support for the European Union, De Vries & Edwards (2009, pp. 18-19) track the following pattern: where left-wing party-based euroscepticism is driven by economic anxieties and opposition to neoliberal

governance, right-wing parties deploy national identity in an attempt to defend national sovereignty, especially against the threat of irregular migration. At the public opinion level, similar results are found. Inferring from European Social Survey data, Val Elsas et al. (2016) show citizens' eurosceptic distribution of preferences. In line with their expectations, left-wing supporters' dissatisfaction with the European Union is based on redistributive concerns, and mostly related to economic policy-making. On the other side, right-wing supporters feel cultural issues are a lot more pressing when evaluating their support for the European Union. A specification is worth noting here: the influence of anti-immigration and exclusivist attitudes on right-wing supporters changes over time, suggesting that specific conditions may significantly impact such attitudes.

Other ways of conceptualizing Euroscepticism have been developed in successive years. Most of them consider the supply and demand sides of Euroscepticism together, thus concentrating on citizens' preferences and the strategies adopted by parties to channel their sentiments. This paragraph introduces the term from a broader perspective. In Chapter 4, supplementary approaches to meaningfully connect the Eurosceptic phenomenon with the rise of populism in Europe will be discussed.

2.2. Multi-level governance, functional legitimacy, and the democratic deficit

The structure of governance of the European Union is multi-layered and complex. It tries to balance the interests of national and sovereign states as well as of particular groups in society. The mix between domestic preferences and the need for international cooperation affects the distribution of power between the private and public spheres but also between different levels of governance (Kohler-Koch, 1996). Moreover, exposure to globalization and international competition, coupled with an increasing pattern of functional and domain-specific differentiation within national member states exposes the European integration process to new challenges (Jachtenfuchs, 1997). Imbalances in the internal distribution of power and lack of representative channels of disputation could translate into a European democratic deficit, based on a lack of input-oriented legitimacy concerning the policies implemented in Brussels. Euroscepticism increases when the weaknesses of central European decision-making are evident. Salvati & Vercesi (2019) clarify that austerity measures exacerbated citizens' perception of being marginalized by European institutions and feeling unable to raise their voices and influence their decisions.

Two different modes of governance can be posited regarding the European Union. The former is a state-centric model in which European integration preserves and even strengthens State sovereignty by way of intergovernmental bargaining at the transnational level on fundamental issues. The latter emphasizes a loss of power on the part of national states and in favor of EU collective decision-making mechanisms via European institutions - European Parliament, European Council, European Commission, European Court of Justice, and European Central Bank. In other

words, policy-making authority is “shared across multiple levels of government - subnational, national, and supranational” (Hooghe & Marks, 2001).

State-centric models' conceptual roots come from intergovernmentalist and realist theories of international relations, following the core assumption that supranational institutions ultimately serve the goals of national states. Liberal intergovernmentalism challenges individuals' and private groups' position as primary actors in international politics holding rational and risk-averse behaviors. Moreover, it questions the tendency to collectively organize their interests under the assumption of a world arena that is characterized by material scarcity and conflicting values (Moravcsik, 1997). As a bottom-up theory of international politics, liberal intergovernmentalism describes the state as a representative institution of a variety of changing and relatively unstable societal actors. In Moravcsik's words, “representative institutions and practices constitute the critical ‘transmission belt’ by which the preferences and social power of individuals and groups are translated into state policy” (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 518). Most importantly, liberal intergovernmentalism assumes the interdependence of the International System. States' behavior is strategically built and determined on top of external constraints faced in world politics and generally coming from other actors' distinct preferences. Policy interdependence links state preferences and their behaviors, meaning that national actors adjust their policies based on a cost and benefits analysis given by the transnational externalities possibly stemming from their actions (Moravcsik, 1997, p. 520).

Building on these foundations, the European Community has been framed as a “successful intergovernmental regime designed to manage economic interdependence through negotiated policy co-ordination” (Moravcsik, 1993, p. 474). After taking into account domestic preferences, states initially refine their strategies and successively undertake a bargaining activity with other states at the transnational level to realize their interests. Liberal intergovernmentalism is consistent with a variety of theories of transnational integration: from the federalist notion of European integration as a cosmopolitan ideal warranted by a shared identity; to the liberal motivations of national security and economic interdependence as a way to provide a peaceful accommodation of discrete national needs. Pursuing policy coordination at the economic level allows states to avoid the burden of negative international policy externalities, thus enabling national actors to achieve objectives otherwise not possibly attainable while also granting overall stability (Moravcsik, 1993, pp. 484-485). Accordingly, state-centric models predict European states to engage in bargaining activities by which they negotiate the terms for reaching specific goals, rather than devolving full authority to European organizations. As a consequence, decisions taken at the European level are supposed to “reflect the lowest common denominator among state executive positions” (Marks et al., 1996).

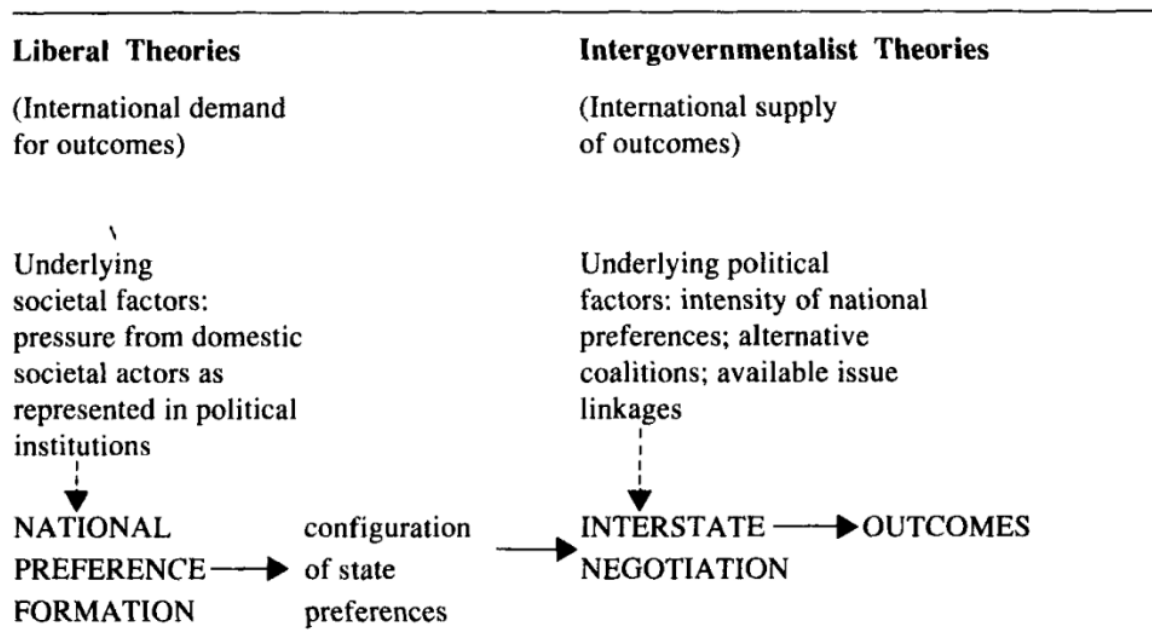


Figure 5: the liberal intergovernmentalist framework of analysis (Moravcsik, 1993, p. 482)

While highlighting the importance of national states and domestic arenas, multi-level governance frameworks stress the fact that “decision-making competencies are shared by actors at different levels rather than monopolized by national government” and the consequent loss of power-control for individual national governments (Hooghe & Marks, 2001, p. 4). Instead of undermining national states capacities by directly challenging their authority, multi-level frameworks of governance pool national leaders and subnational actors together within a transnational polity. That way state executives' sovereign power is limited by the interests and willingness of other national actors by qualified majority voting procedures (Marks et al., 1996). Put differently, European institutions are set to acquire more independence vis-à-vis national agencies and actors throughout decision-making processes. Moreover, shared outcomes at the transnational level concerning the scope of European integration entail gains or losses for single states and display a zero-sum character (Marks et al., 1996, p. 346).

The basic presumption underlying multi-level governance frameworks lies in the fact that such governance implies more flexibility, being dispersed around in a variety of jurisdictions rather than concentrating in one central jurisdiction (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). Two types of governance can be envisaged depending on the flexibility assumption: (i) type I multi-level governance, comprising a small amount of general-purpose jurisdiction - international, national, regional, meso, local - to provide multiple functions such as some judicial, representative and policy-making responsibilities; (ii) type II multi-level, comprising a range of specialized jurisdictions, hence providing specific functions regarding local public provisions, local and international dispute settlement services, common-goods maintenance and quality control (Hooghe & Marks, 2003, p. 236). On one side, and grounded in federalist theorizations, type I multi-level governance presents the following features: (i)

general-purpose jurisdictions; (ii) nonintersecting membership; (iii) a limited number of jurisdictional levels; and (iv) a systemwide and durable architecture. On the other side, type II multi-level governance's main characteristics are: (i) task-specific jurisdictions; (ii) intersecting membership; (iii) many jurisdictional levels; and (iv) a flexible design.

There has always been a vivid discussion about the European Union's democratic deficit and functional legitimacy since the inception of the project (Haas, 1958). In any case, the debate intensified in the 1990s. Majone (1999) identified four different types of arguments about the European Union's democratic deficit, sharing the core assumption about the endemic and long-standing nature of such deficit as long as citizens' loyalty is directed to member states instead of European institutions. On a different level, the EU's democratic deficit refers to a lack of transparency in decision-making procedures, the excessive role of technocratic policy-making, and insufficient levels of public participation accompanied by a deficiency in the checks and balances mechanism to ensure accountability (Majone, 1998, p. 15).

The problem is one of legitimacy: how and under which conditions European Institutions, and hence the European Union integration process, could be considered legitimate? Legitimacy is a multifaceted concept. One can approach legitimization concerns from a functional, normative, or empirical dimension. A functionally legitimized system is a system in which citizens' acceptance of governing authorities is solid even in the face of decisions undermining their interests (Scharpf, 2007). Normative legitimacy relies on political obligations to comply with specific institutional standards, properly designed to effectively ensure governing bodies' accountability, democratic participation, and respect for people's interests. Finally, the empirical perspective disregards coercive concerns and focuses on the behavioral compliance of governing authorities concerning civilian legitimizing needs and beliefs (Scharpf, 2007, p. 7).

One can also look at legitimacy on a two-dimensional axis. On the one axis, you can either have procedural or substantive legitimacy. The former: (i) defines European institutions legal authority and purposes by way of democratically enacted legislation; (ii) regulate the appointment of elected officials; (iv) dictates the rules to apply in decision-making processes; (v) structures judicial and political checks and balances about implemented decisions (Majone, 1998, p. 20). The latter corroborates the validity of non-majoritarian institutions' ability to ensure the duties which they are created to satisfy, which is conditional on the appropriateness of their functioning. Both power independence and accountability by results are substantive reasons to grant a strong degree of legitimacy to European agencies, for such institutions to protect the individual rights set out by a variety of European-level treaties and evaluate the impact of their actions (Majone, 1998, pp. 22-24). The utmost importance attached to the afore-mentioned requirement it's a consequence of the European organizations and bodies' institutional design. Substantive and procedural criteria are a viable and necessary technique to probe the legitimacy of transnational bodies, at best of an indirect nature due to the incomplete

accountability citizens and elected representatives can concede them (Majone, 1999, p. 21)

On the other axis, legitimacy is seen as either input-oriented or output-oriented. The input dimension posits legitimacy as the result of the correspondence between the authentic expression of people's preferences composing the constituency and decisions taken by governing institutions. Input legitimacy implies a sort of 'government *by* the people' or a 'self-government', in the sense that "compliance can be expected because the laws are self-determined, rather than imposed by an exogenous will [*while*] binding decisions should serve the common interest of the constituency" (Scharpf, 1998, p. 2). Instead of focusing on matching people's interests, the output legitimacy dimension serves the fulfillment of people's interests. The mode of governance is not any more "*by* the people" but "*for* the people", focusing on the achievement of collective needs that cannot be directly solved by market mechanisms or individuals only. Generally, input and output-oriented legitimacy go hand in hand: requirements of legitimacy when defining the kind of collective interests to be effectively solved always need to be subsidized by output-oriented criteria defining the action space of institutions (Scharpf, 1998, pp. 2-3).

The Euro-crisis manifested a lack of output legitimacy on the part of European institutions. European fiscal policies were all built on the premise of preventing macroeconomic imbalances and ensuring price stability in the Eurozone. The sovereign debt crisis especially exposed the Southern country's financial security, thus diminishing the legitimacy of the European Central Bank as a driver of economic cohesion within the Common Market (Scharpf, 2013). The creation of controversial effects introduced by the new economic governance partially undermined both the input and output legitimacy of the European Union. Whereas European institutions' fiscal policies were not developed enough to restore their overall legitimacy, new constraints on national governments' ability to implement redistributive measures at the domestic level to tackle the crisis were hindered by these same policies, thus creating a "twin legitimacy deficit" of European integration: not sufficient redistributive policies to achieve output legitimacy, but sufficient progress towards insulated decision making on fiscal policy to fail to reach input legitimacy" (Nicoli, 2017a, p. 393).

Scholars exposed similar problems regarding the international arena and the tension between national democracy and global markets. Dani Rodrik's (2013) trilemma is one of the major examples. Shortly, we have three main options: (i) restricting democracy to minimize international transaction costs and favor economic prosperity regardless of the negative domestic democratic consequences; (ii) limiting globalization to strengthen national democratic institutions; (iii) globalizing democracy to benefit from the free exchange of goods and capital, at the expense of national sovereignty. The trilemma consists of the fact that it's impossible to have all of the three options. If hyperglobalization and democracy are the objectives, then the nation-state is no longer viable. If the nation-state is considered an important political

structure and no one wants to lose the benefits of a liberalized world economy, then democratic institutions are no longer easily sustainable. If democracy and national sovereignty are the most important things, then hyperglobalization would be difficult to pursue.

Building on these ideas, Nicoli (2017a, p. 395) applies the trilemma to the European Union's Economic Governance in the aftermath of the Euro-crisis. Again, one is faced with three options, either preserving: (i) democratic decision-making; (ii) the monetary union; or (iii) exclusive national identity; where only two of these options are feasible together. Concisely, deconstructing the European Monetary Union (EMU) would create negative consequences in the entire European Union, yet again causing monetary instability within the common market. Secondly, protecting the European Monetary Union while safeguarding exclusive national identity would, *prima facie*, increase the output legitimacy of fiscal policies. At a later moment, though, it would undermine the system's credibility to sustain a prolonged commitment matching financial markets' expectations - a problem well known when delegation to non-majoritarian supranational institutions is involved (Majone, 1998). Moreover, shifting preferences within the EMU and differences between national states' expected gains are also expected to reduce the output legitimization of the agreed fiscal policies: ex-ante convergence on a bundle of key priorities and the timely concurrence of results for every member state are unlikely to manifest in such a setting. Thirdly, combining federal fiscal integration and supranational democracy makes it hard to create, and even presupposes, a shared sense of belonging and identity at the European level. Along the process, various nationalist and eurosceptic backlashes could occur - as it happened indeed in the 2010s (Nicoli, 2017a, pp. 397-399).

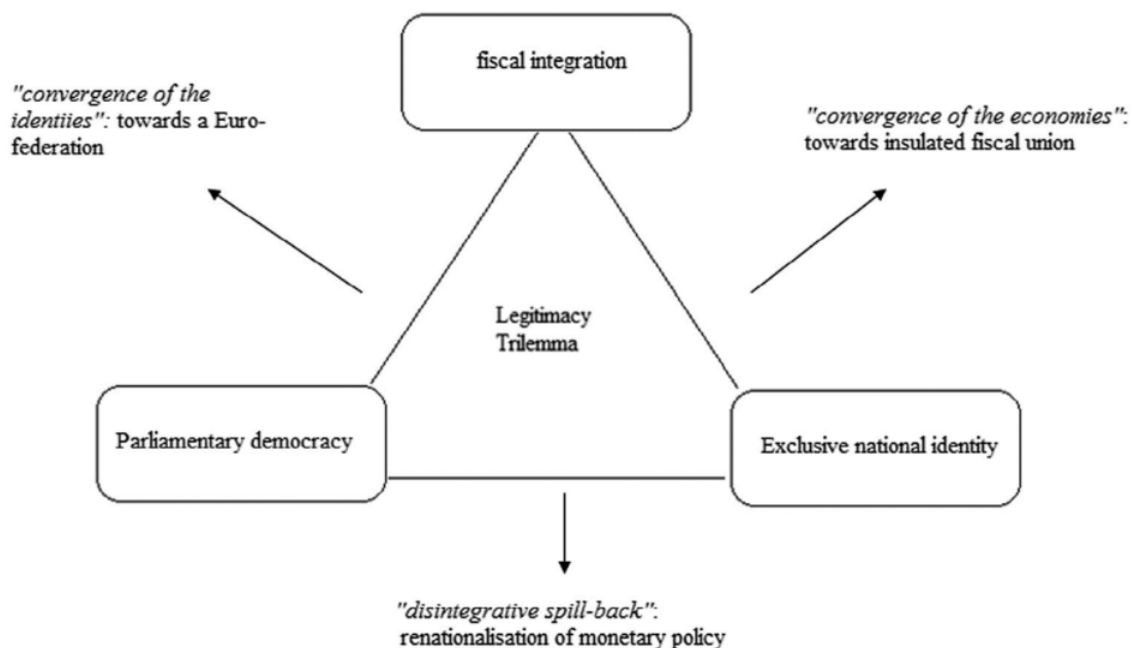


Figure 6: Europe's legitimacy trilemma (Nicoli, 2017a, p. 395)

Integrating Majone's and Scharpf's theorization on redistributive vs. regulatory policies and input vs. output legitimization respectively, Nicoli (2020) provides an S-shaped model of functional legitimacy that helps to better understand the (hypothetical) emergence of a democratic deficit. The nature of the needed legitimacy, whether it is input or output-oriented, is a function of the redistributive or regulatory policies implemented. The basic idea behind the model is that, at a certain point, you need higher degrees of input legitimacy if you want to integrate redistributive policies and other kinds of core state functions and avoid a democratic deficit. Inversely, the system experiences a 'performance deficit' whenever high levels of democratic participation are not followed by a consistent amount of insulated policy-making that struggles to back up and/or complement regulatory actions (Nicoli, 2020, p. 17).

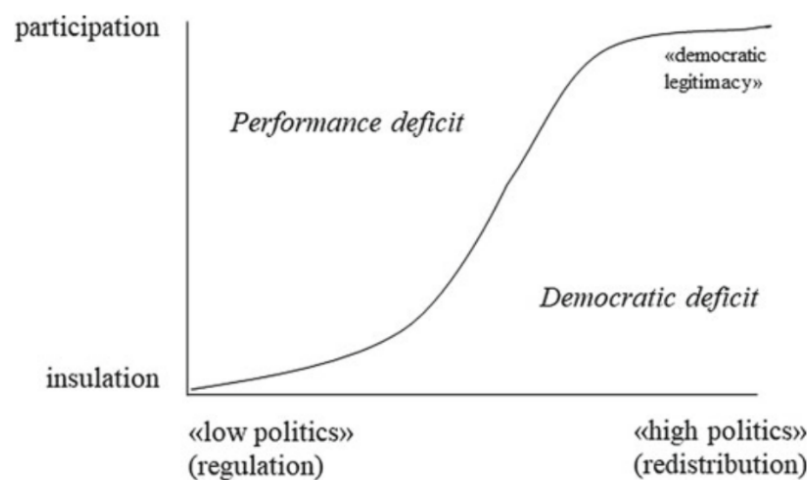


Figure 7: functional-democratic legitimacy (Nicoli, 2020, p. 15)

2.3. Grand theories of European integration

This part of the chapter details the theoretical basis of neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism, the two grand theories of European integration the hypotheses are built upon. On the one hand, neofunctionalism helps in understanding the role of crises in the development of the European Union project and the push for increasing transnational integration. On the other hand, postfunctionalism clarifies the conditions for the emergence of sustained levels of polarization regarding the further integration and the new cleavages flourishing against this back background.

2.3.1. Neofunctionalism

Being developed in the 1950s and the 1960s, neofunctionalism is one of the oldest, refined, and criticized theories of regional, and specifically European, integration. Combining functionalist assumption with federalism, it mainly focuses on

technocratic decision-making, incremental change, and the autonomy of supranational institutions in shaping new patterns of development at the transnational level (Niemann, 2006). Due to scholars' repeated ad-hoc refinements and elaborations, the original theorization diverged into different variants and different terminologies referring to the main explanatory variables - such as its dependent variable or the concept of spillover - and distinct interpretations (Niemann, 2006, p. 13).

The starting point from which to build a neofunctionalist theory of regional integration are the concepts of political community and political integration. What is to be considered as a pool of political communities is the variety of all existing national states in (Western) Europe. Such a kind of political community is neither homogeneous nor strictly, but overall, loyal to a set of symbols or institutions. Following Haas (1958, p. 5):

“Political community, therefore, is a condition in which specific groups and individuals show more loyalty to their central political institutions than to any other political authority, in a specific period of time and in a definable geographic space”

This theorization does not rule out the space for intra-group conflict within communities. Despite ideological differences, people belonging to a political community are expected to acknowledge a structured set of beliefs, around which a stable consensus can be achieved. In any case, the definition is not warranted by a fixed set of objective criteria, and the same applies to the concept of political integration. A process of political integration generally moves forward if the involved political actors are convinced about the goodness of the potential benefits related to the advancement of integration. The goodness of these achievements is meant to be evaluated on strategic and value-driven grounds, rather than altruistic or idealistic assumptions. Concisely (Haas, 1958, p. 16):

“Political integration is the process whereby political actors in several distinct national settings are persuaded to shift their loyalties, expectations and political activities toward a new centre, whose institutions possess or demand jurisdiction over the pre-existing national states”

The neofunctionalist model posits economic integration as the most significant integration process and is inspired by a set of empirical generalizations. On a global scale, increased independence is perceived as long as the rate of exchanges and mutual transactions increases, and it would be evaluated by its members either: (i) negatively, in the presence of a widespread perception of internal asymmetries or; (ii) positively in the presence of mutual benefits (Haas, 1970). Concerning industrialized-pluralistic nations, evidence points toward a tendency for unemotional, subdued, and incremental decision-making. A process that likely produces a

“spillover in the scope of collective action”, meaning that collective decisions are usually the unintentional consequence of previous actions and are all generally related to the satisfaction of benefits granted by the existence of a common market between the members (Haas, 1970, p. 617)

Spillovers do not take place in a vacuum. Earlier integration in the field of agriculture helps in further explaining the point. Elites’ socialization on the importance and effectiveness of further steps towards a regional synthesis of policy measures plants the seeds for ulterior integration. It not only favors the creation of a single political arena in which all the issues are considered and discussed but also creates a ‘community of specialists’ facing the same kind of constraints, demands, and pressures from private and public stakeholders (Lindberg, 1963).

