

HOW ARE POPULISM AND EUROSCEPTICISM LINKED WITH LEFT AND RIGHT IDEOLOGIES? THE CASES OF FIDESZ AND PODEMOS

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Abstract. *With the rise of populism and Euroscepticism in the political arena of the European Union, studies have long pertained on the particular relationship between these two notions. Both of them have found place in left-wing and right-wing political parties, establishing themselves within the foundations of party programs. This study aims to understand the relationship populism and Euroscepticism build with both left and right ideologies. Previous literature demonstrates that these notions are instrumentalized for socio-economic purposes in the left, and socio-cultural purposes on the right. The study's goal is to verify this connection, through comparing two different case studies: the first from the right-wing political party Fidesz in Hungary, and the second from the left-wing political party Podemos in Spain, which both are described as populist and Eurosceptic. The study concludes in the verification of the claim aforementioned: Podemos focuses on socio-economic goals, while Fidesz in socio-cultural.*

Keywords: *populism, Euroscepticism, ideology, policy, socio-economic, socio-cultural, European Union*

Introduction

The rise of populism and Euroscepticism in the European Union (EU) has been a significant trend in recent years. Populist parties and movements have gained ground in many EU countries, challenging the traditional political establishment and promoting anti-EU rhetoric. Eurosceptic parties have also gained support by advocating for the withdrawal or reduction of their countries' involvement in the EU. Both notions can be found interlinked, used by political leaders, parties, interest groups and media outlets. While not all Eurosceptic parties are explicitly anti-EU, they often promote policies that are at odds with the EU's vision of greater integration and cooperation among member states.

The United Kingdom's decision to leave the EU in 2016 was a significant blow to the bloc and a victory for Eurosceptic forces. The referendum campaign was characterized by anti-EU rhetoric, with the Leave campaign arguing that the UK would be better off outside the EU (Kaeding, Pollak & Schmidt, 2021). In Italy, the populist

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Five Star Movement and the far-right League party formed a coalition government in 2018, which collapsed in 2019. Both parties campaigned on a Eurosceptic platform, calling for a renegotiation of Italy's relationship with the EU. The far-right National Front has gained ground in French politics in recent years, with leader Marine Le Pen advocating for a referendum on France's EU membership. In the 2017 presidential election, Le Pen received 33.9% of the vote in the second round, losing to Emmanuel Macron (Mudde, 2019). The Law and Justice party, led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland, has been in power since 2015 and has been accused of undermining the independence of the judiciary and the media. The party has also been critical of the EU, calling for a greater role for national governments (Mudde, 2019). Therefore, populism and Euroscepticism have become legitimate discourses in the Europeanization process.

The EU has taken several stances in order to oppose these growing tendencies. As the main concern is the lack of citizen participation, through creating initiatives that enhance citizen cooperation and communication with the EU Community, EU aims to further strengthen democracy and dialogue (Kaeding et al., 2021). Nevertheless, EU's stance on economy, inequality or migration has made populist and Eurosceptic parties grow further and become a halt in the integration process of member states.

Literature Review

In the light of recent events which have shaped the political face of Europe, two notions: populism and Euroscepticism go hand in hand. Often used simultaneously, these two concepts have found place in the concerns of European Union (EU) experts. Depending on the country, party route and context, both populism and Euroscepticism can be of use for parties with strong ideological profiles.

Taggart (1998, as cited in Fortunato & Pecoraro, 2022) defines Euroscepticism as a part of European integration, that is a qualified or unqualified opposition towards the process of integration itself. Such negative approach towards the European Union can be traced back in the 1980s when the Single European Act was fairly contested, however, particular events after the 1990s altered the magnitude of this approach, such as the entrance of Euro, the failure of the Constitutional Treaty and the enlargement of the EU both in 2004, to name a few (Brack & Startin, 2015: 240-242). Previously, a sense of Euroscepticism had been only peripheral. The approach has evolved to become more legitimate within the EU integration discourse: the elites, including political figures and parties of member states have opposed and showed hostility towards policies of the EU; interests groups, including civil society organizations have been influencing public opinion; media channels have been transmitting a new agenda. Euroscepticism has grown to become a natural approach, mostly of member states that are directly influenced by the EU decision making.

This approach can be found both in its soft and hard forms. The former is a lack of trust in the European institutions and a will to change certain EU policies from which member states do not benefit. The latter is a complete opposition towards the integration process; a will to withdraw from EU membership and a perception that the EU is unreformable. Euroscepticism has become both "increasingly complex and multifaceted" (Brack & Startin, 2015: 241), taking different forms, influencing decision making of states and most importantly, stagnating the integration process, aiming a regress.

