A populist Zeitgeist? The impact of populism on parties, media and the public in Western Europe
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Chapter 6

I CAN’T GET NO SATISFACTION
The Impact of Populism on Political Satisfaction

This chapter is a revision of a paper which is co-authored with Wouter van der Brug and Sarah de Lange and which is currently under review.
Individuals may adopt their party’s position on an issue because they think their party generally reflects their interests. When the costs of developing one’s own opinions are high, taking cues from a party that shares one’s interests could be reasonable.

Gabriel S. Lenz, 2009, p. 831.

Introduction

In the two previous chapters, we have seen that the degree of populism in the programs of political parties and the opinion articles in newspapers varies. The aim of this final empirical chapter is to assess to what extent the degree of populism of parties and newspapers affects how politically satisfied voters are. It could be expected that the degree of populism of the party a person votes for affects his or her political satisfaction. Previous studies have demonstrated that a relationship exists between voting for allegedly populist parties and political dissatisfaction (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). Based on an analysis of the Dutch allegedly populist party the *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (LPF), Van der Brug (2003) has argued that it is plausible that the message of an allegedly populist party fuels discontent among its supporters. Moreover, it can also be supposed that the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads has a negative effect on one’s political satisfaction as many studies of media effects have shown that media messages exert a direct, persuasive influence on their audiences (Bartels, 1993; Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011; Zaller, 1992, 1996).

Hitherto, little research has been conducted on the impact of allegedly populist parties and media on political discontent. The research conducted so far on this topic is limited to only a small amount of cases. Moreover, only a few studies have looked at the actual populist messages of parties and media, so that no information is available about the influence of these messages on citizens’ attitudes and behavior. This chapter fills these lacunae in the literature by focusing on the relationship between political satisfaction, voting
behavior and media use in five countries. It combines survey data on the
atitudes of individual citizens with information about the degree of populism
of the parties that these citizens vote for and the newspapers that they read.
The data on populism stem from a large-scale content analysis of election
manifestos of political parties and opinion articles published in newspapers.

Populism has often been defined as a set of ideas in which the good
people are pitted against a corrupt, evil elite (Abts & Rummens, 2007;
Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Arditi, 2004; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde,
2004, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008). Populists claim that ‘the
establishment’ is out of touch with ordinary citizens and fails to represent ‘the
man in the street’ (Abts & Rummens, 2007; Taggart, 2000; De la Torre, 2010).
According to populists, the general will of the people should be expressed in a
direct and unmediated way. In western democracies, however, this direct
expression of ‘the general will’ is hampered by several checks and balances
imposed by constitutional laws to protect the rights of individuals and
minorities against the majority rule. Therefore, it is not surprising that
populists, and their supporters, are dissatisfied with the way in which the
democratic system is currently working.

The literature on the relationship between populist voting and political
dissatisfaction indicates that this relationship can run in two directions. First,
dissatisfaction can impact citizens’ political preferences and therefore
influence their voting behavior. Dissatisfaction with politics can thus be
considered to be a cause of voting for an allegedly populist party. I will refer to
this explanation as the ‘expressing discontent logic’ (e.g., Betz, 1994; Bélanger
& Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005). This is how most scholars have modeled the
relationship between political satisfaction and populist voting. Second, those
who support allegedly populist parties are more likely to be exposed to and be
influenced by these parties’ populist messages. The emergence of allegedly
populist parties thus does not necessarily reflect existing feelings of
discontent; these parties might fuel such feelings by convincing their
supporters that the elite exploits the people and thereby corrupts the
democratic system. So, theoretically, dissatisfaction can be as much a cause as
a consequence of support for allegedly populist parties. I will refer to the latter
as the ‘fuelling discontent logic’ (see Van der Brug, 2003). This logic has not been studied much yet.

The literature on the relationship between media populism and political satisfaction is still in its infancy. Yet, at least theoretically, we might expect the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic to be present here as well. According to the expressing discontent logic, dissatisfied citizens are inclined to read a more populist newspaper because such a newspaper provides space for similar feelings of political discontent (see Jagers, 2006; Mazzoleni, 2003, 2008). According to the fuelling discontent logic, newspapers that express populist messages have a direct and persuasive effect on the degree of political satisfaction among their readers (see Bartels, 1993; Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011; Zaller, 1992, 1996).

Using multilevel regression analysis and structural equation modeling, I examine the relationships between political satisfaction, voting behavior and media use. My analyses show that, although the degree of populism of the newspaper that a person reads is not related to his or her political satisfaction, the degree of populism of the party that a person votes for is strongly correlated with his or her political satisfaction. Moreover, with regard to voting behavior, both the expressing discontent model and the fuelling discontent model turn out to fit the data well. It is therefore probable that political dissatisfaction is not only a cause of voting for more populist parties; it is also a consequence. A citizen who votes for an allegedly populist party because he or she agrees with its policy propositions regarding, for instance, the economy, can also be expected to become susceptible to this party’s message that the democratic system is in crisis because the corrupt elite exploits ‘ordinary people’.