While original neofunctionalist theorists conceived spillover effects to be only confined to the economic domain, later theorization recognized the significance of spillover effects in other functional domains, such as health, agriculture, and judicial decision-making (Haas, 2004). A spillover can be defined as the concurrent increase in the level and scope of the integrative commitment by actors. It differs from a spill-around, where the actors’ commitment remains constant and their level of authority stays neutral, but the scope of integration receives a boost (Schmitter, 1970; Nicoli, 2019). Complementary to these strategies are the ones of build-up and spill-back. The former entails a transfer of additional power and autonomy to joint and supranational institutions and a denial in the expansion of their scope towards new areas of action. The latter simply indicates a backlash on both the scope and level of integration (Schmitter, 1970, p. 846).

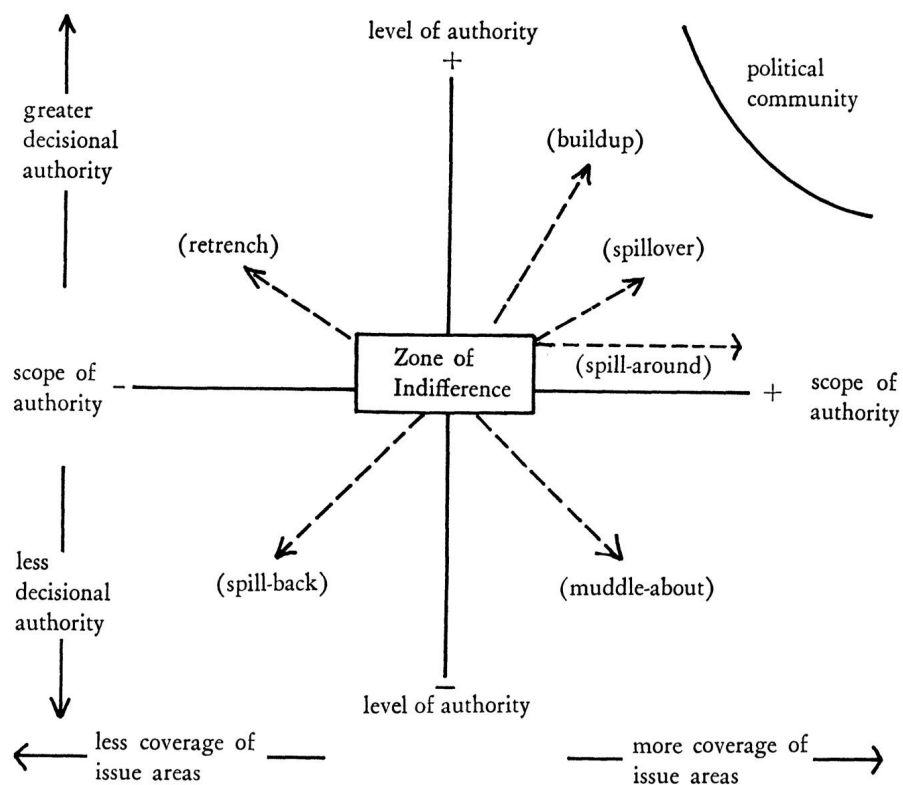


Figure 8: Alternative actor strategies according to the neofunctionalist model (Schmitter 1970, p. 845)

Other scholars expanded the meaning of the concept of spillover, discriminating different kinds of spillovers based on their nature. A political spillover rests on the idea of national elites being socialized to privilege transnational problem-solving rather than national-level policy action. This kind of spillover is notable when the involvement of non-governmental organizations and business organizations is high, pushing for (shared) EU-level solutions (Niemann & Ioannou, 2015). Differently, cultivated spillovers happen when supranational institutions start acquiring more and more power and independence. To paraphrase, central European institutions may foster integration on their own at later stages of the integration process (Niemann & Ioannou, 2015, p. 199). Rather than presupposing the pre-existing autonomy of supranational actors as in the case of cultivated spillovers, a technocratic spillover is grounded on insulation and “implies an increase of independent surveillance and supervision powers of supranational actors” (Nicoli, 2019, p. 8)

Crisis-induced neofunctionalist decision cycles frameworks are grounded in a series of assumptions: (i) bounded rationality, that is to say, actors' strategies are elaborated under conditions of uncertainty and informational imperfection; (ii) preferences have an evolving character and actors are receptive of different elements such as the external environment, socialization processes or shifting alliances and identities; (iii) the integration process involves different kind of policies, respectively tackling different domains, i.e. ‘high’ and ‘low’ politics; (iv) governments' minimalism, in the sense that they will unlikely favor deeper integration and try to preserve sovereignty every time it is deemed as a feasible move; (v) interdependence between different policy domains is common and affects the efficacy of decisions (Nicoli, 2019, pp. 4-5).

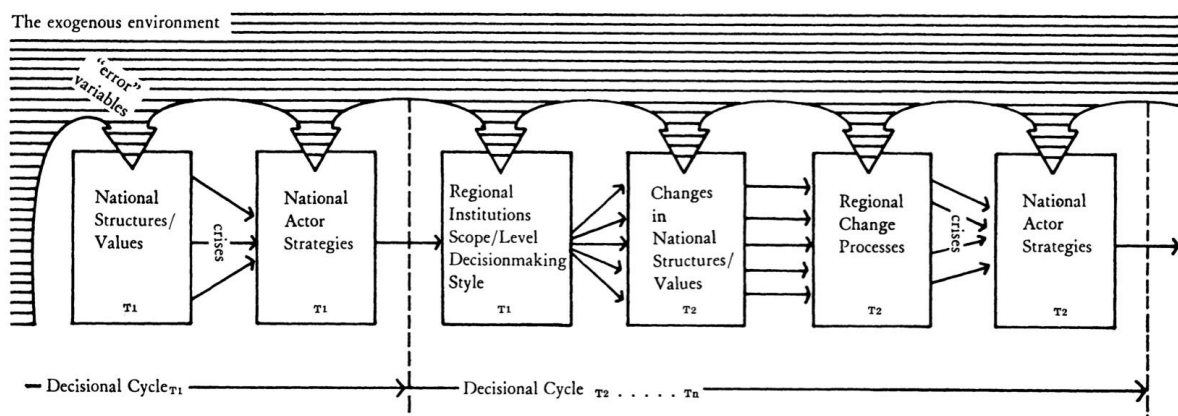


Figure 9: Structure of the neofunctionalist crisis-induced decisional cycle (Schmitter, 1970, p. 843)

The most sophisticated model hypothesizes a succession of integrative cycles, starting from an initiation cycle, and passing through a priming cycle to finally arrive at later cycles of integration. Schmitter (1970, pp. 851-852) postulates a detailed series of variables. The first is the relative size/power (RSP) of regional institutions, granting or not their ability to manage the outcomes of integrations. The second one

is the rates of transaction (ROT), another way to indicate the interdependency between actors within the system. The third one tackles member internal pluralism (MIP), i.e. how much independence the system allows and the ability for dissimilar functional groups to organize themselves and influence policy outcomes. The fourth one is elite value complementarity (EVC), specifying national political groups' evaluation of the pros and cons of integration. The fifth one is extra-regional dependence (ERD), that is to say, the degree of exposure to asymmetric exogenous shocks and their resistance to consequent negative effects. The sixth one is national actors' strategies: the willingness of national actors to promote and/or accept increasing integration in either its scope or level. The seventh is the level and scope of regional institutions (RI). The last one is the decision-making style (DM).

For every cycle, one is confronted with a variety of macro-level conjectures (Schmitter, 1970, p. 847). The most relevant one is the spillover hypothesis (i), predicting initially unforeseen outcomes that are the likely result of exogenous constraints. As already pointed out in the introductory chapter, actors confronted with external contradictions adapt their strategies accordingly, also modifying the level and scope of integrative policies at the transnational level. The search for alternative approaches plausibly creates a shared institutional solution (ii) that is expected to meet the "minimal common objectives despite prevailing tensions" and result in a state of stagnation that favors encapsulation over spillover, build-up, or spill-around. In the presence of stronger and increasing exogenous pressures, politicization (ii) is expected to rise coextensively and create a significant degree of resistance to integrative efforts. However, as long as integration proceeds, the theory acquires more predictive power. Whereas it is hard to explain how variables interact at the initial and priming cycles, at later stages of integration the theory's predictive power expands due to the agents' 'increasing mutual determination' (iii). Similarly, external conditions are less dependent on exogenous shocks when regional integration is well established, i.e. the externalization costs of supranational integration decrease at later cycles of integration (iv). Schmitter (2002) differentiates between initiating, priming, transformative, and transcending cycles of integration. It's out of our scope to analyze the specific characteristics of every cycle of decision-making. Here, we concentrate on the so-called 'priming' and 'transformative' cycles of decision-making, in which the mechanism of spillover is mostly evident.

In priming cycles, actors are likely to perceive benefits more equitably if the distribution and degree of power among them don't change much. In the presence of increasing transaction rates, actors will be also likely to develop organic regional formations warranted by a distinctive regional identity (Schmitter, 2002, p. 28). This is also supposed to be favored by high degrees of internal member pluralism, and to help national elites to grow matching expectations regarding the future development of regional integration, thus favoring the acceptance of regional identities. Additionally, perceived equitable returns from further integration, sustained levels of participation and autonomy of interests, coupled with a rising sense of shared regional identity and reform-mongering activism on the part of regional bureaucrats feeds into a positive evaluative process of further integrative steps at the

transnational level (Schmitter, 2002, p. 29). Importantly, the status of national structures and values and system-wide regional changes strongly predict the future of transnational integration. If changes in national structures and/or values are not foreseen, it will be unlikely to observe a change in national actor strategies regarding regional integration. Less convergence, or even divergence, at the regional level, is dependent on the rates of change at the national level: in the presence of asynchronous rates of change at the national level, joint policies are hardly envisioned, and politicization is a likely outcome. Contrary to intergovernmentalism, one should notice that neofunctionalists conceive actors' strategies as constrained, and hence partially determined, by the parameters set by regional settings (Schmitter, 2002, p. 30).

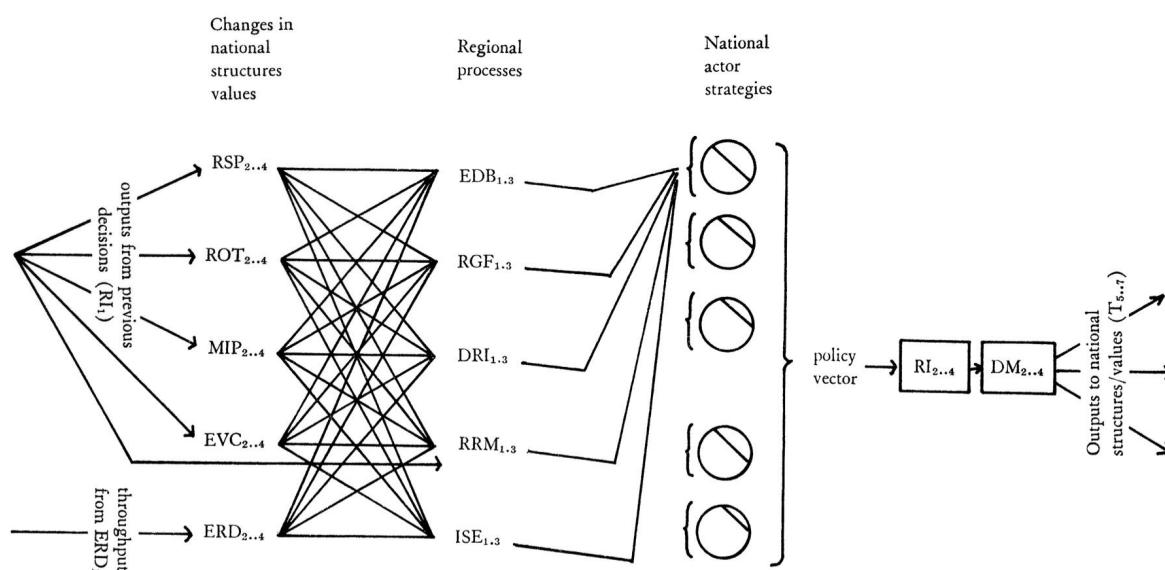


FIGURE 7. TIME_{2..4}: THE PRIMING CYCLE(s). The number of "priming cycles" is indeterminate. Three are suggested merely for convenience (T₂, T₃, T₄). A given regional integration process may go through many more or many less decisional crises until it either breaks through into the next qualitatively distinct cycle, encapsulates itself, or disintegrates.

Figure 10: the neofunctionalist priming cycle of integration (Schmitter, 1975, p. 855)

During priming cycles, actors also tend to behave more cautiously due to mistrust and general insecurities, paving the way for spillover outcomes to be more acceptable and feasible. This pattern is not fixed nonetheless. When the effects of the integration process begin to manifest themselves, other strategies become viable. Given that a large portion of new policy areas have yet to be explored, spill-around through intergovernmental organizations is easier to pursue. Antithetically, build-up in these early phases it's harder to accomplish due to the unlikely lack of competence and encapsulation of freshly created bodies and organizations. A less costly outcome would be disintegrative spill-back. Being unlikely the amount of dependence from regional groups and emerging collective cultural pressures actors would face at the beginning of integration processes, retrenching from initial integrative steps stands out as an easy option. Alternatives

notwithstanding, spillover effects are the key outcomes of priming cycles of integration (Schmitter, 2002, pp. 31-32).

If policy-making decisions get through the priming cycle, the nature of integration qualitatively changes. Actors enter transformative cycles, and some key differences materialize. First and foremost, the ability of regional bureaucrats to influence policy-making processes at the transnational level is augmented. Put differently, their 'reform-mongering' powers benefit from previous expansions in the level and scope of integration, granting them the capacity to push for even more integration if they need and want to. Externalization phenomena are also expected on the part of institutions. The latter, building on their expanded capabilities and strength, will likely start to act more independently in the face of national groupings. (Schmitter, 2002, p. 35). National actors become increasingly differentiated and eventually start forming transnational coalitions spanning across different countries. Thus, alliances begin to cut across national boundaries and the process of regional integration becomes even more complex. As a result, policy-making outcomes start being more dependent on the decisions taken by regional institutions and non-governmental organizations. Nevertheless, to appease a broader set of coalition interests and the acquired global status of the region, spill-over is still considered the most applicable solution (Schmitter, 2002, pp. 37-38).

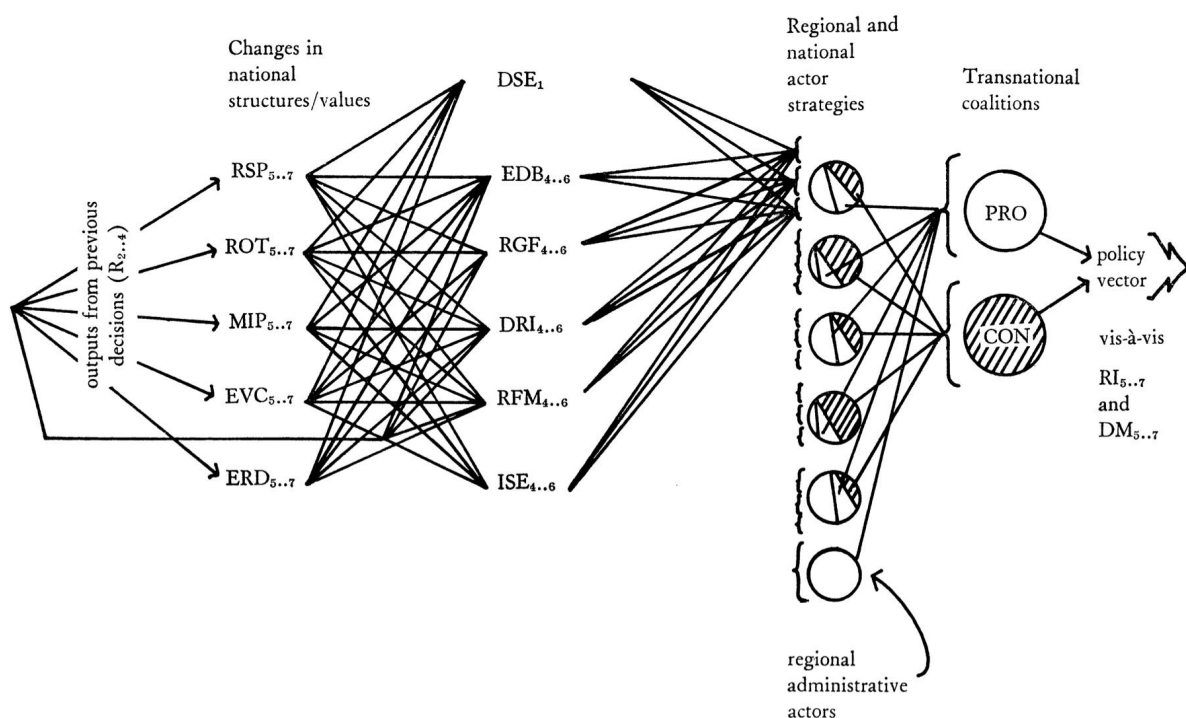


Figure 11: the neofunctionalist transforming cycle of integration (Schmitter, 1970, p. 863)

The theory has not only been criticized for its allegedly grand theoretical pretensions but also for its defender's emphasis on a quasi-inevitable and automatic spillover dynamic in the integration process, hence paving the way for economic determinism. Related to this latter point is scholars' skepticism of the neofunctionalist idea

regarding a strict connection between spillover phenomena and economic (capitalist) growth, often being conceived as symmetric for the entirety of the member states (Niemann, 2006). Moreover, neofunctionalism has been accused of being an actor-centered theory and lacking structural elements: notwithstanding the idea of spillovers as a structural constraint, the strong and ever-present emphasis on agents' willingness to cooperate obliterates other crucial integrative dynamics. Of crucial importance is the impact of sovereignty concerns and nationalist attitudes (Niemann, 2006, pp. 21-22).

Niemann's (2021) refinements of the theory are a good case in point for potential variants. Briefly, he slightly broadened the ontological scope embracing a form of 'soft constructivism' on the lines of Haas' (2004) later examination of rational choice theory and its applications to neofunctionalist thinking. Most importantly, the expanded framework better defines the conditions under which spillover effects are likely to manifest, not considering it anymore as a (quasi)automatic phenomenon (Niemann, 2006; Niemann, 2021, p. 121). Neofunctionalism has also been widely criticized for its excessive reliance on the concept of spillover, both for its apparent and misplaced automaticity and its context-specific - instead of wider - applicability (Nye & Keohane, 1971). Some scholars defended the merits of the theory and its dynamic nature. Neofunctionalism acknowledged from the beginning the internal pluralism of European societies and their complex evolutions; and also the role played by external factors in shaping, but not univocally determining, integrative efforts (Rosamond, 2005). While the concept of spill-over was subsumed by other analytic ideas in the field of political science, the neofunctionalist framework allowed for relevant theoretical additions such as the concept of 'turbulent fields' as an explanation of integrative dilemmas in contexts of incomplete information and rising systemic complexity (Rosamond, 2005, pp. 248-249).

Neofunctionalism assumes further European integration as the likely outcome of such a process. Spillover effects are likely to push elites towards common solutions at the transnational level. To do so, elites develop an incentive to build a narrative facilitating citizens' resonance for shared European symbols, memories, values, and events. As a result, an increased sense of European belonging possibly grows in the various national public opinions. When a country's population and its political elites become well acquainted with the idea of sharing and dividing sovereignty between different levels of governance, the probability of accepting supranationalism and transnational integration is higher. Thomas Risse (2005) calls this idea 'ideational spillover'. Most importantly, European identities and a positive view of the European Union are positively related to crisis events. In major European countries such as Germany, Spain, Poland, and France the Europeanization of identities was heavily influenced by the opportunities and changes provided by critical junctures. However, this phenomenon only partially corroborates neofunctionalist expectations. Identity change and the transfer of loyalties to the European level are not strictly related to the perceived benefits of further integration (Risse & Kappen, 2015, p. 102).

These findings shed important light on the relationship between crisis-led neofunctional integration and Euroscepticism. Furthermore, they highlight the fact that neofunctionalism allows for disintegrative 'spill-back'. People do not always find an incentive to move closer together after a major shock, and might even push in the opposite direction and ask for retrenching actions and policies at the transnational level (Schmitter & Lefkofridi, 2016).

2.3.2. Postfunctionalism

Postfunctionalism is the other grand theory of European integration we are considering in this work. The central claim of postfunctionalism is that "identity is decisive for multi-level governance in general, and for regional integration in particular [...] Political conflict makes all the difference, and that conflict [...] engages communal identities" (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 2). The theory is also explicitly agnostic about the efficiency of transnational institutions and jurisdictional settings, and does not assume integration outcomes as a result of functional pressures. This is so because the main focus of postfunctionalism is to account for later stages of integration instead of the first few decades of transnational integration. At the beginning European integration was considered by alternative grand theories as a response to organizational economic pressures. Public opinions all over Europe were not completely aware of the tradeoffs regional integration would have brought in the long run, thus creating a 'permissive consensus' enabling incremental integrative steps. In contrast to neofunctionalist and intergovernmentalist assumptions, postfunctionalist scholars aim to offer plausible clarification of the emerging 'constraining dissensus' characterizing the European integration project since the 1990s (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5).

Postfunctionalist hypotheses take direct inspiration from the cleavage theory developed by Lipset & Rokkan (1967), and originally seek an explanation for: (i) the development of direct mobilization links between a plethora of different parties and specific groups of citizens; (ii) the emerging patterns of competition between different parties in restructuring party systems across Western Europe. Adapting Talcott Parsons' paradigm of societal interchanges, Lipset & Rokkan offer a representation of the territorial dimension and functional dimension of the national cleavage, respectively along the *I-g* and *a-i* lines in Figure 12 in the next page. The *I-g* line takes into account local or internal oppositions to the incumbent or aspiring national elites at the one end of the spectrum (*I* endpoint) and external or direct conflict over the system as a whole on the other side of the spectrum (*g* endpoint). Orthogonally, the *a-i* line goes from a point (*a* endpoint) indicating specific pacts and alliances over the short-term vis-à-vis long-term economic planning and allocation of resources to a point (*i* endpoint) in which support follows the logic of in-group and out-group bonding under a religious or ideological framework (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, pp. 10-11). Correspondingly, the criterion alignments for each of these lines differ. In the former case, where territorial elements are involved, one commits to their dominant culture and current community instead of waging their particular economic situation.

In the latter case, one's loyalty is given to a class and its collective interests, hence supporting policies even in the face of diverging interests when compared to members of their community (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 13).