The widely accepted definition of populism comes from Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) which depict society as formed by two main hegemonic and antagonistic groups: the pure people and the corrupt elite. Morality is an important aspect when portraying these two groups; if one takes a look at the adjectives used before the two words, they can realise that people are generally depicted as good, while the elite is bad. People hold the ultimate source of power, nevertheless the elite illegitimately holds and uses this power for its own self-interests, resulting in further betraying, damaging or even exploiting the people. As such, general will comes into play as another important aspect when analyzing populism. Rousseau (1764, as cited in Kaltwasser & Mudde, 2017) distinguished between the general will and the will of all, the former being the capacity of people to join together and legislate their common interest, and the latter being a simple temporary aristocratic form of power.

Both the people and the elite are used as notions which represent in themselves constructions. A construction can become of use for a variety of elements, depending on what the populist leader wants to achieve. People can either be the sovereign, the common people, or the nation; similarly, the elite can be illustrated by the political establishment, the incumbent party, the economic elite, the political elite or the media elite (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The populist leaders who serve as watchdogs and criticize the illegitimacy of the elite are not part of it, they portray a group of people who are willing to not only oppose, but also undermine the status quo. Therefore, anti-establishment populism, which falls under the category of hard populism, persists on the idea that the people are hard working victims of a state run by outsiders (the elite) which fulfill firstly and mostly their own interests, rather than the general will (Kyle & Gultchin, 2018, as cited in European Center for Populism Studies, n.d.).

Populism cannot exist on its own, for its fluid characteristics, which can be adopted to different ideologies. As it only teaches how the relationship between the elite and the people should be, and not how society can be run, it has to be combined with other concepts in order to thrive and find place within a discourse (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019: 11-13). What is another feature to be noted down is how populist leaders, which are usually charismatic figures, represent themselves as saviours of democracy. On the contrary, populism is often depicted as a challenger of democratic values, where populist leaders seek to mobilize the people for their own interest and power, becoming part of the elite themselves (Fortunato & Pecoraro, 2022).

As these two doctrines, populism and Euroscepticism, are usually found interlinked, it is natural for one to assume that there must be both differences and similarities between the two. A distinct difference is that populism is more abstract, whereas Euroscepticism is concrete (Fortunato & Pecoraro, 2022). Populism refers to the relationship of two constructions which are abstract and vast, and not to specific policy implementations. Euroscepticism on the other hand, refers to parties' attitudes towards the specific act of European integration, which involves a series of policies and decisions. Secondly, not all populist parties are Eurosceptic. Nationalist parties, such as those in Bulgaria and Slovakia are examples of this. The reasoning behind the absence of Euroscepticism can be found in the idea that populists perceive European integration to further help in deconstructing the elite, as their power would be delegated to the EU (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019: 15). Also, not all Eurosceptic parties are populist. The Conservative Party in UK, which led the Brexit process, did not have populist leaders (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019: 12).

Nevertheless, there are similarity points which have concluded in what is called populist Euroscepticism. Populists, similarly with the Eurosceptics, dislike the EU decision making process (Pirro & Taggart, 2018: 5-6). They believe the process to be opaque, most importantly not in line with the citizens' needs. Because it stands in the direct way of participation of citizens in politics, both parties convey a disbelief regarding the way EU handles crises and policies (Pirro & Taggart, 2018: 5). Most of EU officials are deemed to be technocrats, forming an elite with no connection to the people. Populists are knowing for not tolerating what they perceive of lack of transparency, and EU complex technicalities do not reduce this lack (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019: 30-35). The two notions do not always arise simultaneously, however over 75% of populist parties in EU also identify as Eurosceptic (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019: 37).

Therefore, one can also assume that populism and Euroscepticism find place usually in other ideologies. What is important to mention is how left and right parties use different frames to instrumentalize these concepts and harmonize them with the parties' goals and aims, and stance towards EU. Right-wing parties perceive the EU to be an organization which undermined national sovereignty, while left-wing parties believe it to be a neoliberal construct which raises inequality and poverty (Stollarz, 2021). Therefore, right-wing parties have the tendency to use populism and Euroscepticism for sociocultural purposes, while left-wing for socioeconomic purposes (Rooduijn & van Kessel, 2019: 4-7). For rightists, opening the borders, would bring a massive acceptable of globalization, which would threaten a state's homogeneity. For leftists, most of society gets exploited by the current economic system, in terms of welfare entitlement and working conditions. The study aims to verify this division between the left and the right, through solidifying it with the examples of Hungary and Spain. Fidesz, the incumbent party in Hungary is depicted as right-wing, populist and Eurosceptic, while Podemos in Spain, is depicted left-wing, populist and Eurosceptic as well.