This is an important finding because it indicates that the effect of political disaffection on populist voting has most likely been overestimated in many previous studies. We should therefore carefully rethink the relationship between populist voting and political disaffection. Moreover, the results imply that populism is not only a message that resonates with voters’ attitudes, it is also a message that changes the attitudes of the supporters of the parties spreading the message. This is in line with existing studies that demonstrate
the persuasiveness of the populist message (Hawkins, 2010; De la Torre, 2010), and research showing that citizens are inclined to adopt the ideas of their preferred parties (Lenz, 2009).

The chapter proceeds as follows. In the next section, I focus on the link between populism and democratic dissatisfaction. Then, I focus on the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. After a discussion of my case selection, measurements, and methods, I proceed to the results of my analyses. In the concluding section of this chapter, I focus on the implications of my findings for both the literature on populism and voting behavior.

**Populism and political dissatisfaction**

Many scholars define populism as a set of ideas in which the good people are pitted against the evil elites (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b; Canovan, 2004; Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Mudde, 2004; Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008). Mudde (2004: 543) describes populism as ‘an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the _volonté générale_ (general will) of the people’. He argues that populism is not a full ideology, such as conservatism, liberalism or socialism, but a ‘thin-centered’ ideology. It does not offer an all-encompassing worldview, but contains, first and foremost, ideas about the organization of the democratic decision-making processes. Consequently, populism is inherently chameleonic (Taggart, 2000); it takes on the identity of the ideology to which it attaches itself. 76

As a set of ideas, I conceive of populism essentially as a characteristic of a message rather than a characteristic of the actor sending that message.

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76 I therefore do not consider exclusionism – i.e., excluding ‘dangerous others’ such as immigrants or religious minorities (see Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008b) – to be a defining element of populism. Although it is a central feature of _radical right wing_ populism, it is not necessarily a characteristic of populism as such (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000).
Consequently, populism becomes a matter of degree. A political actor who sends out many populist messages is more populist than an actor that employs only a few populist messages.

Central elements of the populist message are the idea that every democracy is founded on the principle of popular sovereignty and the claim that the voice of the people should give direction to decision-making (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969b; Mény & Surel, 2002b). This way of thinking implies that a single general will exists, which is undivided. Therefore, the people are seen as a homogeneous entity (Canovan, 2004). However, it remains often unclear whom populists refer to when they speak about the people (e.g., the electorate, farmers, or the nation) (see Canovan, 1981, 1999). Yet the people are always defined in opposition to what is perceived as their enemy: the elites. The elites are accused of being completely alienated from ordinary people and of being selfish, arrogant, incompetent and corrupt (Barr, 2009; Laclau, 2005; Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001). In every respect, the elites are portrayed as the antipodes of the people: the people are inherently good, whereas the elites are fundamentally evil. Anti-elitism is most often directed at political elites, which are found guilty of ignoring ordinary citizens and of focusing on their own interests only (Mudde, 2004). The elites are believed to dominate the people in the democratic decision-making process, whereas the principle of the sovereignty of the people implies that this should be the other way around.

Populism has an ambivalent attitude toward liberal democracy. According to the so-called two-strand model of democracy, a liberal democracy is built on two pillars: a democratic one and a liberal one (Mouffe, 2005). The central element of the democratic pillar is the sovereignty of the people, which means that political power ought to reside with the people. The essential feature of the liberal pillar is that political power should be curbed and controlled. This is achieved by means of three mechanisms: checks and balances, minority rights and political representation. There exists an inherent

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77 Anti-elitism could also be directed at economic elites (e.g., bankers or big corporations) or cultural elites (e.g., intellectuals).
tension in the two-strand model, which is eloquently described by Kornhauser (1959: 131):

‘Populist democracy [i.e., the democratic pillar] involves direct action of large numbers of people, which often results in the circumvention of institutional channels and ad hoc invasion of individual privacy. Liberal democracy [i.e., the liberal pillar] involves political action mediated by institutional rules, and therefore limitations on the use of power by majorities as well as minorities.’

Populists emphasize the importance of the democratic pillar. They believe that in any democratic system, the general will should be expressed as directly and unmediated as possible (Canovan, 1981). However, in a liberal democracy, the direct expression of the general will is not possible and occurs through intermediaries, such as elected representatives. For this reason, Taggart (2000: 3) argues that populism is essentially hostile towards liberal democracy:

‘Eschewing the complexity of representative politics, populists advocate simplicity and directness in their politics. The accoutrements of representative politics, including parties and parliaments, are all too often, for populists, distractions and unnecessary complications.’