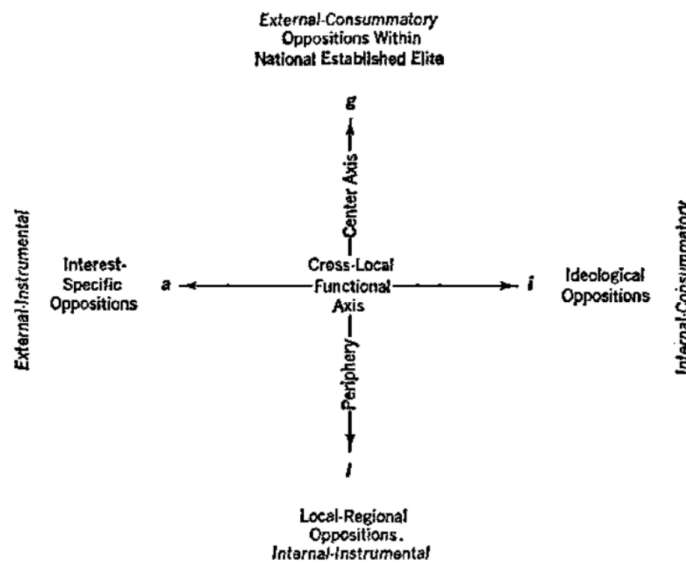


Figure 12: Patterns of opposition around the a-g-i-l paradigmatic scheme (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 10)

In Lipset & Rokkan's minds, the emerging cleavages were a direct consequence of two big revolutions: the creation of the national state and industrialization. As they put it, four big and comprehensive cleavages materialized. The first one involves antagonism between long-standing linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities located at the territorial fringes of the states, and the national states themselves. The second is similar but opposes the national and central state to the interests of the church. While the third one pits rising industrial entrepreneurs against established landowners, the fourth creates a conflict between owners and employers and working classes composed of tenants and workers (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 14).

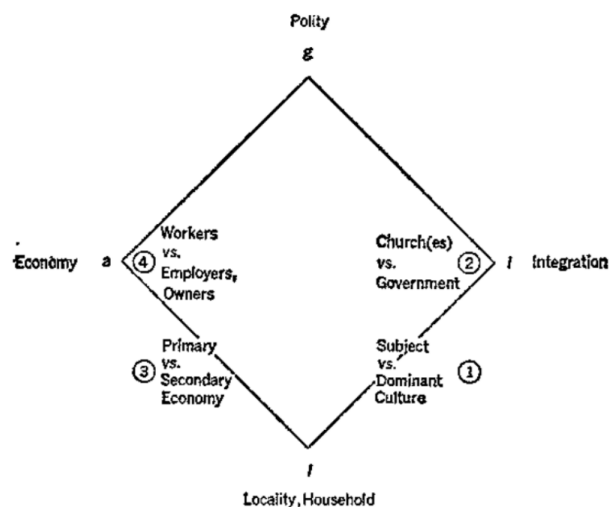


Figure 13: Location of cleavages on the paradigmatic a-g-i-l scheme (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967, p. 14)

Differently, a new set of cleavages is taken into consideration by contemporary cleavage theory, inspired by postfunctionalist ideas (Hooghe & Marks, 2021). The conflict spans the left-right political and economic dimension on one axis, and cuts across the GAL-TAN scale on the other axis - where GAL stands for green/alternative/libertarian and TAN for traditional/authoritarian/nationalist positions (Hooghe & Marks, 2002). The key result offered by this model is that new cleavages are not completely superseding older ones but better transforming them. As Hooghe & Marks (2021, p. 188) put it: "party system is akin to a geological process whereby the structure of conflict reflects both emerging and eroding tensions". The structure of party systems evolves as a direct consequence of exogenous social change, opening windows of opportunity for new political formations to arise and form new cleavages. Most importantly, the significance of the left-right dimension has been slowly eroding in the past few decades, and indicators such as occupation and the level of education play an increasingly crucial role in the transnational divide - especially for younger generations when compared to older ones (Hooghe & Marks, 2021, p. 189).

The basic postfunctionalist idea is one of a 'constraining dissensus' replacing the diffuse 'permissive consensus' the project of European integration has been benefiting since its early phases. Such a constrained development, beginning from 1991, is seen to be the consequence of increasing levels of polarization in European politics among the elites and public opinion (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 5). The theory seeks to fill the explanatory gaps of neofunctionalist and liberal intergovernmentalist theories, only partially predicting later stages of transnational integration. Building on the fact that citizens holding incomplete information regarding the content of European issues tend to use ideological, institutional, or party cues (Hooghe & Marks, 2005), postfunctionalism asserts the increasing importance of identity-driven concern for people experiencing economic losses from the process of transnational integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, pp. 10-11). In a context in which cultural anxieties are salient and politicians seek the opportunity to mobilize those public apprehensions, it is likely that the level of politicization about European integration increases over time. Furthermore, whereas polarization engages citizens at all levels, Euroscepticism is especially pressing for people holding an exclusive national identity compared to the ones believing in a more inclusive sense of Europeanness (Hooghe & Marks, 2004) - as Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.1.2 showed. Following assumptions, identity is expected to play an important causal role in shaping citizens' attitudes towards European integration when: "an issue has (a) opaque economic implications and (b) transparent communal implications that are (c) debated in public forums by (d) mass organizations rather than specialized interest groups" (Hooghe & Marks, 2004, p. 13).

An issue becomes politicized for a variety of reasons. Different and interconnected dimensions to operationalize the term politicization have been proposed and discussed. One should generally distinguish between: the visibility of an issue, that is to say, its salience; the range in which it applies or the ability of actor

to expand the issues in particular domains; and its intensity and direction, another way to refer to the degree of polarization of involved actors (Hutter & Kriesi, 2019, p. 999). Here we are interested in the mechanisms by which issues related to identity politics become politicized and then favor the so-called 'constraining dissensus' over European integration. Scholars sought to shed more light on the allegedly increasing level of political integration. Down & Wilson (2008) argue that the mean level of support for the European Union at the party or public opinion level is not a good indicator, *per se*, of increasing skepticism about further regional integration at the European level. They contend that changes in the distribution of attitudes towards the European Union and the integration process may have remained stable over time, not influencing the mean level of support from the 1990s onwards and perhaps just reflecting the growth of people displaying eurosceptic attitudes. As they put it (Down & Wilson, 2008, p. 29):

“if the entire population has become more Euro-sceptical the level of consensus may not have changed, just because positive evaluations of EU membership have declined. Alternatively, the public may have become increasingly divided in terms of evaluations of the EU. To the extent that this is the case, attitudes may have become more dispersed, the distribution of opinion may have become flatter, or even bimodal, and thus there may have been a decline in consensus.”

In their opinion, and the evidence of the 2010s seems to corroborate the conjecture, where public preferences are becoming more and more dispersed it's plausible for centrist and mainstream parties, and in general moderate stances, to lose track. That way, non-mainstream and extremist parties can capitalize on the situation advancing the salience of anti-EU positions vis-à-vis more pro-EU traditional stances. In parallel, mainstream and pro-EU parties may find it hard to move away from their political platforms for the same reason. In other words, a more dispersed public opinion also implies greater distance both between these parties and their voters and between the parties themselves, especially so if the distribution takes a bimodal form (Down & Wilson, 2008, p. 30).

Therefore, the European integration issue becoming more politicized is a consequence of some party's decisions to draw attention to it. The higher the 'potential' of an issue to be popularized, the higher the chances of a party projecting it into European and domestic arenas. Ideological commitments and reputation also play a key role. Any given party is constrained by its declared values and the perceived credibility it holds in the eyes of affiliated activists and actors (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 19). What postfunctionalism suggests is that the post-Maastricht Treaty period highlighted the issue of European integration at the citizens' level. At the same time, rising concerns about the status of national sovereignty in European countries started to be more pressing after Denmark rejected the Accord and its almost missed ratification in Ireland and France. An elite-public gap materialized, and the specter of Euroscepticism began to feel more realistic, with non-mainstream

parties beginning to invoke eurosceptic tropes (Hooghe & Marks, 2009, p. 21). Consistent evidence is offered in support of this hypothesis. Average support for the European Union remained stable until 2002 in most countries. Support increased until 1991, the year the Maastricht Treaty was adopted. It subsequently decreased between 1991 and 1992, just after the ratification of the agreement. After these years, no significant change was measured in the majority of the countries (Down & Wilson, 2008, p. 38). Not only support for European integration has been slightly decreasing after the Maastricht ratification, but public disagreement over integration has been consistently rising. A change in the issue-space distribution occurred, progressively mobilizing people around the issue of further regional and transnational integration. The suggestion here is not to interpret the emergence of eurosceptic parties, the reluctance to rely on public referenda to deduce over European-wide issues, and the growing citizens' concerns about the side-effects of European integration as a sign of sustained decline in support for the advancement of the European Union project. Rather, Maastricht acted as a catalyst and interrupted the previous trend of increasing agreement over the level and scope of commitment towards further integration, both on the part of elites and public opinions. Put differently, the post-Maastricht and early 2000s phase of 'constraining dissensus' simply indicates a condition in which elite and especially public disagreement about the degree of further European integration has been gradually extending - and is supposed to follow this trend for a while (Down & Wilson, 2008, p. 46). A pattern that is characterized by the erosion of traditional cleavages and their evolution into a new brand of new cleavages. The former, following postfunctionalist theorization, are expected to revolve around identity politics and negatively affect the future of European integration (Hooghe & Marks, 2017).

As evidence shows, since the offset of the financial crisis, experienced even negatively in Europe with the unfolding of the sovereign debts crisis, exclusive national identity began to play a substantial role in shaping parties' strategies and positions on European-wide issues and the level and scope of integration at the transnational level (Fligstein et al., 2012). The refugee crisis and Brexit are other examples of how exclusive national identity has been instrumentalized by political entrepreneurs to rally against European policy-making or gain electoral support at the domestic level. To do so, they mobilized public opinions under the framework of exclusivist sentiments, sometimes but not every time and everywhere coupled with nationalist and ethnic ideas fostering the politicization of European integration (Hutter et al., 2016; Stockemer et al., 2020).

Some scholars expanded postfunctionalism, integrating the theory with discursive institutionalist frameworks (Wendler & Hurrelmann, 2022). The basic idea is to refine the concept of politicization by specifying the specific vectors by which politicization itself develops. The gap between the level and scope of integration is identified, and even communicatively constructed, through discourse. Political agents actively build political narratives of contestation constantly engaging and communicating with a variety of so-called interfaces: institutions, parliamentary and regional players,

framing discourses from governing political actors (Wendler & Hurrelmann, 2022, pp. 948-949). Other scholars also raised some concerns about postfunctionalism. Precisely, the contestation is that neofunctionalism already predicted the possibility for polarization in the later stages of regional integration. However, they concede that neofunctionalists neither specified the specific trigger of this polarization nor predicted that masses would have hindered European integration. Opposite to that, the assumption has always been that national elites would instead try to preserve the status quo and their power positions as protectors of national sovereignty (Schmitter, 2009).

Chapter 3

3. Populism and crisis

3.1. Defining populism

Populism is a highly debated term. Experts have searched for a standard and common definition since its inception (Moffitt, 2020). While its appearance dates back to the nineteenth century, when it was originally conceived as a political and intellectual oppositional platform against rising modernization, social plutocracy, and elected oligarchy; it then became a distinct form of government in the post-WWII landscape (Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018). Initial conceptualizations considered populism to be present in liberal and socialist circles, and characterized by negative sentiments such as anti-capitalist, anti-urban, xenophobic, or anti-semitic attitudes (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, pp. 3-4). Moreover, a differentiation can be outlined when referring to populism in old and traditional societies that granted religion and public morality a high prominence, as typically opposed to Western and more liberally advanced societies. In the former, people are more detached from intellectual authorities and established traditions, and the concept of 'the people' is not aligned with a shared political radicalism and a liberal notion of progress and enlightenment as in the latter case, where the sovereignty of 'the people' clashes with constitutional notions of power and representation (Canovan, 2005, pp. 86-87).

Having always been a transnational phenomenon, populism can be either associated with a political form of contestation or a movement that tries to get to a governmental position; and cuts across the national, global, and supranational levels, but also between the Global North and Global South (Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018). To populist actors, the pillars of democracy - that is to say the parliament and the electoral process - possess an instrumental value only. Elections in particular are seen as empty rituals, with no or minimum attached meaning. They not only do not account for a fair and open contestation and competition of either interests and opinions, but they also fail to legitimize the elected representatives. To put it differently: "populism claims an unbounded supremacy of the 'will of the people' over institutions and over the social strata that do not identify with the dominant group" (Urbinati, 1998, p. 119). The main point here is that populists aim to change the fundamentals of democracy, majoritarian representation, and accountability. Elections are just the validation of prior and existing political truth, and they reveal rather than create the political and sovereign majority. In the populist framework, it is as *if* their electoral majority is the 'right' one to govern and is truly representative of people's political will, thus denigrating oppositional forces as 'fake' representatives and creating a climate of delegitimation for minorities claims' and a form of majoritarianism (Urbinati, 2017).

Following this view, populism is best seen as a "canny and expediting strategy of power-climbing and achieving that uses the democratic method and procedures after twisting them in such a way that they can serve non-democratic ends"

(Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018, p. 24). Building its reasoning on deep and strong moral arguments, populism attempts to convince people to put their hopes in an external leadership that will supposedly work for their interests and emancipation. Thus, it paves the way for an authoritarian understanding of democracy and how a polity should be governed; relying on a 'trust through faith' ideology, and replacing the liberal method of free and open deliberation (Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018, p. 25). The ambivalence and irony of populism uncover the flaws of representative politics and allow people to manifest their deeper and primal instinct of reacting to their rulers (Taggart, 2002). Nonetheless, scholars have shown that citizens holding stronger populist attitudes are not always sympathetic to more autocratic regimes. On the contrary, populist individuals show strong levels of support for democracy. When criticizing democratic governance, they often ask for its revision and adjustment rather than its replacement (Zaslove et al., 2020).

Different interpretations notwithstanding, the core meaning of populism is the Manichean juxtaposition between 'the people' and 'the elite' (ECPS, 2024). Precisely, populism (Mudde, 2004, p. 543):

"Considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will of the people)."

In such a context, the concept of 'the people' (almost) always refers to a univocal social construct, considered to be a unitary and homogeneous category of agents (Canovan, 2002). Opposed to a more classical orthodoxy that structures the concept of 'the people' more abstractly, the populist rhetoric links 'the people' with cultural, ethnic, race-based and blood-driven defining elements (Meny & Surel, 2002, p. 6). Furthermore, three meanings of the concept can be identified along cultural, political and economic lines, in which 'the people' are respectively reified as a nation, as a sovereign entity or as a class; and on top of which left-wing and right-wing discourses emerge (Kriesi, 2014, p. 362). Another variant identifies 'the people' via their geographical location, hence introducing the concept of the heartland. As a territory of the imagination embodying the positive aspects of everyday life, not only differentiating itself from ideal societies and utopias but also overriding classist consideration, the heartland invokes a unified and homogeneous populism that is attached to a well-defined territory and its history (Taggart, 2000, pp. 95-96).

The debate on the meaning and significance of populism makes the most sense, both theoretically and empirically, in the context of liberal democracies. Theoretically, the concept is intertwined with democratic theorizing, lacking an autonomous conceptual identity. It simultaneously highlights the controversies related to what constitutes a democracy and stresses its autonomy from liberal traditions (Urbinati, 1998). Advocates of liberalism sometimes fail to take into account the idea that

popular sovereignty warrants the legitimacy of modern liberal democracies, thereby paving the way for a democratic deficit to emerge. Whether real or perceived, a strong reliance on neoliberal policy-making created a gap between citizens' right to directly participate in politics and their de facto ability to do so. That is why, for some scholars, mainstream parties created a favorable scenario for left-wing and right-wing populist movements to 'rally the troops' and bring citizens together under the name of new forms of political identification (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 53-55).

Empirically, the case for populism to be a by-product of democracy can be advanced. Populist politics also have multiple effects on democratic regimes. On the one hand, it can positively affect democracy and deepen or complete its quality, depending on whether democratic institutions and practices are consolidated or unconsolidated. On the other hand, it can have negative effects on democratic decision-making, respectively eroding or breaking its practices and cultural foundations according to the consolidated or unconsolidated nature of democratic systems (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012a, p. 19). Under the expectation that populism strengthens marginalized groups' ability to participate in politics, while at the same time weakening the possibility for public contention by centralizing power in the hands of the executive, Mudde & Kaltwasser (2012a, p. 25) formulated some experimental hypotheses:

"Hyp 1) Populism in government has stronger effects on democracy than populism in opposition.

Hyp 2) Populism in government has more negative effects on democracy than populism in opposition.

Hyp 3) Populism has stronger effects on unconsolidated democracies than on consolidated democracies.

Hyp 4) Populism in opposition in consolidated democracies will have modest positive effects on the quality of democracy.

Hyp 5) Populism in opposition in unconsolidated democracies will have moderate positive effects on the quality of democracy.

Hyp 6) Populism in government in consolidated democracies will have moderate negative effects on the quality of democracy.

Hyp 7) Populism in government in unconsolidated democracies will have significant negative effects on the quality of democracy."

It's out of the scope of this work to fully discuss these conjectures. However, some interesting points are worth mentioning. In a wide array of cases, populists propose to change democratic procedures under their observation of the poor results of democratic regimes (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012b, p. 207). A second conclusion is that populists in opposition do not actually endanger the quality of democracy as much as expected in every case, and sometimes they can even help underrepresented people and groups to raise their voices and express their needs. Regarding the consolidated or unconsolidated status of democratic practices, conclusions are not univocal. Even if consolidated democracies are proven to be

remarkably resilient to the populist threat, they cannot completely absorb the process of democratic erosion that populism encourages (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012b, pp. 209-210). A consistent number of Latin American cases reinforce the presumption that populism can easily push governing elites to move to less democratic and more competitive authoritarian systems (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013). Contrary to that, other countries such as Slovakia show how populists cannot be strictly portrayed as autocratic or nationalistic in terms of their modes of governance and actions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012b, p. 211). Ultimately, populism exposes the weaknesses of democracy and its deformations: it is neither its highest form of expression nor its key enemy, but a mirror “in which democracy can contemplate itself” (Panizza, 2005, p. 30).

Building on this background, and keeping in mind the chameleonic nature of the concept (Taggart, 2000), scholars have been developing a variety of understandings on the meaning of populism, respectively highlighting its strategic, ideological, or performative and discursive dimensions. In the following paragraphs, we consider the main approaches to the study of populism, and give particular attention to the strategic and ideational approaches, while offering a less detailed outline of the performative and discursive ones. All of them are important for different reasons. The strategic approach is important due to its strong reliance on political crises of representation. The ideational approach elucidates the plasticity of the core populist ideology. The discursive and performative approaches shed light on the antagonistic nature of populist politics.

3.1.1. The strategic approach to populism

Rather than pointing its attention to the arguments and discourses populist actors employ and engage with, the strategic approach to populism focuses on their actions and initiatives (Weyland, 2017, p. 90). Within this framework, populism can be defined as (Weyland, 2001, p. 14):

“a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers”

Such a conceptualization puts a lot of emphasis on personalistic and charismatic leadership, which is usually surrounded by a plethora of loyalist figures following their commanders' will. Seeking to achieve power via the exploitation of ‘amorphous’ and heterogeneous masses, plebiscitarian leaders attempt to undermine democratic checks and balances but also reduce their chances to form a well-ingrained popular political support in the long run (Weyland, 2024, p. 4). Nevertheless, their reliance on mass support is crucial. The larger, unorganized, and more politically mobilized the masses they gain support from happen to be, the greater the power capability they demonstrate vis-à-vis their political opponents. This way, a non-institutionalized,

quasi-personal, routinized correspondence between the leader and their followers based on the former's charisma, and serving the need for stable governmental support (Weyland, 2001, pp. 12-13). To do so and create a sort of special bond with their supporters, populists especially rely on social media and television platforming as their preferred means of communication. Put differently, they are constantly mobilizing their followers towards "a heroic mission such as refounding a country and combating dangerous adversaries" (Weyland, 2017, pp. 94-95). Other scholars see polarization as a crucial element for populism to emerge. Polarizing 'the people' against a perceived maligned establishment, political entrepreneurs can forge a brand new cleavage supporting their scope and actions. Following a goal-oriented political leadership, populist actors substantiate the crystallization of potential majorities into real ones (Pappas, 2012).

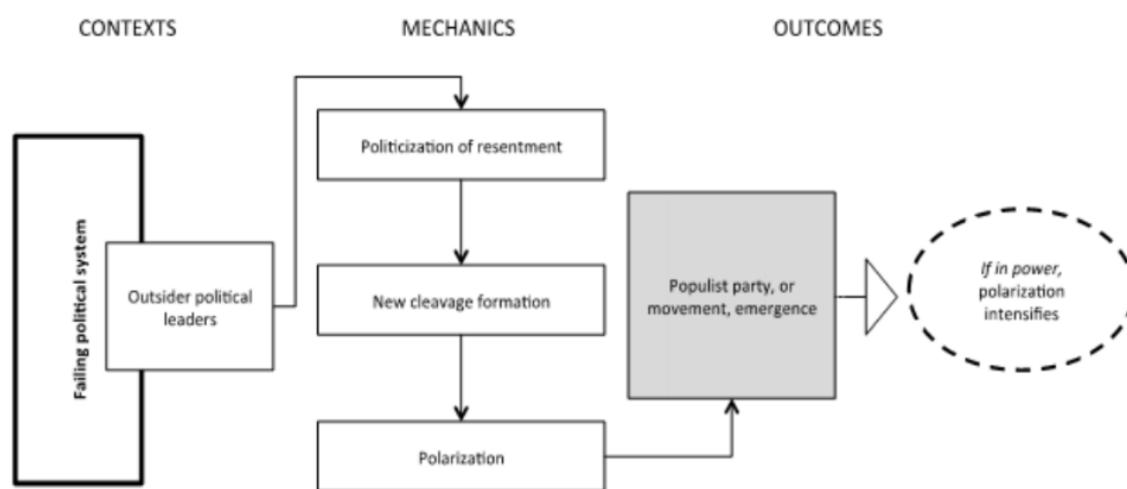


Figure 14: The logic of populist emergence (Pappas, 2012, p. 4)

The political-strategic approach to populism is particularly fit for the Latin American context, in which political populism goes hand in hand with economic liberalism - but can be also consistently applied to some cases in Eastern Europe (Weyland, 1999, p. 379). In most cases, populism was a convenient way to acquire the necessary support needed to implement risky and painful neoliberal economic policies. In particular, populist leaders' disdain towards the status quo was helpful while injecting into the national economic systems elements of economic reform, hence changing the established models of development these states have been based upon. To do so, the communicative strategy it's quite simple: ones need to combine a narrative framing opponents as "selfish defenders of privileges", and then advance an argument grounded in the presumption that the implementation of a neoliberal agenda, even if unpleasant at the beginning, is likely to advance the common good in the long run (Weyland, 2001, p. 17). In parallel to the populist attraction to neoliberal reforms, other elements can be relevant to the spread of populism in democratic systems. First, party weakness is best seen as a permissive cause for populism in general. When mainstream and traditional parties are struggling with

internal disagreements and inconsistencies in their political platforms populist entrepreneurs' possibility to emerge increases, either as a new political formation or by taking control of existing parties. Second, populist leaders distance themselves from political parties and keep an adversarial stance that helps them strengthen their position while at the same time weakening the support enjoyed by their opponents. Third, an adversarial relation to associations of vested interest, that is to say, a strong belief in the negative consequences of a strong, organized trade union and lobbying sector (Weyland, 1999, pp. 384-88).