Methodology

This study is a basic research with an exploratory nature, aiming at finding how two ideologies: populism and Euroscepticism are linked separately with the left and the right ideologies. As such deductive reasoning is used, through a top down approach, which analyzes how populism and Euroscepticism can be related by political parties with the socioeconomic claim of the left and sociocultural claim of the right. Two case studies are chosen to verify this relation: the first is case of the right-wing political party Fidesz in Hungary, and the second is the case of the left-wing political party Podemos in Spain. Qualitative method is applied. Sources of information are from secondary data: articles and books written by scholars, reports, news articles and official websites of both parties.

Findings

1. The case of Fidesz

The Hungarian Civic Alliance, or the Federation of Young Democrats, generally known as Fidesz, was established in 1988; its initial goals were a market economy and European Integration (Wallenfeldt, 2023). As Hungary at the time was under a communist regime, the party had anti-communist beliefs, aiming for a change in the status-quo. With the fall of communism in Hungary, Fidesz reached its peak in 1998, winning elections and occupying the government office through a coalition.

Orbán, its leader, became the prime minister. One of the main points of the party's political program was the austerity program: improving national economy, cutting taxes and social insurance fees, and aiming towards EU membership. The party won again in 2010, 2014, 2018 and 2022, currently serving as the incumbent party in government (Wallenfeldt, 2023).

Fidesz has a strong foundation of six main principles, which have been established on Hungarian values, history and psyche (Rajcsányi, n.d: 123-134). The government's role in maintaining society is strong and central, a role which has been established since the economic crisis of 2010. National sovereignty is upheld as the most important attribute which needs to be taken under consideration in policy making and implementation. As such, all policies maintain one main goal: the Hungarian interest. The middle class receives attention through tax benefits and family policy programmes. Despite the state's reduction on taxes for big companies, budgetary and fiscal policies are strict and tight, and the government does not favor foreign investment (Rajcsányi, n.d: 129). Most of economic policies follow a pattern against neoliberal tendencies, ensuring national sovereignty. International companies usually pay larger taxes than Hungarian firms. Orbán's views on property are protectionist (Stollarz, 2021). Lastly, policies become patriotic, nurturing Hungarian pride and history and focusing on securing Hungarian minorities abroad.

The party has been defined right-wing by general consensus, however in the previous years it managed to hold a moderately centric position through a populist discourse (TUIC Academy, 2021). Orbán recently considers himself to be right-wing, conservative and *nemzeti*, which according to Gati is defined as "not as provocative as a nationalist, but not as warm as patriotic" (Terzieva & Ostermann, 2011). His party supports a Christian democratic world-view, which further strengthens European identity. Through establishing strong Christian roots, the party also opposes any Marxist or progressive ideologies. As such, conservatism is a strong characteristic of Fidesz, nevertheless it has always been presented as not an elitist conservatism, further emphasizing populist tendencies (Rajcsányi, n.d: 124-126). A traditional view of family is continuously marketed, which makes Fidesz more appealing to the general public.

A significant event which marked the party's turn to populism were the 2002 elections. Fidezs lost against the slightly elitist liberal conservative bourgeoisie, which made Orbán turn to the people of the middle class, in order to gain more votes (Rajcsányi, n.d: 131). The leader is considered to have a strong presence in mass communication which he has embarked since the beginning of the decade.

The strong presence of nationalism in Fidesz policies and rhetoric is a strong indicator of populist tendencies. The state upholds national sovereignty while opposing external interference, therefore the EU Community is considered the elite, which is implementing policies, regulations and decisions that do not go hand in hand with the Hungarian social order and interest (Stollarz, 2021). This leaves space for Euroscepticism to rise and be instrumentalized.

The party has long permitted a culture of resentment, which populists intensify through using stereotypes from the past. In the name of Hungarian identity, many other identities become marked and therefore a threat to the people (Becker, 2010). 'Jews', 'gypsies' and 'communists' were identified as undesired groups; this was solidified in policies and a hate rhetoric. According to Becker (2010), Fidesz openly supported

Fascist-like media in the early 2000s; in one of the magazines, a doll wearing traditional Gypsy clothing was drawn hanging.