Political elites, checks and balances, minority rights, and political representation thus stand in the way of a direct expression of the volonté générale of the people. Yet, they play a decisive role in modern democracies. Because populists, and by extension their supporters, fiercely criticize political elites and are also hostile towards various elements of liberal democracy, they can be expected to be dissatisfied with the way in which the democratic system currently functions. It has indeed been demonstrated empirically that citizens who are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy are more likely to support allegedly populist parties than citizens who are satisfied with democracy (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Norris, 2005; Schumacher &
While the evidence is overwhelming that a relationship exists between political satisfaction and the populist message, it is still unclear whether the populist message is a cause or consequence of political dissatisfaction.

**The impact of populism on political satisfaction**

What might be the causal mechanism behind the relationship between political satisfaction and populist voting? To answer this question, I discuss two causal logics: the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic (see Van der Brug, 2003; Van der Brug & Fennema, 2003; Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2005). According to the expressing discontent logic, citizens primarily vote for an allegedly populist party because they are politically dissatisfied. It is expected that citizens who are dissatisfied with the performance of the political establishment and the political system vote for a party that shares this attitude (see Bergh, 2004). With their choice for an allegedly populist party, discontented voters signal their dissatisfaction with the political establishment. Therefore, according to the expressing discontent logic, citizens vote for allegedly populist parties to signal feelings of discontent with politics (Betz, 1994; Bélanger & Aarts, 2006; Mayer & Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). Although in the extant literature this argument has typically been made about *radical right-wing* allegedly populist parties, I believe that the expressing discontent logic could hold for both the left and the right. After all, left-wing allegedly populist parties are critical about the political establishment as well (March, 2007; March & Mudde, 2005; Schumacher & Rooduijn, 2011).

According to the fuelling discontent logic, voters become more discontented with the functioning of liberal democracy as a result of being exposed to the messages of allegedly populist parties. Those who support populists are most likely to be affected by the frequently repeated message that the political elite is incompetent and that the democratic system is not functioning well (Van der Brug, 2003). Thus, political dissatisfaction can also be the consequence of voters’ support for allegedly populist parties.
Although little is known about the way in which the populist message affects citizens' attitudes, it has been shown that people are affected by the messages they are exposed to. Lenz (2009) has demonstrated that if someone supports a party, s/he will be more strongly affected by the messages of this party than someone who does not support this party (see also Bartels, 2002). According to Lenz (2009: 834), citizens change their opinions to be more consistent with the ideas of the party they vote for. For instance, he argued that American voters in the 1980s learned the positions of the presidential candidates Reagan and Carter and subsequently incorporated the position of their preferred candidate as their own position. Cohen (2003) similarly has argued, and demonstrated by means of a series of experiments, that party identification strongly affects individuals' attitudes. He showed that supporters of a party tend to adapt their ideas to the party line when they are exposed to messages in which the position of their party is revealed. According to Lenz (2009: 831), the reason might be that individuals think that 'their' party defends their interests in general: 'When the costs of developing one's own opinions are high, taking cues from a party that shares one's interests could be reasonable'. Thus, if a voter supports a party that expresses the message that the people are being exploited by the elites, s/he might be inclined to incorporate this idea in his or her way of thinking about politics. It may therefore be expected that the more populist the program of a political party is, the less politically satisfied its supporters will become.

It is not only political parties that convey populist messages. Populist messages may also be voiced by other actors – such as the mass media. Only a few studies have been conducted with regard to the relationship between media populism and political satisfaction among citizens. Yet, theoretically, it can be expected that in the realm of the mass media the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic are present as well. The expressing discontent logic can be expected to be present because citizens might well choose to read newspapers that express attitudes that are similar to their own. Just as citizens with low amounts of political satisfaction can be expected to vote for a party that expresses similar attitudes (see Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005), these dissatisfied citizens might also be supposed to be inclined to read
newspapers that provide space for similar attitudes of political discontent (see Mazzoleni, 2003).

The fuelling discontent logic can be expected to be present in the media realm because many studies have indicated that the mass media exert direct persuasive effects on public opinion (e.g., Bartels, 1993; Dalton et al., 1998; Zaller, 1992, 1996). Early studies of voting behavior relied on a framework of direct persuasive media (Berelson et al., 1954). In recent years, a growing body of research has started to re-appreciate these direct effects of the media (Brandenburg & Van Egmond, 2011). Studies have focused on the effect on voting behavior (Druckman & Parkin, 2005), vote-decision timing (Nir & Druckman, 2008), candidate preferences (Dalton et al., 1998; Lodge et al., 1995), policy preferences (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006; Zaller, 1996) and attitudes (Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2009). Because of these direct persuasive effects of the media, it can be expected that the more populist a newspaper is, the less politically satisfied its readers will be.