Weyland's theorization of plebiscitarian populism has a variety of advantages, not only allowing for better identification of *de facto* populist leaders but also the effects of their actions and their unexpected consequences (Weyland, 2022, p. 188). Under a unidimensional understanding of populism, the political conceptualization of populism is preferred to the economic one (Weyland, 1999, p. 381). Whereas the former allows for further and open empirical investigation and analyses of populism within a distributive framework instead of one based on domination; the latter creates confusion and equivalently labels pretty different leaders (Weyland, 2001, p. 11). Not only better delimiting its application in the European context - where one is confronted with a more developed and established organizational landscape - the political-strategic approach to populism clarifies the opportunistic nature of personalistic populism. On the one hand, pure personalism entails the maximization of one's chance to be elected. It leaves no room for strong ideological commitments and aims at people's mobilization as far as it is possible, thus relying on instrumental slogans and flexible ideas. On the other hand, ideocratic personalism pursues ideological clarity and coherence, favoring long-term commitments over short-term objectives (Weyland, 2017, pp. 99-100).

A wider generalization of the strategic approach to populism to a different context than Latin America seems possible. Relevant to our purposes, Central, Eastern, and especially Western Europe could be a case in point. Marked by relevant differences, and without a strong connection with neoliberal thinking, places such as France, Italy, and Hungary prove to be a breeding ground for populism's emergence. In France, the negative economic developments of the 1980s and increasing issues with immigration triggered a sense of general dissatisfaction towards politicians because of their perceived incompetence and dishonesty. In Greece, after years of political distress regarding the Karamanlis right-of-center government, the populist entrepreneur Papandreou capitalized on the accumulated resentment and proposed a new radical socialist political platform, combining national independence and participatory egalitarianism (Pappas, 2012, p. 9). In Hungary, the original values of the Fidesz party were abandoned in the early 1990s when Orban took almost complete control of the party thanks to his populist strategies. In Italy, the crisis of the so-called First Republic and the scandals regarding the corruption of the political system as a whole (Mani Pulite) paved the way for Berlusconi's ascension to power. Thanks to both the collapse of the party system and his populist communicative style, presenting himself as a true outsider,

Berlusconi soon became Italian Prime Minister and directly influenced Italian political development for almost 30 years (Pappas, 2019, pp. 147-156).

In Paragraph 3.2 we are going to expand on the role of crises in populist emergence. Here it is sufficient to note how the political-strategic approach to populism often rests on the assumption that populist developments are likely to occur and even flourish where a previous condition of systemic political anxiety and uncertainty is present and widespread within the population.

3.1.2. The ideational approach to populism

To avoid ‘conceptual stretching’, vagueness, and undefined categories (Sartori, 1970, p. 1035), the ideational approach introduces a minimal definition of populism, framing it as (Mudde, 2004, p. 543):

“An ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”

In such a framework, populism is considered a thin-centered ideology. These ideologies fail to develop and provide a set of comprehensive and rightful answers to the most important societal and organizational challenges. Moreover, they are unable to expand their ambitions and scope toward a wider ideational context (Freedden, 1996). Differently from socialism and liberalism, the core populist concepts are not easily transferable and applicable to a variety of different contexts. The plasticity and openness of the concept of the people impede populism from translating into a full and coherent ideology. Even though ideologies do not necessarily need to be practical, their lack of real-world case scenarios in which to apply the core concepts may raise concerns over their convenience. This is indeed the case with populism (Stanley, 2008, pp. 106-107).

Following the ideational approach, populist reasoning outlines a normative and moralistic distinction between the people and the elites. Such a specification is not empirical, and hence based on a difference in behavioral patterns between the two groups, but on a moralistic and Manichean outlook. In the populist cosmology there are only friends and foes, and groups juxtaposed to ‘the people’ are irremediably corrupt, and thus evil (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). Hawkins & Katlwasser (2018, p. 9) point to three different cognitive mechanisms involved in the populist framing of ‘the people’ versus ‘the elites’: (i) a dispositional attribution of blame, by which populist take advantage of the human spontaneous tendency to blame external actors and factors - the corrupt and evil elite - for the occurrence of negative events; (ii) the call for an in/out-group selection thinking pattern, by which populist incentivize the reification of stereotypical group divisions in society on top of self-perceived subjective identities; (iii) triggering emotional beliefs such as fear and anger to pit citizens against the political establishment.

To be more precise, something could be defined as populist if three necessary conditions are met. First, you have a Manichean division of society. Second, ‘the people’ are seen as a homogeneous, and also generally virtuous, group or community. Third, there has to be an evil and corrupt entity opposing the will of the people and their sovereignty. Put differently, the only reference to either anti-establishment rhetoric or ‘the people’ as an organic political body are just necessary but not sufficient conditions for defining populism. What is crucial for something to be meaningfully called populist is the combination of the three elements just outlined above (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 3).

Contrary to the political-strategic approach, the ideological one assumes charismatic leadership and the direct, often unmediated communication, between populist leaders and their electorates as facilitating factors only for populism to emerge, rather than its defining elements in the first place (Mudde, 2004, p. 545). On top of this assumption, someone following the ideational framework should avoid dichotomous categorizations. There is no such thing as a sharp demarcation between populist and non-populist actors. Treating populism as a set of interconnected, differently intermingling, and context-dependent ideas, this approach best conceives populism as a continuous variable (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 5). Generally speaking, populist main objective is to change the political status of the people. The anti-establishment narratives are tailored to the conviction that the democratic status quo is not favorable for the ‘oppressed people’ populists aim to represent. As we discussed in the introductory part of the chapter, populists aren’t trying to change the rules of the game and replace liberal democracy with different regimes. What they fight for is a different balance in the distribution of power between elites and the average person. This is also why Mudde stresses the fact that “populism is not necessarily opposed to technocratic measures, particularly if they can help to do away with (established) politicians” (Mudde, 2004, p. 547). Bickerton & Accetti (2017) clarify that populism and technocracy sometimes share a common enemy: the political regime of party democracy. Instead of opposing each other, as someone would usually assume, they are both critics of the current democratic regime.

The ideational approach has a variety of advantages. Most importantly, it allows one to distinguish populism from similar but distinct concepts such as pluralism and elitism. Whereas populism considers the people as the morally virtuous group and elites as the corrupt one, elitism has a symmetric conception and portrays elites in positive terms while considering the people as a formation of irrational and impure agents. (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 4). On the other side, pluralism opposes populism when describing society as a highly differentiated aggregation of people, favoring a heterogeneous conception of society and appreciating differences in interests. In other words, “a complex ensemble of individuals and groups with different opinions” (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 4). In parallel to theoretical considerations, the ideational approach is empirically fertile. This is to say that it

makes it easier for both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies to discriminate between populist and non-populist actors (Mudde, 2017, p. 37).

As Mudde puts it, categorizability is another positive feature of the approach. Defining populism as a thin-centered ideology helps to build and further refine a range of diverse populist typologies. As a consequence, populism is better connected to other thin or thick ideologies such as authoritarianism, republicanism, collectivism, and so forth (Mudde, 2017, p. 30). A well-known typological distinction is the comparison between exclusive and inclusive conceptions of populism. While Latin American populism tends to be more inclusivist, European populism tends to be more exclusivist in nature. In the former case, the emphasis is put on the paths to feasible and available ways to establish the proper conditions for the people to have a good life. In the latter case, the locus of attention is directed towards the efforts to be made to protect these particular conditions, rather than achieving them (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, p. 160). Moreover, there are different dimensions on top of which exclusion and inclusion patterns substantiate themselves. At the political dimension, exclusion means the impossibility of fully participating in the democratic development of the country because of a lack of representation in the institutional arena. Political inclusion, on the contrary, indicates the enhanced ability to participate and be appropriately represented by different groups composing society. At the symbolic level, being excluded entails the construction of a narrative that purposely keeps away certain socio-economic groups. Opposed to it, inclusion works the other way around, replacing a vocabulary that describes out-groups as 'them' and/or 'they' with a 'we' and/or 'us' terminology. The material dimension of exclusion simply consists of a targeted deprivation of resources such as jobs or welfare for certain societal categories. Being included, on the other side of the spectrum, implies a favorable redistribution of resources for some sections of the electorate (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013, pp. 158-164). A third strength of the ideational approach is its 'travelability', not only allowing the concept of populism to be easily applicable to cases all around the world but also being of great value in comparative cross-regional studies. Finally, and connected to the previous one, 'versatility' is another asset of the conceptual framework. The quantitative operationalization of disparate research designs, varying in terms of their geographical and temporal settings, it's easier and easily combined with other studies under the ideational umbrella (Mudde, 2017, pp. 33-35).

The ideational approach is an attempt to overcome the long-standing problem in the field of populism studies is the proliferation of ad-hoc definitions of the notion and the absence of clear-cut conceptualizations that are easy to empirically investigate (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 2). Moreover, it is convenient when investigating the effects of populist attitudes on partisan preferences, both on the left and the right end of the political spectrum. Specifically, it can be shown that populist attitudes have a strong predictive power on citizens' party support along socioeconomic and anti-immigration or authoritarian issues (Van Hauwert & Van Kessel, 2018). The ideational framework's openness and attention to the interconnection between populism and other thin and/or thick ideologies are likely to increase the chances of

specific types of ideational populist profiles where the coupling of discourse and ideology is mostly evident (Hawkins & Katlwasser, 2017, p. 8).

3.1.3. The discursive approach

The discursive and performative approaches derive from Ernesto Laclau's theorization of populism. In his view, rather than being a particular type of movement linked to a social or political base of supporters and a corresponding ideological orientation, populism is best conceived as a political logic. Distinctly from social logics, consisting of rule-following mechanisms à la Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, 1953), a political logic emerges on top of institutional elements and more specifically arbitrary but discrete social demands (Laclau, 2005a, p. 117). This view underlines the modes of articulation of political content and does not try to categorize particularistic ideology as populist or not in the first place. In Laclau's words (Laclau, 2005b, p. 34):

“Populism is an ontological and not ontic category - i.e. its meaning is not to be found in any political or ideological content entering into the description of the practices of any particular group, but in a particular mode of articulation of whatever social, political or ideological contents; *[and]* that that articulating form, apart from its contents, produces structuring effects which primarily manifest themselves at the level of the modes of representation.” (italics mine)

This view of populism attaches a high significance to the construction of the concept of ‘the people’, notably to its inimical relationship towards the establishment - economic and political elites (Panizza & Stavrakakis, 2020, p. 21). Three elements are key to the theory. Discourse, understood as the space where the constitution of objective statements and structures materializes, is the first one. Speech and writing are not essential features of discourse, here it suffices to grant discourse the status of any combinatorial space of possibilities built through relational practices (Laclau, 2005a, p. 68). The second tenet of the theory is the interrelated concept of empty signifier and hegemony. The former is a ‘signifier without a signified’, appearing as long as structural impossibilities in the production of meaning at the semantic level are manifesting themselves. Empty signifiers are the necessary but not sufficient conditions for hegemony to originate. The latter, then, is a relationship between two entities or groups that is built on the absence of a reference, again at the semantic level, to a ‘communitarian fullness’ (Laclau, 1996, pp. 36-43). The third basic element of the theory is rhetoric, characterized by its classical meaning of swapping a literal term with a figural one. In the political realm, this is considered to be a fundamental feature of language requiring the naming of something that is ‘essentially unnamable’ (Laclau, 2005a, p. 71).

In the political world, a variety of requests are made by a plethora of social agents. Gradually, several demands could become unheard or discarded. That way, the institutional system becomes unable to absorb them differentially, leaving their

significance equivalent to each other from an external viewpoint. As a consequence, a chain of equivalent but different claims arises. In that respect, an isolated demand is a 'democratic demand, whether it is satisfied or not. In parallel, 'popular demands' are connected and tantamount demands expressing a broader social subjectivity (Laclau, 2005a, pp. 73-74). In a situation where popular demands tend to aggregate themselves following a logic of equivalence rather than a logic of difference, even in the face of their diverging constitution, one is confronted with the creation of an empty signifier aiming to represent the interests of a broad 'popular subject'. To Laclau, this process of discursive articulation of the 'popular subjectivity' is inevitably flawed and leads to floating and imperfect notions. His main point is that increasingly autonomous empty signifiers can be easily re-articulated to fulfill hegemonic projects. Put differently, populist discourse takes over control of floating but seemingly structured popular demands and subjectivities to get to power (Laclau, 2005b, pp. 37-43). As he puts it (Laclau, 2005a, p. 123)

"There is in any society a reservoir of raw anti-status quo feelings which crystallize in some symbols *quite independently of the forms of their political articulation*, and it is their presence we intuitively perceive when we call a discourse or a mobilization 'populistic'" (italics not mine)

These kinds of implicit and destructured populist beliefs are grounded in the inevitable tendency to draw distinctions between social groups, and similarly to the ideational theory, along the line of the 'us' versus 'them' divide. While trying to form a consensus in the center and defending a 'non partisan' view of democracy, a need to articulate an exclusive group-based identity stemming from the confrontation with other political groups cannot be avoided. An external entity is required to form a stable ideological common ground inside any organized alliance: "there cannot be an 'us' without a 'them' (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 56-57).

To recap, populism is a political logic revolving around a series of discursive practices with a political characterization building a sort of 'popular subject' based on a juxtaposition between two social camps. The structure and logic of such differentiation are the results of the creation of an equivalent chain of actions, where every moment of construction along the equivalency chain, translating democratic demands into popular demands, overrides the differential nature of every particular demand. The outcome of this process is the creation of an empty signifier standing for the totality of social demands and trying to offer some coherence to the concept of the (will) of the people (Laclau, 2005b, pp. 43-44). As some scholars rightfully noticed, the framework rests on three assumptions regarding hegemonic relationships: (i) the ontologically conflictual nature of politics, arising on top of linguistic narratives and materialistic needs; (ii) the repeated occurrence of political dislocations expliciting the limits of the socio-symbolic order within which actors happen to engage; (iii) the lack of a universal common ground any political projects could feasibly aim for, that is to say, "an irreducible pluralisation of political projects" (Panizza & Stavrakakis, 2020, p. 23).

Further elaborations close to the framework of the discursive approach have been elaborated. Pierre Ostiguy developed a relational account of populism which posits socio-cultural traits as the combination of identities and 'flaunting' leadership. Furthermore, this take considers the populist political style not only as transgressive, improper, and antagonistic but also as either an ordinary or spectacular praxis aiming to get citizens closer to power and leadership (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 74). The most important aspect of this scheme is the introduction of a separation between the high and low axis of being and acting in politics. The axis comprises two interconnected sub-dimensions: a socio-cultural and a politico-cultural one. While the former comprises manners, demeanors, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary, and public attitudes in general, the latter specifies forms of political leadership and either preferred or advocated modes of decision-making. Although a detailed analysis of the three main components developing ahead of the high-low axis, a common denominator is identified in the ideally perceived level of sublimation and suppression to be possibly employed for exerting institutional leadership and authority. Some differences, though, can be outlined. On the one hand, the high dimension is comprehensive of more abstract, formal, and restrained political methodology. On the other hand, the low dimension offers a less institutionally mediated, and thus more immediate and personal way to establish a connection with the people (Ostiguy, 2017, pp. 83-84).

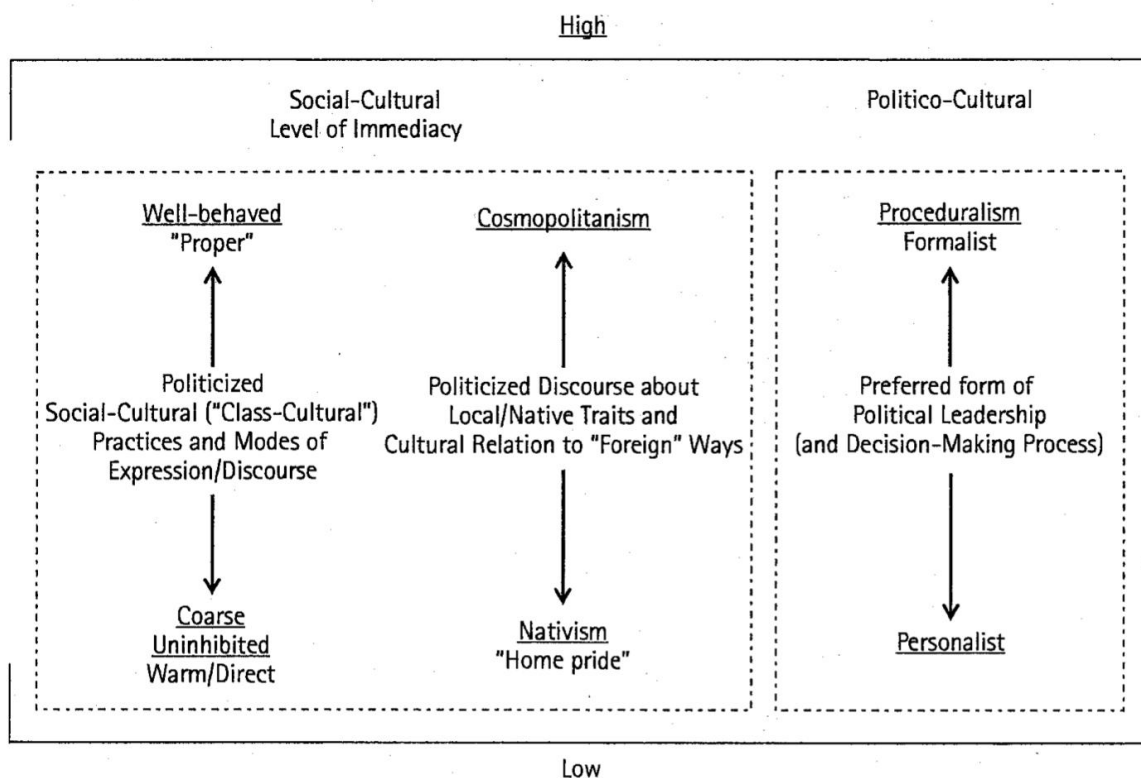


Figure 15: Characteristics and components of the high and low dimensions in politics (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 88)

In addition to that, and with an eye on the pattern of right-wing populist increasing polarization, Ostiguy develops his analysis along the lines of the classic Lipset & Rokkan (1967) cleavage theory of party organization in Western Europe and Northern America on the left-right axis, of which a graphical representation only is offered below for reasons of space.

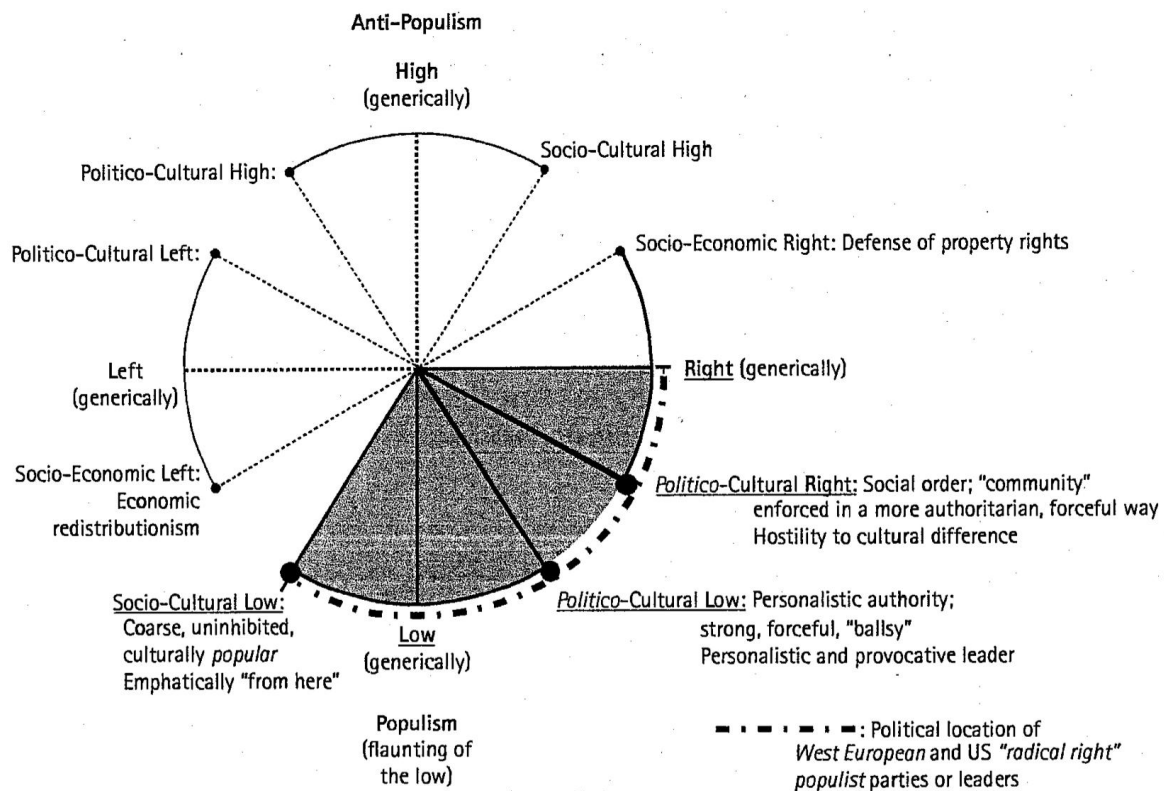


Figure 16: Identification of right-wing populist parties on the high-low and left-right axes in Europe and the US concerning the socio-cultural and political-cultural dimensions (Ostiguy, 2017, p. 88)

Despite differences, the politico-strategic, the ideational, and the discursive approaches all rely on a distinct linguistic register capable of heavily affecting politics and political identities, both in their structural and operative dimensions. Moreover, they all underline the Manichean divide between 'the people' and 'the elite', and they generally assign a prominent role to personalistic leaders (Moffitt, 2020). On the other side, the main distinctions are drawn based on whether populism is conceived as: (i) a binary or gradational concept; or (ii) an attribute or a practice of political actors. At another level, their peculiarity lies in their geographic application - from European to Latin American countries to the African or Asiatic continents, if not at a global scale (Moffitt, 2020, pp. 45-46).