Anti-migration policies have been a strong part of Orbán's politics. Migrant waves from countries of the Middle East in 2015 and 2016 were strongly opposed by the leader, despite EU's external interference. Perhaps migration is the topic most right-wing populists agree. The party claims that multiculturalism does threaten Hungarian sovereignty and brings an increase in criminality and delinquency (Stollarz, 2021). Migration has been generally perceived as a "Muslim" threat, which threatens the country's cultural heritage. As Orbán perceives the nation to be based solely on ethnicity, any wave of foreigners or migrants cannot become part of it. Except for the populist approach which views the people as common, without any distinction and exposed to threats, this behavior could be partly explained through Hungary's homogeneity as a population over the decades (Thorpe, 2016). Such grip over the migration scheme could be a form of politicization: Fidesz feeds of the fear towards terrorism through the politics of blaming migrants from the Middle East.

In the 1990s, Hungary's entrance to the EU was projected as a natural fulfillment for the political and economic sphere of the state, considering that the communist regime deprived the state from said development (TUIC Academy, 2021). There was a general consensus not only by the political elite, but also by the public, that the cultural and political identity of the state must lead as further from the Eastern model as possible, which they associated with the former USSR (Rajcsányi, n.d: 125-126). As Fidesz was initially formed to oppose communist dictatorship, it soon came to embrace pro-European values, framing their party as a people's movement (Rajcsányi, n.d: 126).

However, after the transition period, the evaluation of democracy started to fall sharply. In a matter of years, Hungary became one of the most pessimistic countries within EU. Reasons for this fall into different categories, but a major indicator is the Eurosceptic and populist approach of Fidesz. The EU Community is perceived as a Eurocratic elite, which threatens the well-being of the Hungarian people, through a supranational level. According to supporters of the party, EU forces Hungary to become a colonial state (Lázár, 2015: 228). Therefore, it becomes unacceptable for Hungary to put at stake its sovereignty and authority and allowing massive delegations of power to an institution which does not take into consideration the needs of the Hungarian people.

From an economic perspective, Fidesz believes through openly opposing EU policies, they protect the Hungarian lands from foreign investors, believing this is a form of pragmatism (Lázár, 2015: 228). The party also emphasizes how the EU has been inefficient to manage several crises: the Eurocrisis, which Orbán stated to be a "sabotage" (Terzieva & Ostermann, 2011) or the Covid-19 pandemic. The relationship between the party and EU seems to be more competitive than cooperative. Végh states that Fidesz uses the EU parliament as "arena for fighting political battles for domestic consumption rather than as a platform for constructive cooperation" (2019). The party is willing to protect its own sovereignty as far as partly opposing EU membership; it does not believe EU policies make Hungary a beneficiary and nor can they be adjusted.

Most importantly, Fidesz has denied adhering to EU's migration policies, as they oppose a mixed race. Orbán claims to have a Christian Hungary and a Christian Europe, not a Europe with no identity (2016, as cited in Thorpe, 2016). In 2016, Orbán

denied the compulsory quotas for distributing asylum and shelter to asylum-seekers, and secured the border through building a fence that would not allow migrants to come in (Thorpe, 2016). The border was largely named as an Iron Curtain that is built for the Hungarian people (Orbán, 2016, as cited in Thorpe, 2016).

2. The case of Podemos

Podemos, or as it means in English, “we can”, was founded in 2014. The party began as an anti-austerity movement, considering the country’s tightening of the budget as a threat to the Spanish people (Seguín, 2017: 289). Since its beginning, Podemos pledged to be fighting corruption, poverty, and inequality. Iglesias, its founder, found inspiration in Latin America populist leftist leaders, especially Bolivian ones, as he believed the Bolivian population to have a similar content with the Spanish one (Cervera-Marzal, 2020). A historical mark was when the party won five seats in the European Parliament in the year of its creation. Popularity arose in Spain later, and in 2019, the party won the elections through a coalition.

Six main fundamentals can be found in Podemos’s party ideology, which falls under the left-wing distinction. The party emphasizes public control over most areas, going against the privatization of public administration. Its main goal is poverty reduction, which can be achieved through anti-inequality plans, which aim at increasing social dignity (Seguín, 2017: 287-309). Large corporations receive punitive measures in cases of tax avoidance, while small enterprises are promoted and helped through tax cuts, when compared with larger companies. Investment banks are perceived to be speculating with Spain’s economy, therefore it is in the hands of people to vote for governments, not investment banks (Penty, Neumann, Montijano & Devereux, 2019). The party aims in promoting renewable energy resources, to oppose over-consumption. Lastly, all policies aim at improving the lives of the middle class, concluding to a Scandinavian model of social democracy, and integrating them more in the public and social Spanish life. When the party firstly began as a movement, they would use abandoned buildings in middle-class neighborhoods as areas for different activities, including here political debates (Cervera-Marzal, 2020).