Irrespective of the causal direction of the relationships between voting behavior and political satisfaction on the one hand and media use and political satisfaction on the other hand, both logics are ultimately driven by the attitudinal and background characteristics of citizens. To draw valid inferences about the causal relationships, I need to control for these other factors. Prior research on voting for allegedly populist parties indicated that gender, age, class, education, and religiosity affect citizens’ support for allegedly populist parties (see for instance Lubbers et al., 2002; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000; Van der Brug et al., 2000) as well as their satisfaction with democracy (see for instance Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012; Singh et al., 2012). The same can be said about the effect of citizens’ attitudes towards issues such as European integration and their general left-right orientation on voting for populists (see Ivarsflaten, 2008; Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2005) as well as their satisfaction with democracy (Karp et al., 2003; Bowler et al., 2006).
Data and methods

Data

I focus on Western Europe because ‘the main area of sustained populist growth and success over the last fifteen years in established democracies has been in Western Europe’ (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008: 1). I have selected five countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. These countries have been chosen for two reasons: (1) the electoral success of allegedly populist parties varies across these cases; and (2) I want to include allegedly populist parties on both the left and the right side of the political spectrum. Table 6.1 contains an overview of the allegedly populist parties. Successful right-wing allegedly populist parties (15 per cent of the votes or more in the electorally most successful election between 1988 and 2008) have emerged in Italy (Forza Italia and Alleanza Nazionale), the Netherlands (Lijst Pim Fortuyn), and France (Front National). Unsuccessful right-wing allegedly populist parties (less than 15 per cent of the votes in each election between 1988 and 2008) have emerged in Italy (Lega Nord), the Netherlands (Centrum Democraten and Partij voor de Vrijheid), and the United Kingdom (British National Party and United Kingdom Independence Party). A left-wing allegedly populist party with limited electoral success has emerged in Germany (Die Linke), whereas a successful one can be found in the Netherlands (Socialistische Partij).

I have constructed a dataset containing information about citizens’ political satisfaction, the degree of populism of the parties they vote for and of

78 Although I do not directly assess the electoral success of allegedly populist parties in this chapter, my case selection is nevertheless based on this criterion because I do indirectly focus on parties’ electoral successes. After all, I look at vote choice in order to combine data on the party level with data on the individual level.

79 This table has been constructed exclusively to clarify my case selection. The division between successful and unsuccessful allegedly populist parties and between left- and right-wing allegedly populist parties has not been used in the actual empirical analyses.
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the newspaper(s) they read, some attitudinal positions, and a number of
demographic and socio-economic background variables.

Table 6.1.
Selected countries and allegedly populist parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Right</th>
<th>Left</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>Forza Italia (FI), IT</td>
<td>Socialistische Partij (SP), NL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(more than 15</td>
<td>Alleanza Nazionale (AN), IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>percent of</td>
<td>Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), NL</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>votes)</td>
<td>Front National (FN), FR</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>Lega Nord (LN), IT</td>
<td>Die Linke, GE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(15 percent of</td>
<td>Centrum Democraten (CD), NL</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>votes or less)</td>
<td>Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV), NL</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>British National Party (BNP), UK</td>
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<td></td>
<td>United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), UK</td>
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Notes. Only those allegedly populist parties have been included which have gained seats during national or European parliamentary elections between 1988 and 2008. Success is expressed as the largest vote share of the party between 1988 and 2008 with regard to national parliamentary elections.

The data concerning the degree of populism of political parties come from a content analysis of election manifestos in which 63 manifestos of both mainstream parties and allegedly populist parties were analyzed (see Chapter 3 and Chapter 4). For every paragraph in every election manifesto, extensively trained coders determined whether this paragraph contained indications of people-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism was measured with the question ‘Do the authors of the manifesto refer to the people?’. I instructed the coders to include every reference to the people, irrespective of whether it concerned ‘the electorate’, ‘the nation’ or ‘our

80 I focus on only 63 of the 83 manifestos that I analyzed in the previous chapters because the datasets that include the variables on the individual level only go back to 1999.
society'. Anti-elitism was measured with the following question: ‘Do the authors of the manifesto criticize elites?’ Only when the critique concerned elites in general was it coded as anti-elitism. Hence, a critique of individual politicians or parties was not coded as anti-elitism. If both people-centrism and anti-elitism were present, the paragraph was coded as populist. For every manifesto, the total percentage of populist paragraphs was computed. This percentage is the so-called populism-score for a party during a specific election. In Chapter 3, I have demonstrated that this operationalization yields a valid and reliable measurement of populism. An overview of the mean populism-scores per party per year, and the corresponding reliability statistics are presented in Appendix E.

Information about the degree of populism in the public debates in the media comes from a similar content analysis of opinionated articles in newspapers (see Chapter 5). I realize that articles in the ‘opinion sections’ of newspapers contain only a rather limited part of the messages that enter the political debate. However, I think that these opinionated articles will provide a good reflection of the variation in the degree of populism in the public debates. The samples of opinionated articles were taken from newspapers published in the four weeks before general elections because the media pay more attention to politics during campaigns (Koopmans, 2004: 372). In every country, three newspapers were analyzed. For every election period, a systematic sample of days was drawn, and for every sampled day, the opinion articles about domestic and EU politics have been collected. To measure the degree of populism, the same coding procedure as for the party manifestos was employed. In a first step, the populism-score per opinion article was calculated. This is the percentage of populist paragraphs in each article. In a second step, the populism-score per newspaper per year was determined. This is the mean populism-score of all the analyzed opinion articles in this period.