	Ideational	Strategic	Discursive– Performative
Is populism seen as a binary or gradational concept?	Binary	Gradational (fuzzy set)	Gradational
Is populism seen as an attribute or a practice?	Attribute	Practice	Practice
Key authors	Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser, Hawkins, Canovan, Müller	Weyland, Roberts, Jansen	Laclau, Mouffe, Wodak, Ostiguy
Key regions studied	Europe; Latin America	Latin America; Africa and Asia	Global

Figure 17: Comparison between the different approaches to populism (Moffitt, 2020, p. 44)

3.2. The role of multiple crisis

Under the most-different systems design framework, Rooduijn (2014) compares six different cases of populism in Western Europe and Latin America. The study shows that the ‘nucleus’ of populism consists of four elements: (i) the central position of the people; (ii) the criticism towards the elites; (iii) the perception of the people as a homogeneous entity; (iv) the proclamation of a serious crisis. All the cases present a situation where populists argue that a serious political, cultural, and/or economic crisis is the direct consequence of the elitist exploitation of the people. Even though organizational and stylistic features result from populism, the article posits the populist proclamation of a serious crisis as a necessary consequence of populism. In other words, “the populist outlook will always lead to the proclamation of a crisis” (Rooduijn, 2014, p. 594). Most theories tend to present crisis as external to populism. Two problems are evident. First, it’s hard to find simple causal explanations connecting crisis to populism. Second, one can hardly formulate a crisis scenario in neutral terms when related to populism. Against this conception, populism can also be conceived as a trigger for crisis. Where you have the performance of a crisis you also have populism: the elements are strictly interconnected (Moffitt, 2015, p. 194). Shortly, a performative understanding of the relationship between populists’ performances and the occurrence of crisis presents six main components: (i) the identification of some urgencies and failure; (ii) the elevation of crisis into a wider temporal and moral framework; (iii) the framing of two opposing societal camps pitting ‘the people’ against the ones responsible for the

crisis; (iv) the strategic use of the media to propagate the perception of the gravity of such crisis; (v) the presentation of simplistic solutions, while offering solutions based on a strong leadership style; (vi) the perpetuation of a sense of distress and anxiety concerning the expansion of the crisis (Moffitt, 2015, p. 198).

Crises are windows of opportunity for populists to capitalize on citizens' discontent. They not only offer a possibility for parties to re-brand and re-position themselves in the political debate but also to create new 'thin-centred' ideologies mainly useful to build new political alliances and cleavages (Caiani & Graziano, 2019, p. 10). From a general perspective both political and economic crises, especially their combination, have compelling effects on populism (Pappas & Kriesi, 2015). Again, there is a difference between economic and political crises and their relationship to populism. In line with the reasoning above, Pappas (2012, p. 5) makes clear that economic crises-based theories of populism lead to downplay the role of institutions, conflict, ideological competition, mass mobilization's power, and the antithesis between personal and collective modes of organization. Put differently, these theories "tend to exogenize politics". It is important to note that crises of political and democratic representation play a crucial role and provide the necessary conditions for the rise of populism (Pappas, 2019). They are the common denominator of the vast majority of cases investigated in the comparative politics literature and can be distinguished into three different types. One type implies a group's exclusion and denial of access to the political life of a country. A second form develops as the direct outcome of the party system's collapse. According to the performative framework, a third one is directly induced by populist leaders (Pappas, 2019, p. 127).

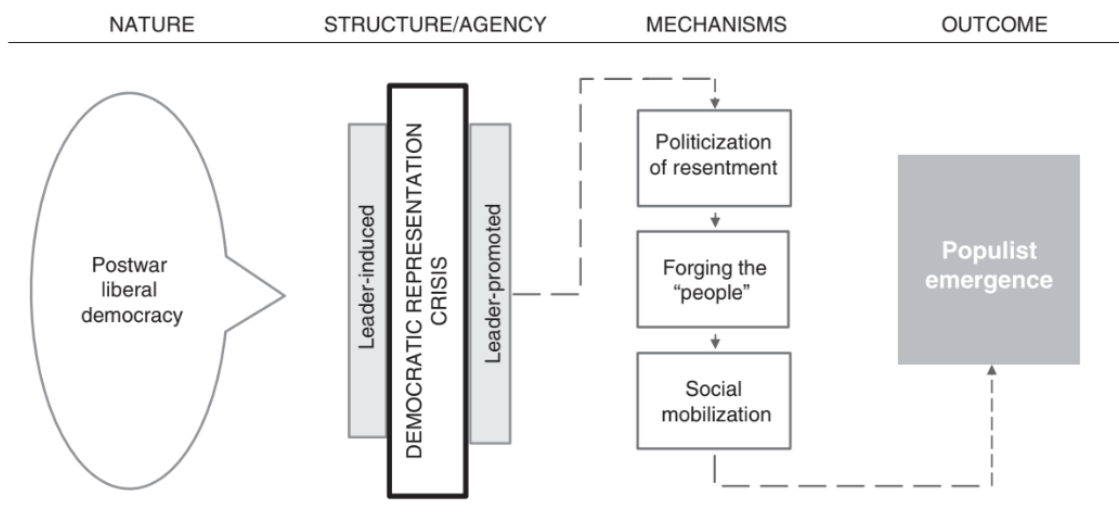


Figure 18: The place and role of democratic failures of representation in populist emergence (Pappas, 2019, p.124)

The emergence of populism in the context of political and democratic crises of representation is also consistent with an ideational interpretation of populist attitudes. Ideational approaches acknowledge the great influence populist attitudes have on

people's tendency to express support for populist parties (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2017). In detail, they deem populist attitudes as a latent demand or disposition, meaning that at the individual level (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 7):

“most people require a context that makes the activation of populist attitudes sensible, and interpretive help from other people who can catalyze this process. Thus populism at the level of individual citizens is a latent demand that must be activated through context and framing”

Citizens translate into effective populist voters if like-minded populist entrepreneurs provide a political platform on the supply-side dimension and in a specific context. Overall, the main drivers of support for populist movements and parties are social exclusion and crises of belonging; and the effect is especially significant for right-wing supporters. Populist leaders gain support thanks to emotionally driven communication. Specifically, they spread negative emotions in a period of ‘normalcy’ while raising positive expectations and new resolution paths during crisis time (Maher et al., 2022). A recent study seems to confirm these generalizations. Analyzing the effects of external shocks on the development of political populism in New Zealand, Levi & Stillman (2024) find increasing patterns of mistrust towards mainstream parties and higher levels of appreciation for strong leadership. Importantly, these shocks had a medium/long-term impact on populist attitudes in the subsequent years. Migration and income losses were detected to be the most significant factors behind the surge in populist attitudes (Levi et al., 2024, p. 362).

In a nutshell, populism's relation to crisis relies on a few points. First, the necessary but not sufficient condition for populism to emerge is an economic, political, or social dislocation. Second, populist actors blame certain parts of society as the main triggers of the emergency. Third, ‘the people’ are framed as the victims of the crisis’ negative consequences, and the ones populists are offering their help to. Fourth, an anti-populist reaction is likely to manifest. Fifth, different types of populist discourses may oppose each other for supremacy. Sixth, either left-wing or right-wing agendas can characterize emerging populist political platforms (Panizza & Stavrakakis, 2020, p. 27).

3.2.1. Populism and health crises

Bobba & Hube (2021b) provide a framework for the analysis of the context of the COVID-19 crisis. A particular issue has to go through three stages to be politicized. In this process, actions, objects of contention, and outputs follow a specific order. First, there is the emergence phase. At this stage, the problem materializes, and the actions of ‘naming’ help point the attention towards it; also allowing political agents to position themselves in relation to the question. Second, a confrontation phase begins in which ‘blaming’ narratives attribute the responsibility and ownership of the issue and its management to specific actors. Third, actors are ‘claiming’ their original solutions to confront and resolve the crisis in the managing phase. Adjusting our

scheme to a scenario inhabited by populist agents, we obtain the following. In the emergence phase, populists are naming the crisis and identifying the failures allowing its occurrence. In the confrontation phase, populists blame the responsible actors acting against the interests of the people. In the managing phase, they can finally offer a solution to the crisis (Bobba & Hube, 2021a, p. 9).

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Action</i>	<i>Contention</i>	<i>Output</i>
Emergence	Naming	Political vs. non-political status of the problem/issue	One or more political or social actors identify a specific problem/issue as a problem/issue with a public scope and political nature The issue becomes a new political divide or opposition
Confrontation	Blaming	Attribution of accountability and ownership of the problem/issue	One or more political or social actors blame other actors for not facing the problem, or not facing it with the necessary urgency and effectiveness
Managing	Claiming	Alternative problem/issue-specific solutions	One or more political or social actors propose a solution and claim the ability to solve the problem/issue

Figure 19: Politicization of public issues in the context of the pandemic (Bobba & Hube, 2021a, p. 10)

Before turning to the analysis of parties and the patterns of their reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is useful to explore the populist style of leadership in health crisis scenarios. Medical populism is “a political style based on performances of public health crises that pit ‘the people’ against ‘the establishment’” (Lasco & Curato, 2019). Medical populism is also composed of four features. As we have seen before, a central element of populist communication in these scenarios is the dramatization of the crisis and its effect on the population. This is strictly connected to the second aspect of medical populism: the simplification of the pandemic (Lasco, 2020, p. 2). Regarding the second element, populists generally “make a case a case for the swiftest possible response”, thus offering simplistic and erroneous solutions to complex issues. (Lasco & Curato, 2019, p. 3). A final and important feature of medical populism is its invocation of knowledge claims, such as Trump famously advocating for hydroxychloroquine to diminish the chances of contracting COVID-19 or even diminishing the degree of its related damages (Lasco, 2020, p.3).

Cases of medical populism are not only confined to the COVID-19 pandemic. HIV denialism was a big issue in South Africa after the rule of Thabo Mbeki, the successor of Nelson Mandela. Succeeding his predecessor in a situation where HIV

infections were continuously increasing, Mbeki performed the health crisis claiming that AIDS was not as disruptive as people might think and has been suggesting home-made remedies. When accused by the international media of irresponsibility and epidemic denialism, he diverted attention away from internal mistakes and established a narrative of Western dehumanization of Africans and economic colonization through the action of pharmaceutical companies (Lasco & Curato, 2019, p. 4). Another representative case is Southeast Asia's drug wars. In countries like Thailand and the Philippines, the leaders Thaksin Shinawatra and Rodrigo Duterte engaged with medico-populistic strategies. They both declared a war on drugs, challenging national and international agencies' statistics on the medical consumption of particular compounds. In doing so, they exaggeratedly overstated the negative consequences of their employment, portraying 'the people' as "helpless victims, the virtuous citizens whose lives are put at risk by 'subhuman' actors" - in this case, industrial elites (Lasco & Curato, 2019, p. 6).

Concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, some general patterns can be tracked down from a sample of cases including Trump in the USA, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines. They all tried to frame the pandemic as a 'little flu', offering at the same time alternative methodologies to fight back the virus contraction. In addition, a widespread feature of populist leaders during the crisis has been the repeated use of a 'war language' describing citizens as fighters - and even soldiers - of this dramatic virus. Since most of them were ruling their countries at the time, 'the people' were generally pitted not against governing elites but international and transnational entities such as the World Health Organization (WHO). In terms of knowledge claims, the tendency was to refer only to a selective part of the scientific evidence available - the so-called cherry peaking technique (Lasco, 2020, pp. 7-9).

	Simplification of the pandemic	Spectacularization of the crisis	Forging of divisions
Brazil – Jair Bolsonaro	'It's just a little flu or a little cold' Brazilians can withstand the virus Hydroxychloroquine as treatment	Dramatic market visits, #BrazilCannotStop campaign, language of conspiracy	The country vs. political opponents, state governors, health experts, and China
The Philippines – Rodrigo Duterte	'Filipinos are not easily hit by the illness' Antibodies and drugs like Avigan as potential treatment	'Optics of power' in lockdown, language of war, punitive threats	The country vs. government critics, dangerous poor, <i>pasaway</i> (disobedient ones), leftist groups
United States – Donald Trump	'It will be gone with warmer weather'; 'It's under control' Hydroxychloroquine, disinfectants, UV light, as treatment	Language of war, hyperbolic language to describe government responses	The country vs. China, WHO, and the media

Figure 20: summary of the main patterns of interaction between populist leaders and the COVID-19 pandemic development in their countries (Lasco, 2020, p. 8)

The analysis of a bigger sample of cases, including European states, points in the same direction. A discriminative factor is the institutional position of populist parties during the pandemic. Populists in power tried to acquire more legitimacy and centrality in the aftermath of the crisis. Given that politicizing the crisis was not an ideal strategy in the context of the pandemic, they tried to depoliticize the issue and

attach particular importance to the actions they were implementing to handle the situation (Bobba & Hubbe, 2021a, p. 134-139). On the contrary, populist parties in opposition tried to politicize the pandemic accusing governing coalitions of centralizing their powers and not taking the economic distress, alongside health problems, of 'the people' enough into account (Ringe et al., 2023, p. 278). Nonetheless, politicization wasn't optimal for oppositional forces too. At the beginning of the crisis, even populists in opposition experienced difficulties in performing the crisis. When 'naming' and identifying the COVID-19 threat, actions pursuing the minimization of its related risks quickly turned to a narrative stressing its seriousness. The actions of blaming and claiming were strictly intertwined. Due to the complications affecting the entire population, the concept of 'the people' was not always sound (Ringe & Renno, 2023, pp. 4-5). To avoid the problem, populist parties in the opposition built their narratives on anti-elitism sentiments and migration-related concerns during the confrontation and managing phases (Bobba & Hube, 2021b, p. 136).

There are also some observations about the populist right parties' behavior during the pandemic. A comparative study by Kaltwasser & Taggart (2022) details these engagement patterns with the crisis. Challenging nativism, one of the main tropes of populist ideology, the pandemic drew more attention to technocratic and scientific decision-making. Nonetheless, nativism was especially present in the narratives and behavior of populists in government at crisis time. However, it is more interesting to notice how the populists in opposition reacted to the health crisis. We can find a similar behavioral pattern revolving around a harsh attack directed toward ruling elites and their decisions about pandemic management. Some of these forces even accused governing parties of authoritarian tendencies when outlining solutions to the problems caused by the virus (Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2022, pp. 14-16). A concise summary of the strategies taken by populist radical right actors during the COVID-19 pandemic is offered in Figure 21 on the next page.

The evidence presented in this paragraph exposes the weaknesses of populist during the pandemic and their inability to confront and perform the crisis as they are used to. This is in line with electoral results and the decrease in populist attitudes discussed in Chapter 1. The inefficient management of the health threats exposed populist incompetencies and reduced their attractiveness in the eyes of European public opinion. As a result, a significant decrease in populist attitudes has been overall measured (Gianmarco et al., 2020; Foa et al., 2022).

Case study	How did the PRR respond to the pandemic?	How did the PRR frame the pandemic?	What effects did the pandemic have on the popularity of the PRR?
France	Initially slow to react to the pandemic, but Marine Le Pen used COVID-19 response as part of attempt to normalize the party; steered clear of anti-vax positions but vacillated in masks and lockdown	Marine Le Pen and RN adopted an ambivalent strategy; while making a direct link between the pandemic and issues of security and immigration, they did not minimize the effects of COVID-19	Stable levels of public support and Marine Le Pen very well evaluated
Germany	Initially in favour of harsh measures, but later adopted a libertarian approach to attack lockdown measures and present itself as a defender of freedom	The pandemic was framed as an imported phenomenon, linked to the politics of open borders; criticism of elites and promotion of ideas developed by other experts	Although the party's core topic (nativism) lost saliency, the AfD maintained relatively stable levels of electoral support
Italy	Both PRR parties initially sought to downplay COVID-19 but then quickly moved to criticize government for not locking down hard enough	Both PRR parties emphasized the economic rather than the health consequences of the pandemic and attacked EU	Lega lost public support, while the FdI gained public support
Spain	Frontal attack against the measures imposed by the 'socio-communist' government, i.e. self-portrayal as defender of freedom	Emphasis on nativism ('Chinese virus'); criticism of the government measures because of its authoritarianism, which was equated with the positions defended by left-wing dictatorships such as Cuba and Venezuela	No big variation in support for the party; presented itself as the most oppositional actor towards the government, mobilizing this way those conservative voters radically at odds with the government of Sánchez

Figure 21: Populist radical right oppositional forces during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2022, p. 13)

3.2.2. Populism and economic crises

Populism has been rising in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Support for populist parties increased by about ten to fifteen percentage points, almost doubling their vote share. The 2008-2009 financial crisis played a key role. The populist expansion mostly happened after the economic recession (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022). As we have already seen in the chapter, populists thrive where economic shocks are impactful and recurrent. An economic shock can be defined as “an instance of a significant and intense change in one’s personal economic standing, whether realized (e.g. job loss) or expected (e.g. a sharp increase in one’s likelihood of being laid off)” (Margalit, 2019, p. 278). Economic voting theories help one understand these movements. Voters negatively affected by economic shocks

would probably develop a feeling of mistrust for mainstream parties as a whole. The assumption here is that mainstream parties are directly responsible for the crisis's mismanagement. Thus, people most affected by its negative consequences foresee a punishment mechanism in casting a ballot for different parties in successive elections. Citizens base their evaluations on a variety of elements. Their reasoning can be macroeconomic in nature and focus on economic development and markets' performances. It can also be based on egotropic and sociotropic factors, depending on whether they consider their personal welfare and financial situation more important (or not) than the current economic prosperity of their country. Finally, a redistributive concern might affect the judgment they form about their political preferences (Christensen et al., 2024, pp. 6-7).

In general, the argument above is a retrospective explanation of voting. A second view stresses the role and ability of oppositional parties to channel dissatisfaction under new ideas. Parties on the left pointed attention to the rejection of the austerity regime and the cuts on government welfare spending. Parties on the right focused on concerns related to illegal immigration and the fear of losing one's job in favor of a non-native person (Hobolt & Tilly, 2016, p. 2). The second conjecture has been widely discussed from a global perspective too. Dani Rodrik (2017, pp. 24-25) suggested how nativist and ethnocultural cleavages can be easily mobilized in the wake of disrupting shocks. Presenting immigrants and even refugees as competitors for jobs and public resources seekers and drainers, the economic anxieties of people can be tunneled into oppositional political platforms. The salience of financial preoccupations creates cultural and nativist ideologies claiming the inefficiency of the status quo. Domestic politics has been influenced by globalization and the subsequent competition at the economic, cultural, and political levels. The structure of the European party system has been transforming since the final decades of the 20th century. Winners and losers of globalization favored the creation of new political divides. The conflict between integration and demarcation is a key one. As we discussed in Chapter 1, the old European cleavage structures and divisions along the lines of the left/right have been replaced by the GAL (green/alternative/libertarian) and TAN (traditionalist/authoritarian/nationalist) dimensions. This movement favored a new demarcation between pro-state and pro-market positions on the basis of socio-economic issues. Regarding cultural factors, the 'ethnicization of politics' and the increasing opposition of emerging political movements to cultural liberalism enhanced the salience and visibility of European integration and immigration (Kriesi et al., 2006).

Different studies provided supporting evidence for these hypotheses. Taking stock of both the demand and supply side of populism, Guiso et al. (2017) show the impact of economic variables in affecting populist behavior in the presence of diffuse economic distress. At the level of demand, economic insecurity has mainly two effects: makes people less prone to participate in politics, and more likely to vote for a populist party, if they decide to vote. On the one hand, political participation is mostly affected by possible unemployment, income losses, and competition from immigrants but not from globalization's exposure. On the other hand, fear of losing

their jobs does not play a substantial role in people's tendency to vote for a populist party. As for political participation, the likelihood of supporting populist parties is predictable by one's level of suffering from income losses, exposure to globalization, and fear of immigrants. More specifically (Guiso et al., 2017, p. 25).

“Being unemployed lowers participation by 3.1 percentage points; feeling you live in difficulty on current income, compared to living comfortably on current income, lowers participation by 9.6 percentage points; while moving immigrants fears from the lowest to the mean value lowers participation by 2 percentage points. Similarly, being exposed to globalization increases the chance of voting for a populist party by 1.6 percentage points (20% of the sample mean), feeling you live in difficulty on current income, compared to living comfortably, increases voting for a populist party by 1 percentage point (9% of the sample mean) while moving immigrants fears from the lowest to the mean value increases the chances of voting for a populist party by more than 1.4 percentage points (17% of the sample mean).”

At the level of supply, the existence and emergence of new populist alliances can also be explained by economic variables. When people are: (i) unsure about their income's ability to sustain their daily expenses; (ii) experiencing high levels of unemployment, and (iii) more threatened by foreigners and illegal migrants; populist platforms can flourish. When average education is higher, economic drivers are weaker predictors of populist emergence. Interestingly, while a sustained level of trust in politicians seems to discourage populists from offering new political platforms, strong levels of trust in political parties seem to raise the demand for populist formations (Guiso et al., 2017, p. 35). Economic crises are crucial determinants of political behavior because they engage with anger and also create a sense of political alienation in voters. Disengagement from politics is common after a period of economic complications and is driven by feelings of low political efficacy. When people hold low levels of political efficacy, it means they feel a marginal and limited ability to influence politics. Based on an analysis of the 2005-2010 British panel data show, Magni (2017) shows that disengagement from politics and higher levels of support for populist parties and leaders are meaningfully explained by the interplay of anger and low political efficacy. On the contrary, high political efficacy does not lead people to disengage from politics. In detail, the likelihood of voting is 20 percentage points lower for people displaying anger and low political efficacy, as opposed to non-angry individuals. The populist party UKIP benefitted from such a pattern of behavior: self-perceived low political efficacy pushed people to vote for the party, increasing support between 0.6 and 1.2 points on a 10-point scale. When political efficacy grows, support for UKIP decreases accordingly. In other words, a negative interaction between anger and efficacy does not increase popular support for populist parties (Magni, 2017, pp. 97-98).