Populist tendencies found in Podemos mainly source from the party’s anti-system approach, as opposing the political values of the system in which the party itself has been developed (Cervera-Marzal, 2020). Podemos is in favor of making Spain a federation, which would require a massive change in its 1978 Constitution and reformation, as it believes the federation to be a more convenient political system for Spain. Iglesias is in favor of minority rights: he has increased the number of refugee intakes from Syria and has showed levels of acceptance towards the idea of an independent Catalonia (Seguín, 2017: 295). The party’s roots in egalitarianism have made its approach to the political scene of Spain be anti-establishment, with an aim of change. Iglesias claims for Europe’s greatest heritage to be the freedom of its people. Furthermore, Podemos wishes to create an anti-pluralist establishment, which would increase citizen’s role in the political sphere through direct participation.

Iglesias, which began his career as a political science professor, rose to the scene immediately through his presence in television. He presented strong communication abilities through initially opening a political talk show where youth could discuss on political matters. Podemos has a strong connection with mobilization, always presenting themselves as in the side of the people. They help in the

organization of different protests or riots, which have aimed at criticizing the government as working against the will of people and further amplifying the gaps between the rich and the poor (Cervera-Marzal, 2020). Members of the party are openly activists which have been against racism, against tenant evictions, have supported strikes in public services or have been against the tourification of working-class neighborhoods (Cervera-Marzal, 2020).

When the party was initially created, it aimed at converting the social indignation that had come as a consequence of EU austerity programs. Therefore, since its creation, it showed signs of Euroscepticism, nevertheless, it was a form of soft Euroscepticism where the party wished to reform EU policies (Gago, 2017). Podemos criticized how EU handled the Eurocrisis, emphasizing the impact the crisis had left in Spain's unemployment rates, which had been growing (Ramos & Cornago, 2016). Iglesias claims the crisis aftermath was not managed well either by the EU Community, or the Spanish state. The leader has a negative attitude towards several trade agreements with the EU. Also, Iglesias has called on the EU in several occasions to have a stronger stance towards migration, through increasing migration acceptance rates; and to further work on the reduction of poverty, which Podemos believes to partly come from EU policies and linkages (Ramos & Cornago, 2016).

Discussion

As one can see from the analysis, populist tendencies can be found in both parties of the Left and the Right. Orbán, through a popular presence in media, wishes to preserve Hungarian sovereignty and continuously praises its homogeneity, creating an image of enemies for other ethnicities, migrants, foreigners or even EU institutions themselves. Through projecting a strong Eurosceptic sense, he strengthens the idea that EU is the elite, which works based on its interests and fails to consider Hungarian principles. Fidesz's will to disintegrate from the EU shows a regress in the EUization of the continent, and a stronger attachment to the East. On the other side, Podemos aims towards a society which preserves egalitarianism and equality. The establishment is simply perceived as wrong, ruled by an elite which does not help in poverty reduction and continues exploitation. Iglesias claims for the EU community to also be an elite, which through its economic policy implementations is not helping the Spanish. Nevertheless, while Fidesz's Euroscepticism falls into the category of hard Euroscepticism, Podemos's is rather soft, with a goal of remaining EU members, but willful for a change.

Limitations

While conducting this study, some limitations have been present nevertheless. Firstly, when studying and measuring the degree of Euroscepticism both in Hungary and Spain, public participation on the EU is not taken into consideration, rather, the political parties' attitude is studied. Secondly, the relationship between democracy and populism, albeit an important one, has not been studied thoroughly. Lastly, there was a lack of research in the English language for Podemos.

Conclusion

Populism and Euroscepticism have found place in the political sphere of the European Union, and can be seen as strong attributes in parties both of the right and

left wing of the ideological spectrum. Theory concludes that mostly, left parties make use of these two notions for socioeconomic purposes, while right parties for sociocultural purposes. The theory remains truthful: Fidesz in Hungary has proven to indulge and strengthen a sense of Hungarian ethnic heterogeneity and sovereignty through its policies and rhetoric, while Podemos in Spain focuses on reducing poverty and corruption for the greater good of the Spanish people, while also opposing the establishment. Populism and Euroscepticism strengthen the parties' right and left status and stance, while the leftist and rightist ideologies become perfect conditions for these two notions to grow hand in hand.

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