81 ‘The people’ can mean many different things to many different populists in many different circumstances (Canovan, 1981). To deal with this this variety of meanings, and in order not to miss particular perceptions of ‘the people’, I have decided to employ an open coding procedure and thus not to strictly define ‘the people’ beforehand.
newspaper in a specific year. See Appendix F for an overview of the populism scores per newspaper per year and the corresponding reliability statistics.

These data were combined with survey data from the European Elections Studies (EES) of 1999, 2004 and 2009. Although the EES focuses primarily on European elections, it includes variables that concern the national level as well. I have combined the data as follows. In each EES wave, respondents were asked: ‘If national elections were held today, which party would you vote for?’ Respondents who expressed an intention to vote for any of the 63 parties whose manifestos were coded are included in my analyses. I then created a new variable, labeled ‘populism of the party voted for’, to which I attributed the populism scores of the party manifestos to voters that intended to support these parties. Therefore, if a respondent intended to vote for party A at time X, I have ascribed the populism score of the most recent manifesto of party A at time X to that person. Respondents were also asked which newspaper they read. Similarly, if a respondent read newspaper B at time X, I have attributed the populism score of the relevant newspaper to that respondent. In this way, I created the new variable ‘populism of the newspaper read’. A disadvantage of combining the EES with these content analysis results was that it generated a large amount of missing values. After all, many respondents did not read a newspaper at all. They had, unfortunately, to be dropped from the analyses. I will return to this point later in the chapter. Hence, I have created a dataset in which the information about vote choice and newspaper readership is replaced with interval level variables: the degree of populism of the party one voted for and the degree of populism of the newspaper one read. The degree of populism of parties ranges from 0 to 23.08; the degree of populism of newspapers ranges from 0 to 12.76. See the Appendices E and F.

Satisfaction with democracy was measured with the question: ‘On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?’ Respondents could indicate on a 4-points scale to what extent they were satisfied (1 = not at all satisfied, 4 = very satisfied). Many scholars have employed this variable as a measure of satisfaction with democracy (see Aarts & Thomassen, 2008; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012;
Blais & Gélineau, 2007; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Lijphart, 1999; Mcallister, 2005; Singh et al., 2012).

Respondents’ positions on the left-right dimension were measured with an item that asked them to place themselves on a 10-points scale that ranges from left (1) to right (10). To measure how radical a respondent is, I first recoded this left/right variable so that it ranged from -4 (left) to 4 (right), and I then squared this variable. As a result, high scores indicate a position on either the extreme left or the extreme right of the left-right dimension. The squared variable ranges from 0 (not radical) to 16 (very radical). Another attitude that might affect a respondent’s satisfaction with democracy and populist voting is his or her attitude towards European integration. It has been demonstrated that the attitude towards Europe is a component of the socio-cultural dimension in public opinion, of which the attitude towards immigration and integration is also part (Van der Brug & Van Spanje, 2009).

It was measured with the following question: ‘Some say European unification should be pushed further. Others say it already has gone too far. What is your opinion?’ Respondents could answer this question on a 10-point scale ranging from 1 (has already gone too far) to 10 (should be pushed further).

I included several other background variables in the analysis. The first one is political interest, which ranges from ‘not at all interested’ (1) to ‘very interested’ (4). Secondly, I controlled for education, which is measured in the EES by asking respondents at which age they ended their full-time education. The assumption is that the higher the age, the higher the level of education. Thirdly, I have taken into account the net household income per month. As this variable has been categorized differently across countries and waves, I have standardized it per country-wave combination. Fourthly, I have included a measure of subjective class position. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-points scale whether they belonged to the working class (1), the lower

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82 To compute this score I have combined the two middle categories of the original left/right variable.

83 Unfortunately, questions regarding immigration and integration have not systematically been asked over the different EES waves, as a result of which it was not possible to include such attitudes in this analysis.
middle class (2), the middle class (3), the upper middle class (4) or the upper class (5). Additionally, I have controlled for gender (0 = male, 1 = female) and the age of the respondent. Finally, a measure of religiosity has been included. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale how often they attended religious services, ranging from never (1) to several times a week (5).

For a descriptive overview of the variables, see Appendix G. The pooled dataset consists of 1700 respondents, nested in 15 country-year combinations (five countries and three years: 1999, 2004 and 2009). I did not analyze the countries separately from each other because the number of party-year combinations is too small to conduct separate analyses. Nevertheless, I controlled for the differences between countries in several ways (see below).