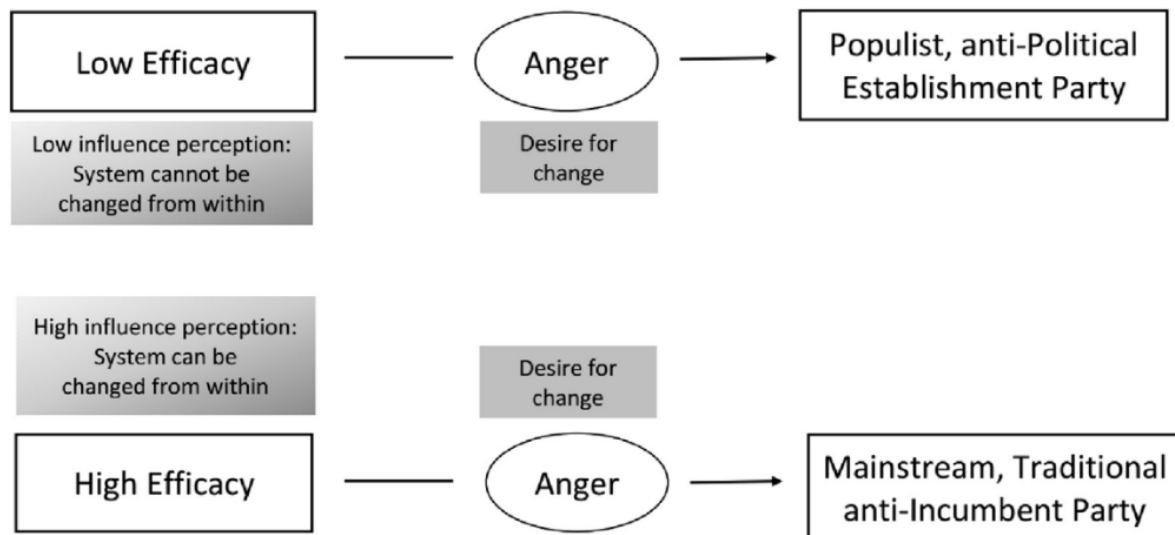


Figure 22: effects of anger on party support conditional on political efficacy (Magni, 2017, p. 96)

Another important observation has been made by Gavresi & Litina (2023). People who experienced macroeconomic shocks in the past are more likely to vote for populist parties in the future. The effects of these shocks are remarkably significant during a person's most impressionable years, i.e. between 18 and 25 years old. Increasing levels of the impact of the shock (a one standard deviation change) are associated with: (i) increasing chances (a standard deviations change of 0.014) of voting in the national elections; (ii) increasing probabilities (a standard deviations change of 0.011) that the vote was given to a populist party. A similar pattern is also found for trust in political parties and politicians but also for trust in the national and European parliament and the government's satisfaction (Gavresi & Litina, 2023, p. 996):

“an 1 standard deviation increase in the shock variable is associated with a 0.024 standard deviations decline in trust in political parties, 0.026 standard deviations decline in trust in politicians, 0.027 standard deviations decline in trust in the national parliament and 0.043 standard deviations decrease in government's satisfaction. The results are significant at the 1% level. Similarly, exposure to a shock (1 standard deviation increase) is associated with a decline of 0.022 standard deviations of trust in EU parliament.”

In line with expectations, Pappas & Kriesi (2015) find a populist surge of 4.1 percentage points in the aftermath of the Great Recession. Non-negligible differences are noticeable between European regions. In Southern Europe, populism presented a polarizing, anti-systemic nature, engaging with the left as well as the right section of the electorate. In Central-Eastern Europe, populism materialized in 'purifier' parties promising to fight against political corruption. In Northern Europe, populism was highly systemic, and populist parties often supported mainstream parties' policy-making. In Western Europe is the sole expectation, overall

experiencing a modest contraction of populist forces - excluding France. Anglo-Celtic countries present a sharp contrast: while they both faced a serious crisis, the United Kingdom only suffered the rise of anti-European populist forces. Only partial confirmation concerning the relationship between populism and economic crisis is found. A consistent number of countries that were strongly hit by the consequences of the crisis saw the rise of populist forces. Nonetheless, even the party systems of countries that were not heavily affected by the crisis developed populist tendencies. Stronger but not univocal confirmation of the relationship between populism and political crisis is also found. The connection is higher in Southern and Central and Eastern European countries. The effects are anyways robust in Western and Northern Europe too, with the sole exception of Belgium, Austria, and Switzerland. Ireland is the only case where the hypothesis is not confirmed. Essentially, populism is more likely to develop and thrive where there is a conjunction of both economic and political crises: almost every European country tends to confirm this hypothesis (Pappas & Kriesi, 2015, pp. 323-324).

	A. Pre-crisis	B. Post-crisis	Difference B/A	EU2014
25 parties in 17 countries*	19.0	23.1	4.1	24.6

Notes: *Including Ireland, a case of negative populism.

Figure 23: Aggregate levels of populism pre and post-financial crisis (Pappa & Kriesi, 2015, p. 323)

Cultural crises are another kind of crisis where populism flourishes. The statement is based on Norris & Inglehart's (2019) theory of a cultural backlash in modern societies with developed liberal democracies. Western countries have been experiencing an unprecedented change in attitudes, shifting from the need for material and physical security to post-materialist demands for individual free choice and self-expression. This gradual movement from socially conservative and traditional values to more pluralistic and cosmopolitan values is the theory's point of departure. Growing generations, educational, gender, and urban transformations changed the cleavage structure of Western societies, thus modifying the balance between liberalism and conservatism and creating an incentive for populist movements to emerge (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 45).

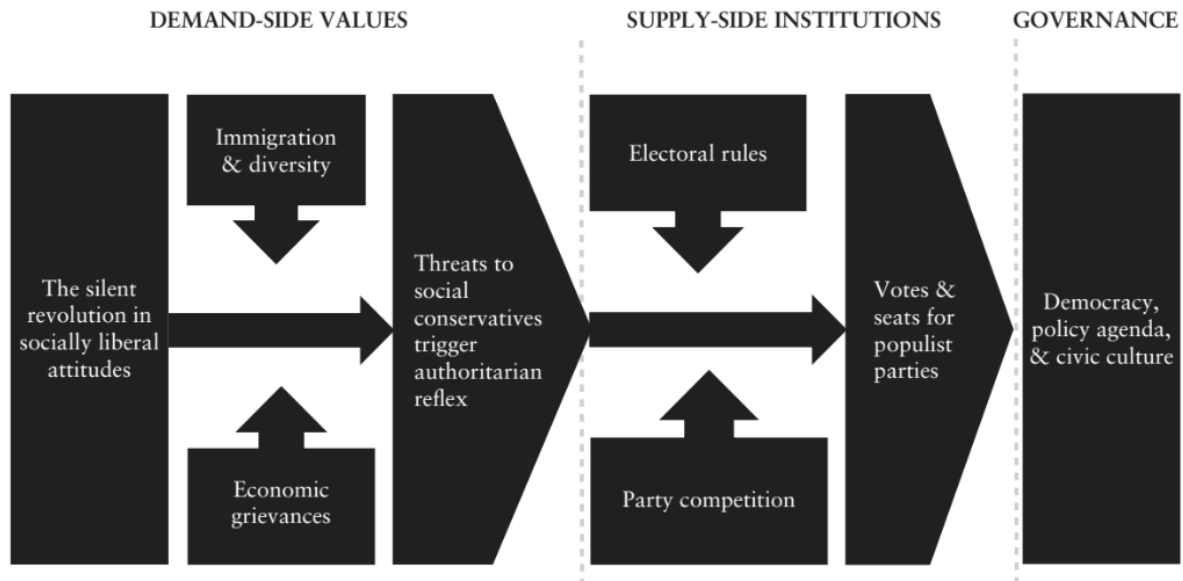


Figure 24: The theoretical framework of the cultural backlash (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 33)

As it is apparent from the discussion in the current paragraph, immigration it's a salient issue in populist narratives and citizens' perception of the potential threats to their security and identity. Nonetheless, the empirical evidence is not univocal and varies a lot depending on the country that is taken into consideration. For these reasons, the relationship between populism and crisis is context-dependent, and comparative studies should (and generally do) pay attention to country-specific or regional-specific elements (Caiani & Graziano, 2019, p. 10).

Chapter 4

4. Populism, Euroscepticism, and European integration

4.1. Populist democracy in the European Union

Peter Mair (2002) argues that populist democracy is best conceived as a popular democracy without parties. Populist democracy flourishes in a scenario where popular disaffection and disengagement from politics are higher, that is to say where there are sustained levels of indifference. Popular democracy is opposed to constitutional democracy. The former emphasizes the role of the demos, entailing a government by the people. The latter stresses the need for institutional requirements such as checks and balances and executive autonomy, assuming a government for the people. The increasing significance of populism in Western and European politics is a consequence of parties' declining importance. Their ideological and programmatic identity became more and more blurred in the eyes of citizens, thus changing the dynamics of electoral competition. Additionally, the traditional representative and procedural functions that parties were generally acknowledged to satisfy started to be perceived as less and less meaningful. In this sense, parties are no longer both representatives and governors. Where the popular and constitutional pillars of democracy diverge, and even some tension between them rises, neopopulist actors and more generally populist politics acquire more relevance (Mair, 2002, pp. 83-86).

Building on existing political discontent, populism feeds cynicism. When citizens don't trust the governing coalition but feel competent and entitled to raise their voices and change the direction of events, populist actors can directly influence people's levels of political reflexivity. According to this logic, citizens are no longer required to follow politics carefully and are allowed to embrace, and trust, populist narratives, their plans of action, and their consequences (Krouwel & Abts, 2007, pp. 265-266). Scholars highlighted the role of persuasiveness and leadership visibility in populist politics. Van Kessel (2015) shows that populist parties are the most successful when their leadership is convincing in the eyes of citizens - especially when populist leaders are able to draw a sharp division between themselves and other political elites. In doing so, populists can offer a credible alternative to the electorate at the supply-side level, which is a necessary condition for the electoral success of their parties.

Political discontent can be either exogenous or endogenous to the rise of populist parties. Following a political logic of expressing discontent, populist parties offer citizens a platform through which their complaints can be meaningfully structured. Put differently, they support the party because they are politically disconnected. Following a political logic of fuelling discontent, political disconnection becomes endogenous to the rise of populist parties. Voters become more disenchanted with politics because they are increasingly exposed to messages building upon ideas regarding the malfunctioning of politics (Bélanger & Arts, 2006).

What is interesting here is the latter view rather than the former. Criticizing the political establishment, populist parties expose citizens to polarizing messages and fuel political discontent: populist voting is endogenous to political discontent. The evidence confirms this assumption. There is a direct relationship between the level of political disconnection and dissatisfaction of a given citizen, and the degree of populism a political platform or program expresses. Put differently, “if a voter supports a party that expresses the message that the elite is incompetent or even corrupt, s/he might be inclined to incorporate this idea in his or her way of thinking about politics - even without having this view beforehand” (Rooduijn et al., 2016, p. 34).

The European political arena can be described in terms of a political market. It is similar to an oligopoly where the market for votes is characterized by imperfect competition, thus favoring dominant parties over challenging ones. In exchange for votes, parties trade their product, in this case, their political platforms (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020). What they offer is promising to implement a particular plan of action with a certain level of competence. Having great experience governing, mainstream and dominant parties hold a competitive advantage over non-mainstream and challenging parties. To retain their position, they generally do three things: (i) they offer non-divisive policies to people; (ii) they mobilize the issues in which they are more competent; (iii) they discard specific and polarizing issues. Challenger parties are generally identified with political entrepreneurs - and populist parties are a subset of this group. To change the status quo, challenger parties engage dominant ones through policy innovation. After reviewing the most appropriate issues, these political entrepreneurs actively discredit dominant parties by employing anti-establishment rhetoric. Picking a profitable issue is a matter of cost-benefit analysis. Challenger parties engage in issue entrepreneurship and choose to mobilize issues less expected to create a low number of negative reactions, while adversely affecting dominant parties in terms of vote share. As discussed in Chapter 3, anti-establishment rhetoric is a core feature of populism. In this framework, such a narrative presents dissenting and pessimistic sentiments towards the system, the political elite, and technocratic decision-making (De Vries & Hobolt, 2020, para. 4-5-6). This conceptualization of the European party system and its electoral arena is crucial for understanding how mainstream and emerging parties engage with each other. Populist parties build their political bases by employing these tactics and mobilizing wedge issues like European integration. With respect to the European party system, European integration is a wedge issue since it isn't traditionally integrated into the dominant left-right dimension of competition, and provokes pressures within the system (Van de Wardt et al., 2014, p. 987). Two types of wedge issues are possible. The first one is within different parties in government and causes an 'intracoalition competition'. The second one is between parties and their respective political platforms, causing 'intraparty competition'. Evidence shows that challenger parties rather than opposition parties are more likely to engage in wedge issue competition when the topic of European integration is involved (Van de Wardt et al., 2014, p. 996)

The literature on Europeanization does not help to understand the link between populism and European integration. Following this view, Europeanization is just the fusion of national elements and interests that are common enough to grant some unity and coherence. The mobilization of European issues resulted from similar national political situations pushing towards the same direction in a cumulative logic. In other words, “Europe is not considered as an explanatory variable for the rise of populist parties because domestic political fields remain the main level of analysis” (Dechezelles & Neumayer, 2010, p. 231). Even though the emergence of populism is not always and univocally related to European integration, connecting populist movements to Euroscepticism helps understand political extremism in the European Union. European integration shapes the party’s position at the national level. Claiming to be pro-EU, politicians portray themselves as legitimate, democratic, and opposed to a political counterpart seen as illegitimate and often populist. The Europeanization of political competition in European member states makes it easier to understand the relationship between populism and European integration (Dechezelles & Neumayer, 2010, pp. 232-233).

The growing pattern of contestation against further transnational integration in the European Union is shaped by anti-elite discourses and the domestic power and opposition mechanics. The European political arena has become a place where populist parties validate their positions and increase their relevance and authority at the national level. As Robert Harmsen (2010, p. 338) puts it: “the European arena has provided a perhaps somewhat paradoxical resource by allowing parties to define themselves in terms of both the alliances which they are willing to conclude – and even more those which they refuse to accept – in the formation of a parliamentary group”.

4.2. Politicizing and opposing European integration

The politicization of European integration has become a well-ingrained feature of national political conflict structures in different European regions. While differing in nature and often emerging on top of different context-specific issues, European integration has become more salient in Northern, Southern, and Eastern Europe. Eurosceptic leaders and parties consolidated their positions within national governing coalitions and started to affect transnational bargaining regarding major integrative steps (Kriesi, 2016).

Politicization can be defined as the “expansion of the scope of conflict within the political system” (Grande & Hutter, 2016, p. 7). An issue is politicized if a consistent number of actors, not only a minor portion of agents from the elites, raise the matter in the public opinion arena. This is to say that a careful analysis of politicization patterns should raise more attention toward all the players involved. Politicization is also a multi-dimensional phenomenon involving an increasing series of actors and expanding the degree of public debates. Moreover, it tackles three fundamental questions: (i) the scope of cooperation within the European Union and between member states; (ii) the expansion and enlargement of the political union

and the legitimacy of becoming a member; (iii) the ownership of central authority and institutional design. Depending on the intensity and extension of conflicts - the level of polarisation and the actors taking part - politicization assumes different forms, as shown in Figure 25 below.

		Extension of conflict: <i>Actor expansion</i>	
		Low	High
Intensity of conflict: <i>Polarisation</i>	Low	Low-intensity elite conflict (<i>type 1</i>)	Low-intensity mass conflict (<i>type 3</i>)
	High	High-intensity elite conflict (<i>type 2</i>)	High-intensity mass conflict (<i>type 4</i>)

Note: This typology refers only to constellations in which European integration is salient.

Figure 25: Explaining politicization (Hutter & Grande, 2016, p.11)

This paragraph discusses how and why challenger and Eurosceptic parties mobilize European integration. To do that, we further develop our discussion of the concept of Euroscepticism in Chapter 2, Paragraph 3.1.

Political opposition entails “a disagreement with the government or its policies, the political elite, or the political regime as a whole, expressed in public sphere, by an organized actor through different modes of action” (Brack & Weinblum, 2011, p. 74). Krowel & Abts (2007) proposed a typology of targets towards which to direct opposition at the European level. When opposing the European Union, one can point out discontent towards three main targets. The first is European authorities, meaning the political actors and authorities composing the European Union and involving the evaluation of their performance on specific issues and their reliability as a political class. Second, there is the European regime, or, European institutions such as the Commission, the Parliament, or the Council. In this case, the opposition is based on the evaluations of their performances in terms of the policy outcomes achieved on the one side, and on the fairness and equity of the system and its functioning on the other. Alongside these two dimensions of evaluation, opposition to the European regime is also driven by the ‘general practice of European integration’ and the degree of transnational cooperation and its consequences on the market and national identities. Where the evaluation depends on the level of attachment to the community and the citizens’ sense of belonging to either the idea or the principles and values of European integration, opposition is directed to the third target: the European political community (Krowel & Abts, 2007, p. 257).

	<i>Targets</i>	<i>Sub-targets</i>	<i>Criteria of evaluation</i>
European Union (specific support)	Authorities (actors)	Morals	Integrity of actors
		Actions	Competence of actors
	Regime (institutions)	Institutions	Responsiveness – Equity
		Performance	Output – Outcomes
		Practice of European integration	Widening – Deepening
European integration (diffuse support)	Community	Liberal-democratic society	European democracy
		European integration	National sovereignty
		European project	EU membership legitimacy

Figure 26: Typology of EU targets and their assessment criteria (Krowel & Abts, 2007, p. 256)

Thus, we can define political opposition to the European Union as (Carlotti, 2020, p. 35):

“A disagreement with the policies enacted by the EU, its political elite, the EU institutions and the political community as a whole alongside the various geometries deriving from the process of European integration, expressed in the public sphere, by an organized actor through different modes of action.”

Building on a benchmark theory of support and scepticism, De Vries (2018) refines the understanding of Euroscepticism. Following benchmark theory, people base their evaluation of the European Union on the level of benefit the status quo grants them when compared to an alternative state of affairs. The trade-off between the benefits associated with the status quo and the alternative state of affairs is called the EU differential. In other words, they assess whether moving from the existing situation to an alternative entails new gains or losing current benefits. The EU differential is the difference between the evaluations regarding the status quo and the evaluations regarding the alternative state. Support for the European Union occurs when the EU differential is positive, namely, when the degree of benefits associated with the evaluation of the status quo is higher than the degree of benefits associated with the evaluation of the alternative state, as shown in Figure 27. Symmetrically, EU scepticism occurs when the EU differential is negative, namely, when the degree of benefits associated with the evaluation of the status quo is lower than the degree of benefits associated with the evaluation of the alternative state, as shown in Figure 28 in the next page.

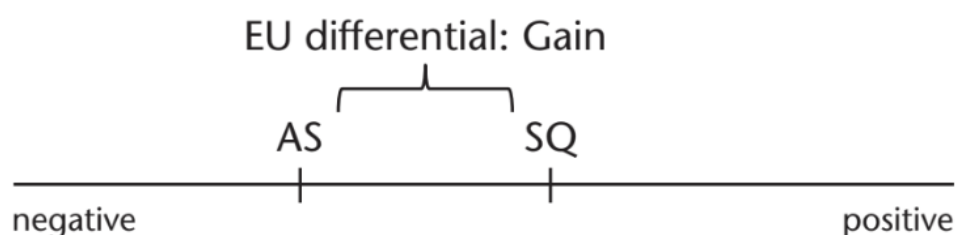


Figure 27: Representing EU support (De Vries, 2018, p. 38)

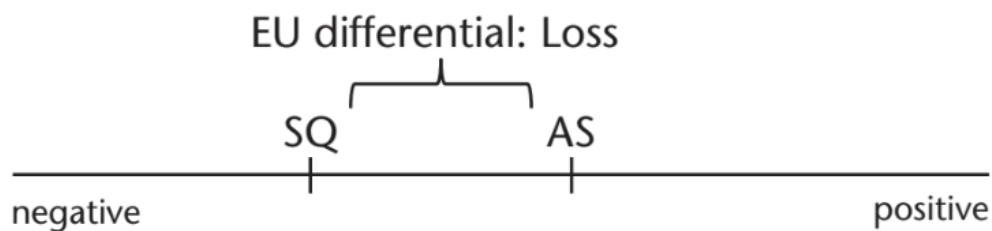


Figure 28: representing EU Scepticism (De Vries, 2018, p. 39)

There is evidence that the EU differential is influenced by a variety of factors. Most importantly, it increases when people receive positive news about Europe and decreases when they receive negative news about it. National events play an important role too. When confronted with positive national events, people's EU differential tends to diminish. Vice versa, when confronted with negative news about the current state of affairs of their nation, their EU differential increases accordingly (De Vries, 2018, p. 66).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
	<i>Positive/ national</i>	<i>Negative/ European</i>	<i>Negative/ national</i>	<i>Positive/ European</i>
Treatment effect	0.42* (0.20)	-0.72* (0.30)	-1.02* (0.54)	0.35* (0.16)
Individual level covariates	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fixed effects	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	733	277	668	678

Notes: Table entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. Individual level covariates included: age, gender, education, employment status, and income. * significant at a $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Sources: European Social Survey 2008, 2010, & 2012 respectively.

Figure 29: The effects of event type on the EU regime differential (De Vries, 2018, p. 63)

De Vries combines the EU regime differential with another subjective measure of one's perceived benefits: the EU policy differential. The latter measures the effect of policy performance and the related benefits perceived by citizens. Specifying between the EU regime differential and the EU policy differential clarifies the fact that people distinguish the regime from the policies it produces. It also helps to determine different types of Euroscepticism. A combination of negative EU regime and policy differential feeds into Exit-Scepticism, according to which people think they would be better off leaving the European Union due to a preferable alternative under the rule of their national states only. On the opposite side of the spectrum, one finds Loyal

Supporters combining positive EU regime and policy differentials. People belonging to this camp are convinced of receiving higher benefits being part of the EU vis-à-vis leaving the union. A third category is composed of Policy Sceptics, believing that past and current European policies could be heavily improved. Nonetheless, citizens belonging to this group do not think that leaving the European Union would be beneficial for them. They believe the union provides better institutional guarantees than the national states. Finally, Regime-Sceptics are convinced that the European Union's regime is not ideal compared to their countries. However, they are better off with transnational policies in terms of perceived benefits (De Vries, 2018, p. 79).