**Methods**

My analysis involved a number of steps. To determine whether the degree of populism of the party a person voted for and of the newspaper that a person reads is related to his or her satisfaction with democracy, I first estimated multilevel linear regression models. Multilevel analysis was used to account for the hierarchical structure of the data: the respondents are nested within country-year combinations. I estimated three different models. In the first model, the degree of populism of the party one voted for is the dependent variable. As satisfaction with democracy here is assumed to be a determinant of the degree of populism, this model represents the expressing discontent logic with regard to the political realm. I also estimated a model in which the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads is the dependent variable. As satisfaction with democracy here is modeled as an independent variable as well, this model represents the expressing discontent model vis-à-vis the media realm. Finally, I estimated a third model in which satisfaction with democracy is the dependent variable. This model represents the fuelling discontent logic with regard to both the political realm and the media realm, as the degree of populism in the programs of parties and in the public debates in the media are modeled as independent variables. The program MLwiN was used to conduct the analyses. The estimation method is restricted maximum
likelihood (RML) because RML estimates are less biased than full maximum likelihood (FML) estimates (Hox, 2010: 41). I included country dummies to take into account the differences between the countries under investigation. Regression models are not the best suited to test the validity of a causal claim. In the second stage of my analyses, I therefore conducted path analyses, which allowed me to compare two models representing the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. An advantage of path analysis is that complex causal models can be analyzed, and therefore, indirect effects can also be estimated. Moreover, and even more important for my purpose, it makes it possible to compare how well the two models fit the data. Ideally, path analysis requires parsimonious models. I therefore used the outcomes of the regression analyses to create more parsimonious models. Variables that had no significant effects in both regression models were excluded from the analyses in this second stage. The path models have been estimated using LISREL 8.80 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006).

Results

The first results of the multilevel analyses are presented in Table 6.2. In model 1, I focus on the degree of populism of the party one votes for as the dependent variable. It turns out that political satisfaction has a positive and

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84 Because satisfaction with democracy is measured on an ordinal 4-point scale, I also estimated the second model by means of ordinal logit and logistic regressions (for which I have dichotomized this 4-points scale). This leads to the same substantive results.

85 Because some variables are measured on an ordinal scale, I have first estimated the polychoric (PCM) and asymptotic correlation matrices (ACM) with PRELIS and used these matrices to estimate the models. As I used these special correlation matrices, I estimated my models by means of weighted least squares (WLS). To take into account the country differences, I have also estimated the models by centering the variables on their country-means. Because this resulted in variables that could not be interpreted as ordinal anymore, it was not possible to use the polychoric and asymptotic correlation matrices. Therefore, I was forced to make use of the original covariance matrices. However, these analyses did not lead to substantively different results.
significant effect on the degree of populism of the party one votes for ($b = -0.477$, significant at $p < 0.01$). This indicates that political satisfaction and a party's populism are negatively related to each other, and it suggests that political satisfaction can be modeled as a cause of the degree of populism of the party one votes for. In model 2, the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads is modeled as the dependent variable. It turns out that political satisfaction is not significantly related to the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads. This is confirmed in model 3, in which political satisfaction is the dependent variable and the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads is one of the independent variables. This indicates that with regard to the realm of the media, neither the expressing discontent logic nor the fuelling discontent logic seem to hold. Model 3 does indicate, however, that the degree of populism of the party one votes for can be modeled as a cause for the amount of political satisfaction. After all, the degree of populism of the party one votes for exerts a negative and significant effect on political satisfaction ($b = -0.025$, significant at $p < 0.01$).

These first findings indicate that the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads and one's political satisfaction are not related to each other. Because the variable that measures the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads contains many missing values – after all, many people do not read a newspaper at all – I have excluded this variable from the analyses in the remainder of this chapter. This led to a very strong increase of my N from 1700 to 6016. For an overview of the descriptive statistics on which the analyses in the remainder of this chapter are based, see Appendix H.

---

86 Although one could argue that this finding might well be due to the large time-span between my measurement of the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads and the measurement of political satisfaction in the EES, I doubt that this argument holds. After all, this time-span is just as large with regard to my measurement of the degree of populism of the party one votes for and the measurement of political satisfaction. I found a significant correlation between these two variables nonetheless.
Table 6.2

*Regressions explaining the populism of a party, the populism of a newspaper, and satisfaction with democracy (with country dummies)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Populism party</th>
<th>Populism newspaper</th>
<th>Satisfaction with democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
<td>Model 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>(SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>3.653**</td>
<td>(0.768)</td>
<td>2.269*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Background variables**

Gender -0.194 (0.159) -0.038 (0.082) -0.031 (0.037)
Class -0.090 (0.089) -0.032 (0.046) 0.071** (0.021)
Income -0.166* (0.082) -0.051 (0.043) -0.014 (0.019)
Age 0.001 (0.005) 0.004 (0.003) -0.001 (0.001)
Education -0.007 (0.014) -0.017* (0.007) -0.006 (0.003)
Religiosity -0.164* (0.070) 0.011 (0.037) 0.032* (0.016)

**Attitudinal variables**

Political interest 0.060 (0.108) -0.048 (0.056) 0.012 (0.025)
Left/right attitude 0.085* (0.040) 0.093** (0.021) 0.042** (0.009)
EU attitude -0.119** (0.029) 0.002 (0.015) 0.026** (0.007)
Radicalism left/right 0.032* (0.015) -0.020* (0.008) -0.006 (0.003)
Populism party 0.023 (0.013) -0.025** (0.006)
Populism newspaper 0.067 (0.044) -0.025 (0.020)
Satisfaction with democracy -0.477** (0.105) -0.166 (0.155)

**Variance components**

Country-year level (n = 15) 0.454* (0.211) 2.764** (1.056) 0.015 (0.008)
Respondent level (n = 1700) 9.827** (0.338) 2.641** (0.091) 0.523 (0.018)
Deviance 8734.001 6541.266 3740.997

*: significant at p < 0.05. **: significant at p < 0.01. Two-tailed tests
Table 6.3 shows the results of the multilevel analyses without the newspaper variable. Let me now focus more specifically on these outcomes. In models 1 and 2, I focus again on the degree of populism of the party one votes for as the dependent variable. In model 1, only the effects of the background variables gender, class, income, age, education and religiosity have been estimated. Gender, class and religiosity turn out to exert significant negative effects on the degree of populism of the party one votes for (b = -0.151, significant at p < 0.05, b = -0.188, significant at p < 0.01 and b = 0.154, significant at p < 0.01, respectively), indicating that females, individuals who position themselves in a higher class, and individuals who are more religious, vote for less populist parties. In model 2, all variables have been included. Gender, class and religion are still significant. The EU attitude seems to affect the degree of populism of the party one votes for as well. The negative coefficient (b = -0.101, significant at p < 0.01) indicates that more positive attitudes toward European unification lead to voting for less populist parties. Satisfaction with democracy exerts a strong and negative effect on the degree of populism of the party one votes for. The more satisfied a citizen is with the way in which his or her democracy functions, the less populist the party he or she votes for: b = -0.332, p < 0.01.

However, what happens when I model satisfaction with democracy as the dependent variable, and the degree of populism of the party one votes for as one of the independent variables? This approach is tested in models 3 and 4. Of the background variables, only class, income and religiosity exert significant effects (see model 3). Social class has a positive effect, showing that the higher classes are more satisfied with democracy (b = 0.069, significant at p < 0.01) than the lower classes. Income equally has a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy (b = 0.037, significant at p < 0.01). Religiosity exerts a significant and positive effect as well (b = 0.031, significant at p < 0.01), indicating that more religious individuals are more satisfied with democracy. Once I include the attitudinal variables in the model (see model 4), the effect of religiosity is only significant at the p < 0.05 level. The effects of class and income remain significant at the p < 0.01 level. The ideological attitudes of
### Table 6.3

*Explaining populist voting and satisfaction with democracy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Populism party</th>
<th>Satisfaction with democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1 (SE)</td>
<td>Model 2 (SE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intercept</td>
<td>2.058** (0.418)</td>
<td>3.217** (0.458)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Background variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.151* (0.075)</td>
<td>-0.176* (0.076)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>-0.188** (0.041)</td>
<td>-0.149** (0.042)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>-0.072 (0.041)</td>
<td>-0.048 (0.041)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.002)</td>
<td>-0.003 (0.002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-0.005 (0.007)</td>
<td>-0.002 (0.007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity</td>
<td>-0.154** (0.033)</td>
<td>-0.142** (0.033)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudinal variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political interest</td>
<td>0.037 (0.050)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left/right attitude</td>
<td>0.014 (0.016)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU attitude</td>
<td>-0.101** (0.014)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicalism left/right</td>
<td>0.013 (0.007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with democracy</td>
<td>-0.332** (0.052)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populism party</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variance components</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country-year level (n = 15)</td>
<td>0.362** (0.145)</td>
<td>0.373** (0.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent level (n = 6016)</td>
<td>8.296** (0.151)</td>
<td>8.149** (0.149)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deviance</td>
<td>29842.346</td>
<td>29734.810</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: significant at p < 0.05. **: significant at p < 0.01. Two-tailed tests.
citizens affect their political satisfaction as well. The more right-wing a citizen, the more satisfied he or she is with the way in which his or her democratic system works (\(b = 0.026\), significant at \(p < 0.01\)), and the more positive someone's attitude towards European unification, the larger his or her political satisfaction (\(b = 0.026\), significant at \(p < 0.01\)). Additionally, radicalism on the left/right scale exerts a significant effect: the more radical a person, the lower his or her satisfaction with democracy (\(b = -0.007\), significant at \(p < 0.01\)). Finally, and most importantly, the degree of populism of the party a person votes for exerts a significant effect on democratic satisfaction as well. The regression coefficient of \(b = -0.020\) (significant at \(p < 0.01\)) shows that the more populist the party a person votes for, the less satisfied this person is with the functioning of his or her democratic system. This indicates that satisfaction with democracy can also be modeled as a consequence instead of a cause of populist voting.\(^{87}\)