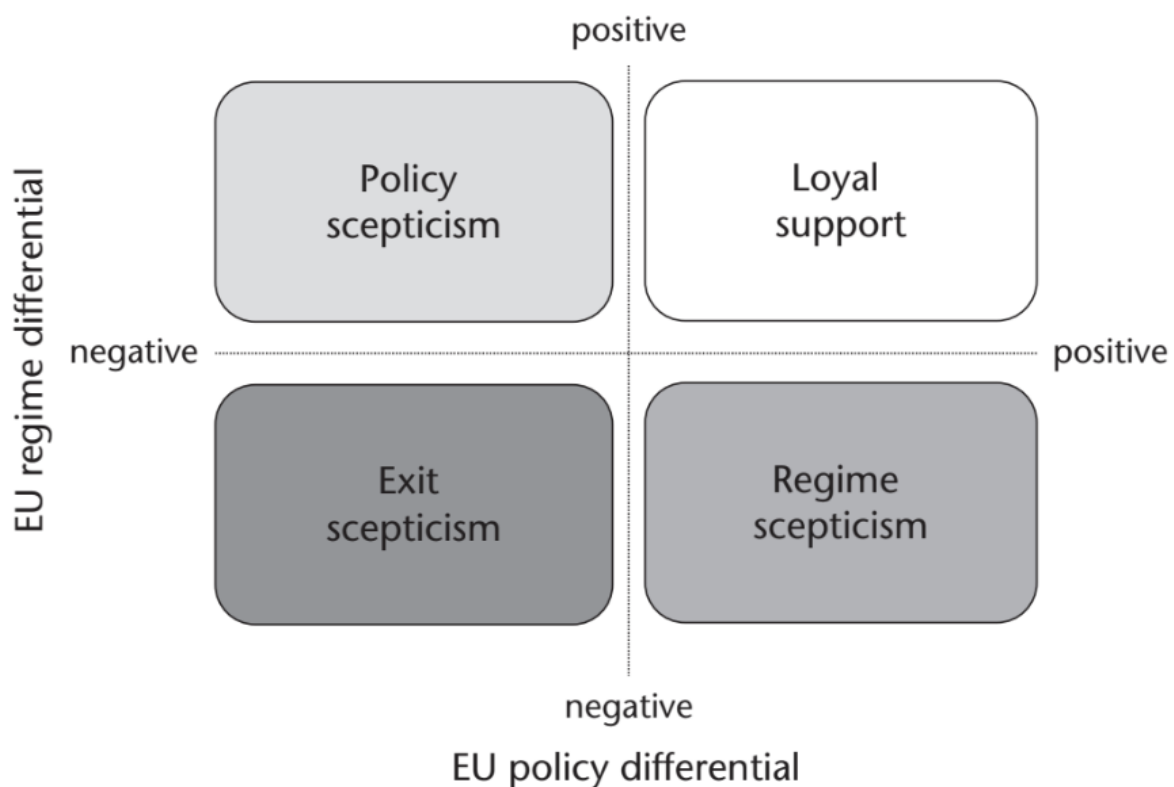


Figure 4.1. Four types of support and scepticism

Figure 30: Four types of support and scepticism concerning the EU (De Vries, 2018, p. 78)

How do parties and public opinions relate to the issue of European integration and develop Eurosceptic tendencies? European integration has been shaping the debate between and within national states, their elites, and their people. Becoming increasingly salient among political actors, the process of European integration expanded the visibility of European issues in public debates. Moreover, it fueled polarization within the European Union and its member states while also inflating the scope of actors involved in debates regarding European issues (Hutter & Grande, 2014). This amounts to European integration's increased saliency.

Parties decide to make European integration more or less salient in their platforms and political appeals depending on some aspects. Whitefield &

Rohrschneider (2015) found that European integration is more salient for parties holding distinctive positions on the matter. Moreover, they show that mainstream or incumbent parties in a governing position for a long period avoid attempts to make European integration salient. Contrary to that, and with a similar pattern in all European regions, extreme and more specifically challenger parties attempt to increase the issue saliency of European integration. Far-right parties are key drivers of polarization about European integration (Vasilopoulou, 2018, para. 3). Their Eurosceptic stances can be driven by anti-system and anti-liberal concerns, and their nature depends on the party's organizational model and electoral purposes. Moreover, their narratives against the European Union are deeply connected to domestic issues and the specific national context. To ensure the resonance of the European integration issue in their voters' minds, far-right Eurosceptic parties try to connect it to other national questions that are particularly relevant for their compatriots. Some scholars argued that parties face a politicization dilemma when they attempt to politicize European integration (Grande & Hutter, 2016, p. 19). Where European integration is articulated at the European level, the only actors involved in the political competition and conflict are intergovernmental agents and transnational elites. When the issue is pushed at the national level only, political competition is limited by domestic constraints. To overcome this stalemate situation, parties must properly mobilize European integration both at the national and European levels to effectively engage with transnational elites as well as public opinions. As we have seen, the evidence shows that challenger and Eurosceptic parties progressively pushed in this direction.

A specific element assimilating all parties opposing the European Union is their anti-elite target (Carlotti, 2020, para. 5). Independently from their ideological orientation, both left-wing and right-wing parties are generally critical of European elites. They blame the latter for their moral conduct and accuse them of collusion with financial powers or even corruption. Anti-EU establishment parties oppose the European elite on a principled basis. Nevertheless, not all of them reject the EU-regime and EU-community completely. Far-right parties distinguish themselves from left-wing parties for their 'tout court' rejection of the EU-political system. Differently, left-wing parties do not necessarily accompany their anti-establishment rhetoric with adversarial attitudes towards the EU-regime and the EU-community. Their criticism is directed at supranational institutions' erosion of member states' sovereignty and the disrespect for the principle of subsidiarity. In contrast to anti-EU forces, mainstream parties oppose the European Union on a pragmatic basis only, while exercising "a mainstream blame shifting vis-à-vis their political challenger" and building a pro-EU narrative and platform (Carlotti, 2020, p. 183).

<i>Parties' categorization</i>	<i>Parties' name</i>	
Anti-EU policy party	<i>Economy</i>	FN, LN, UKIP
	<i>Immigration, asylum and borders control</i>	AFD, FN, LN, UKIP, PODEMOS
	<i>Environmental protection</i>	–
Anti-EU-establishment party	FSM, PODEMOS ^a , LINKE, AFD, FSM, LN, UKIP	
Anti-EU-system party	AFD, FN, LN ^b , UKIP	
Anti-Euro party	FSM, PODEMOS ^a , LINKE, AFD, FSM, LN, UKIP	
Anti-Schengen-party	AFD, FN, LN, UKIP	

Figure 31: Categorization of the EU-opponents' stances towards the EU (Carlotti, 2020, p. 180)

The role of challenger parties and their employment of anti-establishment rhetoric underlines the role of populist narratives and stances in fueling Eurosceptic agendas. Populist actors not only fuel distrust and cynicism towards the European Union, but they actively drive against the system people's most negative and rejective attitudes. As a result, populism transfers political attitudes from one referent to another. For instance: (i) from a specific politician or group of politicians to the whole political establishment; (ii) from one particular institution to the whole institutional system or the wider political environment (Krowel & Abts, 2007, p. 264). These strategies are also facilitated by the reluctance of mainstream parties to engage and adopt populist platforms, even when confronted with previous electoral losses (Rooduijn et al., 2014).

4.3. Populist Euroscepticism and crisis-driven integration

Challenger populist parties engage the issue of European integration in a peculiar way. First, they build chains of equivalences by way of which they oppose 'the people' to 'European elites following a binary logic. Second, they legitimize the European Union and the integration process on moral grounds where the interests of corrupt elites are detrimental to other groups in society. Third, local economies and identities, being framed in idealistic and a-historical terms, are undermined by the European Union and its openness to globalization (Olivas Osuna, 2023, pp. 5-6). This is not to say all populist parties are Eurosceptic. At the level of parties populism and Euroscepticism are not univocally correlated. In a study mapping Eurosceptic stances among populist parties in Europe before the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic, Taggart & Pirro (2019, p. 290) find that soft-Euroscepticism is more prevalent than its hard version. This is consistent with other findings indicating that populist radical-right parties do not necessarily reject European integration in the first place. A negative reaction is detected when the countries' sovereignty is challenged. In such cases, the incentive of populist parties to frame the European integration issue as a key element of their political platform is higher (Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017).

The effects of crisis-led economic shocks are stronger for people directly affected by the crisis. There is evidence that those people tend to punish mainstream parties by changing their voting preferences towards challenger ones. In particular, people with feelings of distrust towards the European Union and migrants are more likely to change their vote and defect from mainstream parties, thus favoring challenger ones. A person supportive of economic redistribution is also more likely to change their voting preference analogously.

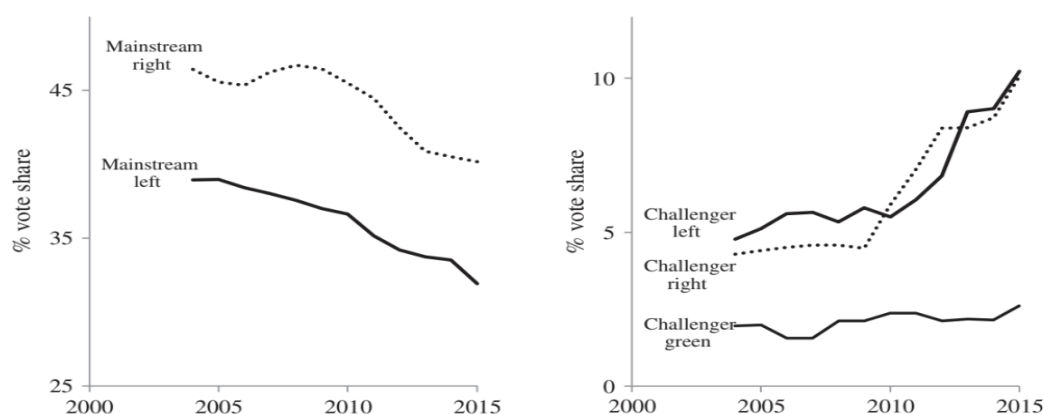


Figure 32: Mean vote shares in national general elections of different types of parties in Western Europe, 2004-2015 (Hobolt & Tilley, 2016, p. 5)

Multiple crisis scenarios transformed the issue of European integration into a decisive battlefield of political and ideological conflict in the European party system. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the growing significance of populist challenger parties on domestic and European political public debates increased the saliency and relevance of European integration (Pirro et al., 2018, p. 382). The European Union project is the perfect scapegoat to blame for negative events in populist narratives. From an economic perspective, European elites and bureaucracy are criticized for their inability to face the social consequences of their policies and accused of undermining the space for action of national states. From a native-identity perspective, populists accuse Brussels of discarding national and cultural differences and transferring democratic control away from national electorates. In addition, technocratic decision-making makes people perceive European elites as detached from ordinary life and distant from them. The populist backlash is best seen as the result of the perceived lack of output legitimacy of the European Union project and the integration process (Buti & Pichelmann, 2017, pp. 4-5).

An important specification is needed. Not every crisis is politicized by populist parties, and their specific position stance towards European integration varies depending on the nature of the event (Nelipa & Balinska, 2022). A study concerning the articulation of eurosceptic stances in the political platform of the Five Star Movement, a well-known Italian populist party, clarifies the strategic dimension of Euroscepticism. Rather than being a programmatic feature of its propaganda, a

negative position about the European Union seems to be a strategic attempt to channel popular disaffection and frustration to gain more power and political relevance (Franzosi et al., 2015, p. 122). Euroscepticism is not causing populism but provides a window of opportunity for populist leaders to increase their appeal and traction in the political arena. Furthermore, it affects the agenda of younger or rising centrist and liberal parties and pushes these formations to exploit citizens' anti-elitist and anti-European orientation. Put differently, European crises "act as a catalyzer mobilizing the political conflict potential that had been present in the societies" and pave the way for the emergence of new populist and eurosceptic actors (Kneuer, 2018, p. 31).

Different crises activate different political responses, depending on the policy heritage policy-making develops upon and the spatial distribution of preferences policy-makers need to engage with. Maria Ferrara & Kriesi (2022) offer a systematic typology of crisis-led decision-making actions, that can be identified depending on the nature of the shock (symmetric/asymmetric) and the level of competence (high/low) of supranational institutions in the policy domain affected by the crisis pressures.

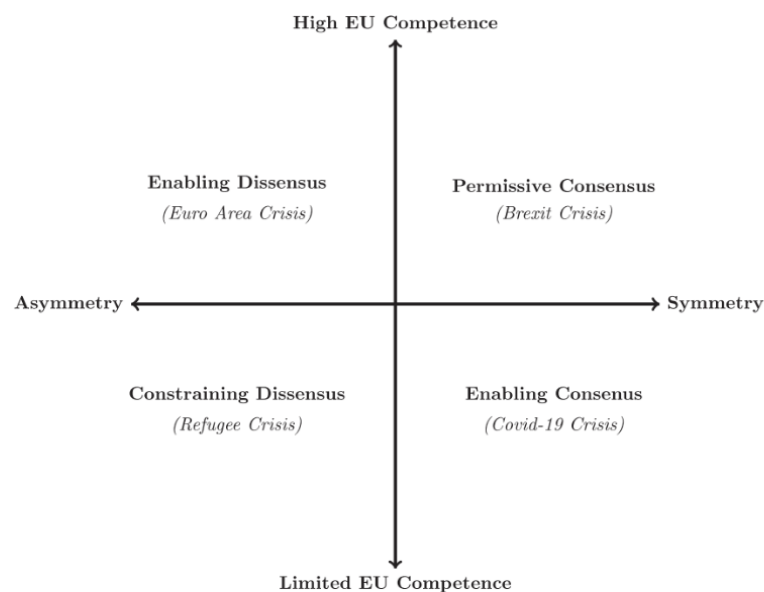


Figure 2. A Typology of Crisis Decision-Making Scenarios.

Figure 33: Typology of crisis decision-making scenarios (Maria Ferrara & Kriesi, 2022, p. 1362)

According to this conceptualization, the Euro-crisis is a situation where asymmetrical pressures were coupled with a high policy-domain competence of the European Union. In this case, one would expect a neofunctionalist response and a spillover effect in the fiscal domain driven by European actors and institutions (Maria Ferrara & Kriesi, 2022, p. 1364). As shown in Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.2.2, this was indeed

the case (Nicoli, 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic is better understood as a situation where symmetrical pressures were coupled with a low policy-domain competence of the European Union. In such a context, one would expect intergovernmental bargaining activities to play a more prominent role compared to neofunctional spillover actions (Maria Ferrara & Kriesi, 2022, p. 1367). Again, Chapter 1, Paragraph 1.2.2. confirms the assumption and documents a pattern of general build-up (Brooks et al., 2023).

Theories of European integration broaden the understanding and interpretation of the Euro-crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Schimmelfenning (2015) argues that postfunctionalist expectations do not easily apply to the European economic crisis. Despite rising levels of politicization and asymmetric effects of austerity measures on member country and their citizens, the European Union and its elites followed the reconstruction of the European Monetary Union (EMU) implementing a joint and supranational (mostly technocratic) policy-making agenda. His argument lies on the assumption that “governments have been able to shield Eurozone integration from the impact of politicization by forming euro-compatible governments, avoiding and constraining referendums on institutional reform and by delegating competencies to supranational organizations” (Schimmelfenning, 2015, p. 3). During the Coronavirus crisis, security concerns favored a contraction of the functional scale of governance and relegated demands for efficiency from the supranational level to the sub-national one. Even if present, neofunctionalist pressures were not as high as in the case of the Euro-crisis. At the same time, the expansion of the scope of community, driven by a shared sense of solidarity among the European public, prevented the politicization of European integration. For these reasons, the postfunctionalist prediction of increasing polarization within the European Union and between member states and public opinions in the aftermath of the crisis seems not to be confirmed (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2021, pp. 365-366).

Postfunctionalism better applies to non-crisis or post-crisis scenarios, as we discussed throughout this work. Depolarizing attempts, transnational joint actions, and the delegation and/or transfer of power at the supranational level pursued by European and national elites when faced with a current crisis likely inflate the saliency and politicization of European integration. That way, it also creates a favorable environment for populist Euroscepticism to flourish and grow in the party system and among the electorates (Borzel & Risse, 2017). The Schengen crisis is a good case of postfunctionalist integration and the emergence of a ‘constraining normative dissensus’ in the European Union regarding the management of (illegal) migration. During this period, national identities, narratives, and experiences were the main sources of normativity in member states’ justification of their actions regarding the resolution’s problem. Put differently, the populist and Eurosceptic politicization of national and exclusive identities undermined the European Union’s legitimacy as the key player in administering the emergency (Bachleitner & Betts, 2024). The results of the 2024 European parliamentary elections and the large and heightened share of votes for populist parties, coupled with their sustained

mobilization of Eurosceptic agendas seem to confirm similar effects in the post-pandemic context (Ivaldi & Zankina, 2024).

Chapter 5

5. Methodology and data

5.1. Data sources and collection

Aiming for consistency, the employed data for the statistical analysis are all taken from multiple Eurobarometer sources: a collection of cross-country public opinion surveys conducted regularly on behalf of the EU Institutions since 1974. The analysis focuses on six different Eurobarometers. Since the investigation centers on the impact of two crises on European political attitudes, the sources are divided into two groups.

To explore the Euro-crisis, Eurobarometer 72.4, Eurobarometer 76.3, and Eurobarometer 82.3 are considered. The first refers to the pre-crisis period and contains data collected between October and November 2009. The second refers to the crisis breakout period and incorporates data collected in November 2011. The third one refers to the post-crisis period and contains data collected in November 2014.

To account for the Covid-19 pandemic, Eurobarometer 92.3, Eurobarometer 93.1, and Eurobarometer 96.3 are considered. The first refers to the pre-crisis period and contains data collected between November and December 2019. The second refers to the crisis breakout period and incorporates data collected between July and August 2020. The third one refers to the post-crisis period and contains data collected between January and February 2022.

The variables chosen to catch populist attitudes are: trust in (i) political parties (ii) national legal system/justice, (iii) public administration, (iv) regional or local public authorities, (v) media press, and (vi) national government. The variables to catch eurosceptic attitudes are: trust in (i) the European Parliament, (ii) the European Commission, (iii) the European Central Bank, and (iv) the European Council. No use has been made of the variable identifying trust in the national parliament as a measure of populism because of the likely positive spillover effects between national and transnational institutions detected in the literature, possibly confounding my analysis and influencing the significance of the results (Dominioni et al., 2020).

To run the linear regression analysis on the STATA statistical analysis software, all the variables are re-coded with different, coherent, and consistent labels, thus changing the original ones one can find in the surveys. The following list enumerates all the labels used to proxy populism and Euroscepticism. As you can see, two additional dummy variables are created: `avg_populism` and `avg_euroscepticism`. They are the mean scores of all the other variables identifying populist and Eurosceptic tendencies.

- Trust in political parties: *trust_parties*
- Trust in justice: *trust_justice*
- Trust in public administration: *trust_pubadm*
- Trust in local/regional authorities: *trust_regauthorities*
- Trust media: *trust_media*
- Trust in national government: *trust_natgovernment*
- Average populism score: *avg_populism*
- Trust European Union: *trust_eu*
- Trust European Council: *trust_council*
- Trust European Central Bank: *trust_ecb*
- Trust European Parliament: *trust_euparliament*
- Average Euroscepticism score: *avg_euroscepticism*

After that, all the potential control variables are defined, which you can find below:

- Nationality: *region*
- Age: *age_group*
- Education: *edu_group*
- Income: *income*
- Gender: *gender*
- Political orientation: *left_right*
- Social class: *social_class*

Moreover, two additional dummy variables respectively indicating the year of the dataset and whether the dataset refers to a crisis or non-crisis scenario are created:

- *year_data*
- *crisis*

Finally, the six datasets are merged together with the *append* STATA command.

After that, some useful additional dummy variables are created too, often just re-coding variables already present in the dataset. The variable *region* is re-coded to create a dummy variable specifying different geographical areas within the European continent. This way, the variable *region* is a categorical variable comprising six different categories - corresponding to a numerical value ranging from 1 to 6. The first category, *eu_countries*, refers to all European member countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. The second category, *eurozone_members*, refers to the 20 countries participating in the common market: Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania,

Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Spain. The third category, *eu_south*, refers to southern European countries: Malta, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Cyprus, and Greece. The fourth category, *eu_north*, refers to northern European countries: Denmark, Finland, Norway, Iceland, Lithuania, Latvia, and Sweden. Even if not a member, this category comprehends Norway due to its similarities with other northern countries. The fifth category, *eu_cee*, refers to Central and Eastern European countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. The sixth category, *eu_west*, refers to Western European countries: Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, The Netherlands, Luxembourg, and Ireland.

After creating the dummy variable *age_group*, its labels are re-defined for them to indicate specific age groups: 1) students, indicating people of age between 15 and 24 years old; 2) young workers, indicating people of age between 25 and 34 years old; 3) adults, indicating people of age between 35 and 44 years old; 5) old workers, indicating people of age between 55 and 64 years old; 6) retired people, indicating people of age above 65 years old.

A similar thing is made with the variable indicating people's educational levels with respect to their last year of formal education. The dummy variable *edu_group* is created and divided into eight groups: 1) primary education: people completing their formal education between 3 and 13 years old; 2) early dropouts: people completing their formal education between 14 and 16 years old; 3) high school diploma: people completing their formal education between 17 and 18 years old; 4) bachelor's degree: people completing their formal education between 19 and 22 years old; 5) master's degree: people completing their formal education between 23 and 25 years old; 6) PhD: people completing their formal education between 26 and 96 years old; 7) people still studying at the time of the interview; 8) people with no full-time education.

5.2. Empirical model and case selection

Recall that hypothesis one expects that (H1): *Populism has a stronger effect on Euroscepticism during non-crisis scenarios vis-à-vis crisis scenarios*. To check this prediction, the following ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression model is built:

- Model 1

$$\text{avg_euroscepticism} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{avg_populism} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{crisis} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{avg_populism} \cdot \text{crisis}) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{region} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{age_group} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{edu_group} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{gender} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{left_right} + \beta_9 \cdot \text{social_class} + \beta_{10} \cdot \text{income} + \varepsilon$$

Where: avg_euroscepticism is the dependent variable; avg_populism is the main independent variable; crisis is a dummy binary/categorical variable;

avg_populism##crisis is the interaction term measuring the average effects of avg_populism on avg_euroscepticism; region, age group, education group, and gender are exogenous categorical control variables; left-right, social class, and income are endogenous categorical control variables represented; ϵ is the error term.

Recall that hypothesis two expects that (H2): *Populism has a weaker impact on Euroscepticism during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the Euro-crisis*. To check for this prediction, the following ordinary least square (OLS) linear regression models are built:

- Model (2a), accounting for the period preceding, coinciding, and succeeding the Euro-crisis emergency

$$\text{avg_euroscepticism} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{avg_populism} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{crisis} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{avg_populism} \# \# \text{crisis}) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{region} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{age_group} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{edu_group} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{gender} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{left_right} + \beta_9 \cdot \text{social_class} + \beta_{10} \cdot \text{income} + \epsilon, \text{ for year_data} < 2019$$

Where: avg_euroscepticism is the dependent variable; avg_populism is the main independent variable; crisis is a dummy binary/categorical variable; avg_populism##crisis is the interaction term measuring the average effects of avg_populism on avg_euroscepticism; region, age group, education group, and gender are exogenous categorical control variables; left-right, social class, and income are endogenous categorical control variables represented; ϵ is the error term; for year_data is the timeframe-specific distinction to tackle the crisis of interest.

- Model (2b), accounting for the period preceding, coinciding, and succeeding the Covid-19 pandemic

$$\text{avg_euroscepticism} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{avg_populism} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{crisis} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{avg_populism} \# \# \text{crisis}) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{region} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{age_group} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{edu_group} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{gender} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{left_right} + \beta_9 \cdot \text{social_class} + \beta_{10} \cdot \text{income} + \epsilon, \text{ for year_data} > 2018$$

Where: avg_euroscepticism is the dependent variable; avg_populism is the main independent variable; crisis is a dummy binary/categorical variable; avg_populism##crisis is the interaction term measuring the average effects of avg_populism on avg_euroscepticism; region, age group, education group, and gender are exogenous categorical control variables; left-right, social class, and income are endogenous categorical control variables represented; ϵ is the error term; for year_data is the timeframe-specific distinction to tackle the crisis of interest.

Since this project aims to explore the effects of multiple crises on the interplay between Euroscepticism and populism, the case selection does not specify a particular region of the European continent or a specific set of countries. Instead, the

analysis takes into consideration all 27 European member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. Nevertheless, the variable accounting for European countries (*region*) is coded in such a way as to differentiate between different geographical areas within the continent: Northern Europe, Western Europe, Southern Europe, Central, and Eastern Europe; and also the European Community as a whole, plus the Eurozone community.

Chapter 6

6. Results and analysis

Table 1 presents the results of Model 1. The first column outlines the results of the baseline model, where all control variables have been left out. The equation concerning this variant of the model is: $\text{avg_euroscepticism} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{avg_populism} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{crisis} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{avg_populism} \cdot \text{crisis}) + \varepsilon$. The results are significant at the 1% (0.01) for all key coefficients. Overall, a positive and strong correlation between populism and Euroscepticism is evident. As coefficient β_1 shows, a one-unit increase in populism is associated with a 0.694 - almost 70 percentage point - unit increase in Euroscepticism. This proves the interdependency of the two phenomena in contemporary European politics. The β_3 coefficient referring to the interaction term between Euroscepticism and crisis scenarios is the key component of interest to the analysis. The coefficient is highly significant and has a negative sign, meaning that the average marginal effects of populism on Euroscepticism are significantly lower during periods of crisis. In particular, the influence of populism on Euroscepticism is 2.56 percentage points lower during periods of crisis compared to non-crisis ones. Those results confirm my first hypothesis (H1): *Populism has a stronger effect on Euroscepticism during non-crisis scenarios vis-à-vis crisis scenarios*. Corroborating neofunctionalist expectations, Euroscepticism is less impacted by populist narratives and agendas when people are confronted with exogenous shocks. Positive spillover effects likely mitigate the effects of challenger political platforms and beliefs and bring people closer together at the European level.

Table 1: Impact of populism on Euroscepticism in crisis and non-crisis contexts

Model 1	Baseline model	Exogenous factors	Additional controls	Endogenous factors
	1	2	3	4
Variables	Euroscepticism	Euroscepticism	Euroscepticism	Euroscepticism
Populism	0.694*** (0.00425)	0.718*** (0.00435)	0.680*** (0.00468)	0.637*** (0.00489)
Crisis	0.0629*** (0.0117)	0.0508*** (0.0119)	0.0424*** (0.0123)	0.0339** (0.0149)
Interaction crisis	-0.0256*** (0.00723)	-0.0154** (0.00741)	-0.0132* (0.00767)	0.00874 (0.00934)

EU south	0.00859 (0.00540)	-0.0193*** (0.00569)	-0.0249*** (0.00626)
EU north	0.0114** (0.00518)	0.0323*** (0.00569)	0.0373*** (0.00624)
EU cee	-0.0481*** (0.00476)	-0.0481*** (0.00507)	-0.0395*** (0.00557)
EU west	0.0719*** (0.00475)	0.0701*** (0.00512)	0.0808*** (0.00561)
25-34 yrs old	0.00630 (0.00542)	-0.00181 (0.00682)	-0.00720 (0.00770)
35-44 years old	0.0287*** (0.00523)	0.0140** (0.00685)	0.0106 (0.00772)
45-54 yrs old	0.0439*** (0.00519)	0.0193*** (0.00682)	0.0126* (0.00768)
55-64 yrs old	0.0678*** (0.00520)	0.0290*** (0.00690)	0.0174** (0.00774)
older than 65	0.119*** (0.00509)	0.0385*** (0.00703)	0.0281*** (0.00784)
early dropouts		-0.0117 (0.00864)	-0.00906 (0.00990)
high school diploma		-0.0755*** (0.00843)	-0.0704*** (0.00968)
bachelor's		-0.114*** (0.00848)	-0.0992*** (0.00977)
master's		-0.157*** (0.00880)	-0.130*** (0.0101)
PhD		-0.131*** (0.00927)	-0.103*** (0.0106)

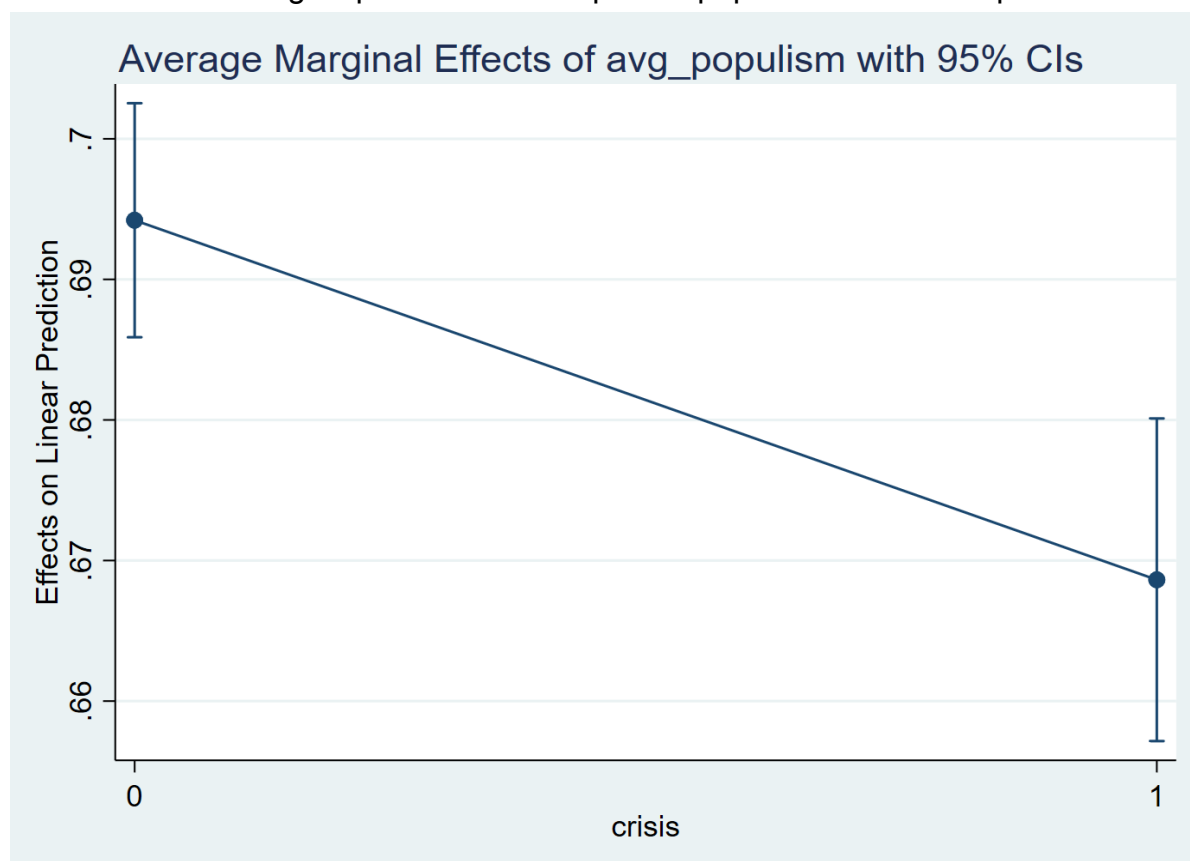
Female	0.0353***	0.0277***	0.0216***
	(0.00257)	(0.00267)	(0.00295)
Left-wing			-0.000840
			(0.0102)
Center-left			-0.00564
			(0.00755)
Center-right			-0.0203**
			(0.00812)
Right-wing			-0.0224**
			(0.0111)
Extreme right			-0.0249**
			(0.00991)
Working class			-0.0366***
			(0.00531)
Lower middle class			-0.0868***
			(0.00433)
Middle class			-0.142***
			(0.00602)
Upper middle class			-0.219***
			(0.00734)
Good income		-0.00326	-0.0140***
		(0.00380)	(0.00415)
Low income		0.0455***	0.0306***
		(0.00470)	(0.00525)
Bad income		0.0785***	0.0582***
		(0.00571)	(0.00658)
Constant	0.444***	0.319***	0.485***
	(0.00678)	(0.00902)	(0.0134)
			(0.0168)

Observations	134,751	128,798	118,364	100,434
R-squared	0.224	0.240	0.259	0.280

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 2: Margins plot about the impact of populism on Euroscepticism



As shown in Table 2 above, the average marginal effects of populism on Euroscepticism differs in a crisis context compared to a non-crisis one. The impact is lower by about 3 percentage points during a crisis when compared to non-crisis periods. In the latter case, a one-unit increase in populism is correlated to an increment of almost 70 percentage points (0.694) in Euroscepticism. In the former case, a one-unit increase in populism is correlated to an increment of almost 67 percentage points in Euroscepticism (0.6684). There is a significant but not extremely big difference in the influence of populism on Euroscepticism in crisis and non-crisis scenarios. While populist beliefs are still mobilizing Eurosceptic sentiments in crisis scenarios, their impact is significantly less powerful in such contexts when compared to periods of 'normalcy'.

An important specification is worth noticing. The analysis has been expanded to control for confounding factors. Column 2 of Table 1 presents the results of an extended version of the baseline model, introducing exogenous factors such as geography, age, and gender. The equation with exogenous factors is:

$$\text{avg_euroscepticism} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{avg_populism} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{crisis} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{avg_populism} \times \text{crisis}) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{region} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{age_group} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{edu_group} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{gender} + \varepsilon.$$

As you can notice, controlling for exogenous elements does not change the validity of the results. The coefficients, especially the interaction term $\text{avg_populism} \times \text{crisis}$, still present a high significance - at the 1 (0.01) or 5 (0.05) percentage levels respectively. When you add additional endogenous controls like education, political orientation, social status, and income, results are not significant anymore, and the interaction term does not prove useful. This is so because endogenous factors can be potentially highly correlated or overlapping with specific political attitudes, and so relevant latent drivers of either Euroscepticism or populism. For the sake of clarity, the model with all the additional control variables would be the following:

$$\text{avg_euroscepticism} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \cdot \text{avg_populism} + \beta_2 \cdot \text{crisis} + \beta_3 \cdot (\text{avg_populism} \times \text{crisis}) + \beta_4 \cdot \text{region} + \beta_5 \cdot \text{age_group} + \beta_6 \cdot \text{edu_group} + \beta_7 \cdot \text{gender} + \beta_8 \cdot \text{left_right} + \beta_9 \cdot \text{social_class} + \beta_{10} \cdot \text{income} + \varepsilon.$$

Turning to the second part of the analysis, Table 3 presents the results regarding Model 2. Columns one, two, and three outline the coefficients resulting from Model 2a, identifying the years of the Euro-crisis. Columns four, five, and six outline the coefficients resulting from Model 2b, indicating the years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Specific attention is needed regarding columns one and four, where the results of the baseline models are shown. In this case, we are mostly concerned with the coefficients displaying the results of the interaction term between populism and crisis ($\text{avg_populism} \times \text{crisis}$). The baseline model in Column 1 regarding the effects of populism on Euroscepticism during the Euro-crisis indicates a positive and statistically significant coefficient (0.0307 at $p < 0.01$), showing that the crisis amplified the impact of populism on Euroscepticism by about 3 percentage points. On the contrary, the baseline model in Column 4 regarding the effects of populism on Euroscepticism during the Covid-19 pandemic indicates a negative and statistically significant coefficient (-0.0293 at $p < 0.01$), showing that the crisis weakened the impact of populism on Euroscepticism by about 3 percentage points as well.

The evidence presented in Table 3 corroborates hypothesis two (H2): *Populism has a weaker impact on Euroscepticism during the Covid-19 pandemic compared to the Euro-crisis*. Populist narratives hold a stronger mobilization power during asymmetric shocks vis-à-vis symmetric ones - the Euro-crisis and the Covid-19 pandemic respectively. In addition, similarly to Model 1, expanded versions of the model controlling for additional factors have been checked for, showing that endogenous elements lower the significance of results when compared to the effects of exogenous aspects.

Table 3: Impact of populism on Euroscepticism during the Euro-crisis and Covid-19

Model 2	Baseline model	Exogenous factors	Endogenous factors	Baseline model	Exogenous factors	Endogenous factors
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Variables	Euro scepticism	Euro scepticism	Euro scepticism	Euro scepticism	Euro scepticism	Euro scepticism
Populism	0.674*** (0.00526)	0.700*** (0.00541)	0.627*** (0.00684)	0.703*** (0.00562)	0.722*** (0.00570)	0.640*** (0.00603)
Crisis period	0.00687 (0.0142)	-0.00787 (0.0144)		0.0515*** (0.0159)	0.0364** (0.0159)	0.0143 (0.0158)
Interaction with crisis	0.0307*** (0.00873)	0.0375*** (0.00899)		-0.0293*** (0.00998)	-0.0164 (0.00997)	0.00340 (0.00991)
EU south		-0.0152** (0.00711)	-0.0251** (0.0108)		0.0165** (0.00745)	-0.0231*** (0.00736)
EU north		-0.0226*** (0.00693)	0.0107 (0.0108)		0.0259*** (0.00709)	0.0499*** (0.00735)
EU cee		-0.0854*** (0.00647)	-0.0910*** (0.00998)		-0.0289*** (0.00653)	-0.0241*** (0.00651)
EU west		0.0639*** (0.00641)	0.0683*** (0.00995)		0.0741*** (0.00652)	0.0859*** (0.00659)
25-34 years old		0.0312*** (0.00660)	0.00449 (0.0118)		-0.0102 (0.00789)	-0.00807 (0.00947)
35-44 years old		0.0518*** (0.00639)	0.0251** (0.0118)		0.0104 (0.00757)	0.00742 (0.00948)
45-54 years old		0.0609*** (0.00640)	0.0139 (0.0119)		0.0262*** (0.00746)	0.0132 (0.00942)

55-64 years old	0.0658*** (0.00642)	0.00871 (0.0121)	0.0559*** (0.00742)	0.0178* (0.00943)
Older than 65	0.0738*** (0.00620)	0.0109 (0.0124)	0.114*** (0.00722)	0.0266*** (0.00948)
Early dropouts		0.0426*** (0.0143)		-0.0269** (0.0121)
High school diploma		-0.00692 (0.0142)		-0.0994*** (0.0118)
Bachelor's		-0.0371*** (0.0144)		-0.132*** (0.0119)
Master's		-0.0529*** (0.0151)		-0.171*** (0.0123)
PhD		-0.0111 (0.0160)		-0.148*** (0.0129)
Female	0.0160*** (0.00331)	0.00123 (0.00470)	0.0397*** (0.00355)	0.0258*** (0.00353)
Left-wing		-0.00585 (0.0157)		-0.00370 (0.0127)
Center-left		-0.0619*** (0.0110)		0.00878 (0.00959)
Center-right		-0.0700*** (0.0120)		-0.00966 (0.0103)
Right-wing		-0.0829*** (0.0174)		-0.00813 (0.0137)
Extreme right		-0.0818*** (0.0142)		-0.00273 (0.0126)

Working class			-0.0142			-0.0390***
			(0.0101)			(0.00599)
Lower middle class			-0.0551***			-0.0888***
			(0.00805)			(0.00492)
Middle class			-0.138***			-0.114***
			(0.00988)			(0.00735)
Upper middle class			-0.134***			-0.142***
			(0.00937)			(0.0180)
Good income			-0.0211***			-0.00732
			(0.00656)			(0.00503)
Low income			0.0320***			0.0400***
			(0.00819)			(0.00644)
Bad income			0.0625***			0.0800***
			(0.00994)			(0.00842)
Constant	0.367***	0.270***	0.581***	0.500***	0.378***	0.678***
	(0.00822)	(0.0112)	(0.0252)	(0.00904)	(0.0123)	(0.0205)
Observations	54,007	49,064	22,734	80,744	79,734	77,7
R-squared	0.277	0.300	0.319	0.217	0.229	0.264

Note: robust standard errors in parentheses

*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Besides the main purpose of this work, supplementary interesting insights are worth briefly discussing. Euroscepticism varies by region and cuts across the European continent. Table 1 and 3 presents a juxtaposition between Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe on the one hand, and Northern and Western Europe on the other. While Northern and Western Europeans tend to be more Eurosceptic, Southern Central and Eastern Europeans are slightly less so compared to the reference category - European member countries as a whole. The evidence is nevertheless mixed. Southern Europe is not consistently less Eurosceptic over time, and

differences between the Euro-crisis years and the Covid-19 ones are evident. Apparently, the health emergency impacted more than the sovereign debt critical situation on the levels of Euroscepticism in Northern and Western Europe, fueling such sentiments post-2019. On the other side, Central and Eastern Europe presents a stable pattern of reduced Euroscepticism over time.

Results related to age are less controversial. Both Table 1 and Table 3 show increasing levels of Euroscepticism as age increases. Older groups are progressively more eurosceptic than younger generations. The inverse happens with education, the more a person's educational level the less likely to display Eurosceptic attitudes, with much stronger effects in the Covid-19 reference period. Similar patterns are found concerning the self-perceived social status of citizens. A higher socioeconomic status correlates with greater trust in the European Union and its related institutions. These effects are also consistent with income. People reporting greater satisfaction with their income and degree of financial availability tend to hold pro-European attitudes compared to people with financial distress. Even though Table 1 offers evidence of decreasing Euroscepticism the further one moves away from leftist political orientations and positions oneself towards a center-right or right-wing stance, coefficients relating to political orientation are not organically significant across tables, especially in Table 3.

This study has some potential limitations too. A key problem could be the measure of populism used in the analysis. To proxy for populist attitudes, an average measure of trust in some institutions has been built. As we have seen in Chapter 5, paragraph 5.2., populism comprises trust in the following institutions: political parties, the justice system, public administration, regional and local authorities, written press, and national government. Scholars in the literature showed that a meaningful measure of populism involves other political beliefs and behavioral aspects (Akkerman et al., 2014; Van Hauwert et al., 2020). In particular, the employed measure of populism doesn't take into account the Manichean vision of society that populist voters generally hold, sharply dividing between evil elites and the will of the pure people. Furthermore, the current study also excludes the populist preference for a plebiscitary-based type of leadership and decisive political actions and the opposition to technocratic decision-making.

A critical note about the simplistic nature of the employed measure of Euroscepticism could also be advanced. Chapter 2 and Chapter 4 discussed the multifaceted nature of Euroscepticism, presenting a variety of approaches operationalizing the term in multiple and diverse ways. On the contrary, the current empirical framework conceives Euroscepticism as 'just' an average measure of trust in key European institutions. On top of that, one might argue that the present setting lacks analytical sophistication.

Summary and conclusions

The thesis focuses on the role of crises in the interplay of populism and Euroscepticism and its significance for the European integration process. After introducing the main determinants of support for the European Union the framework of the analysis is presented. According to neofunctionalism, the first hypothesis is expecting populism to have a weaker mobilizing effect on Euroscepticism during periods of exogenous shocks, such as the Euro-crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The idea behind this is that external shocks mitigate the influence of challenger and anti-establishment rhetoric, lowering the saliency and significance of economic and identitarian concerns while temporarily pausing oppositional stances against transnational integration predicted by postfunctionalism. Moreover, a second hypothesis seeks to differentiate between symmetric and asymmetric crises and check whether the effects of populist agendas on eurosceptic attitudes increase or diminish according to the nature of the shock in question.

The central part of the study is dedicated to a detailed discussion of the two main phenomena. Chapter 2 introduces the concept of Euroscepticism, exploring its origin and different ways to frame the term in the contemporary European context. After discussing the key problems concerning the European integration project, such as the lack of functional and output legitimacy of European institutions and the democratic deficit undermining transnational governance, the section outlines two main grand theories of European integration. Neofunctionalism is the first theory taken into account. Its framework helps to understand the process of transnational integration and the development of spillover effects between different policy domains, thus bringing people closer together as integration increases. What is crucial for neofunctionalist theorists is the role played by crisis in promoting positive integrative actions at the European level, forging an ethos of togetherness between national political elites and public opinions. Postfunctionalism is the second theory considered. Expanding the neofunctionalist framework, postfunctionalism postulates the emergence of a 'constraining dissensus' regarding European integration. This is seen as a consequence of the increased saliency of negative economic and cultural outcomes related to the advancement of the European Union project. New movements start opposing mainstream and traditional parties and mobilize new groups cutting across a new set of societal cleavages.

Chapter 3 defines populism and its relationship with (liberal) democracy. It then proceeds with a discussion of three different approaches to the study of populist movements. The politico-strategic approach underlines the key role of crisis and widespread sentiments of dissatisfaction with the current status of democratic governance. Populist leaders thrive where democracy is weak and citizens feel alienated and distant from political elites, central institutions, and policy-making processes. The ideational approach clarifies the nature of populism and helps in understanding how the concept is a thin-centered ideology, and hence capable of intertwining with broader and more developed host ideologies in order to serve an

array of different purposes. The discursive approach sets the basis of the populist ideology. Following this framework, populism is a logic of articulation, and sometimes a political style, describing politics as divided into two camps, the corrupt elite and the pure people, struggling to gain recognition of their main interests. In other words, it is the attempt to restore democratic governance and impose the will of the people.

Chapter 4 connects populism and Euroscepticism within the development of European integration and European politics in the early decades of the 21st century. It shows how populist entrepreneurs channel and fuel political dissatisfaction and pit public opinions against European elites. It presents a refinement of the concept of Euroscepticism and explains how the politicization of European integration takes place and evolves. To conclude, it delves into the mechanics of populist eurosceptic mobilization and the rise of challenger parties displaying similar political platforms in the aftermath of recurrent crises.

The final part of the thesis offers an empirical test of the hypothesis formulated in Chapter 1, explaining the empirical strategy: the data employed and the construction of the linear regression models. The results confirm both hypotheses and the main expectations. First, the effect of populism on Euroscepticism is weaker during crisis scenarios compared to non-crisis ones. Second, the influence of populism on Euroscepticism is also weaker during symmetric shocks compared to asymmetric ones. The predictions of neofunctionalism and postfunctionalism are corroborated by these findings. During a crisis, people tend to get closer together as a result of the pressures exercised by the emergency, and populist narratives hold less mobilizing power on eurosceptic agendas. The overall levels of polarization concerning European integration are generally increasing, as populism and Euroscepticism have a positive relationship overall, irrespective of the context. Pro-European folks cannot count anymore on a 'permissive consensus' facilitating the advancement of transnational integration. They should more carefully consider citizens' economic and identitarian demands when designing new policies, to avoid a retrenchment from the European Union, undermining the functional and output legitimacy of its major institutions, and widening the democratic deficit.

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