To assess this relationship more carefully, I have constructed two different path models, based on the outcomes of the previous regression analyses (see Figure 6.1). I have only included those variables that exerted a significant effect in one of the regression analyses. Therefore, in my path models, the left/right attitude and the EU attitude of a citizen, as well as his or her radicalism on the left/right scale, affect democratic satisfaction, whereas only the EU attitude has an effect on the degree of populism of the party one votes for. Additionally, class has a direct effect on satisfaction with democracy, and the gender and religiosity of a person affect the degree of populism of the party he or she votes for.\(^{88}\) The left/right positions and the EU attitudes of citizens are assumed to co-vary. I have also included those background

\(^{87}\) I tested the sensitivity of these findings to specific country characteristics by means of the jackknife procedure. I estimated the models again after dropping one of the five countries at a time. The only difference is that after dropping the respondents from Germany, Italy or the UK, age becomes significant in the models that explain satisfaction with democracy. As this only concerns a background variable, I conclude that my findings are robust.

\(^{88}\) I fixed the effects of income and religiosity on political satisfaction to 0 because LISREL indicated that these effects are not significant.
variables in my models that turn out to significantly affect one of the attitudinal variables: age, gender, income, class and religiosity. Effects that turned out to be insignificant were removed from the models. It is assumed that class and income co-vary.

Having thus arrived at a model specification, which provides the best fit of the data, I turn to the question of which model fits the data best, the one representing the expressing discontent logic (number 1 in Figure 6.1) or the one representing the fuelling discontent logic (number 2 in Figure 6.1)?

**Figure 6.1.**

*Expressing discontent logic (1) and fuelling discontent logic (2)*
The results are presented in Table 6.4. I evaluated the goodness of fit of the models using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the comparative fit index (CFI). I defined acceptable model fit by the following criteria: RMSEA ≤ 0.05; SRMR ≤ 0.08; and CFI ≥ 0.95. I compared the two models with each other on the basis of the chi-squared and the Akaike's information criterion (AIC). The model with the lowest chi-squared and AIC is the best fitting model. Both models fit the data very well. The RMSEA for both models is 0.009, the SRMR is 0.014 and the CFI is 0.99. The chi-squared is 36.37 for model 1 and 37.29 for model 2; the AIC is 96.37 for model 1 and 97.29 for model 2. These indices show that the expressing discontent model fits the data marginally better than the fuelling discontent model, but because the differences between the models are extremely small and not significant, I cannot refute one of the logics and accept the other. Hence, these results indicate that political disaffection can be modeled both as a cause and as a consequence of populist voting.\(^{89}\)

\(^{89}\) Unfortunately, LISREL failed to converge while estimating a non-recursive model according to which both causal effects exist.
### Table 6.4.

*Path models explaining populist voting and satisfaction with democracy*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Path Model</th>
<th>Model 1 (Expressing discontent)</th>
<th>Model 2 (Fuelling discontent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age → Left/right attitude</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age → EU attitude</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age → Radicalism left/right</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class → Populism of party</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class → Satisfaction democracy</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class → Left/right attitude</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class → EU attitude</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income → Radicalism left/right</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity → Populism of party</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity → Left/right attitude</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religiosity → Radicalism left/right</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
<td>-0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left/right attitude → Satisfaction democracy</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU attitude → Populism of party</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
<td>-0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU attitude → Satisfaction democracy</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicalism left/right → Satisfaction democracy</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction democracy → Populism of party</td>
<td>-0.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populism of party → Satisfaction democracy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class ↔ Income</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left/right attitude ↔ EU attitude</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**R-squared**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Left/right attitude</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU attitude</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radicalism left/right</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Populism of party</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction democracy</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-squared (df)</td>
<td>36.37 (25)</td>
<td>37.29 (25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMSEA</td>
<td>0.009</td>
<td>0.009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRMR</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CFI</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIC</td>
<td>96.37</td>
<td>97.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Chapter 6

Conclusion

It can be expected that the degree of populism of the party one votes for and the degree of populism of the newspaper one reads affect one’s political satisfaction (see Mazzoleni, 2003; Van der Brug, 2003). It can also be expected that the causal directions of these relationships run in the opposite direction: political dissatisfaction then is not a consequence, but a cause of voting for a more populist party and of reading a more populist newspaper (see Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). I have labeled these logics the fuelling discontent logic and the expressing discontent logic, respectively. In this chapter, I have tested whether the degree of populism of the party one votes for and the newspaper one reads are related to one’s political satisfaction, and, if this is the case, which of the two mentioned logics best explains this relationship.

Combining the results of a content analysis of election manifestos with the European Election Studies (EES) of 1999, 2004 and 2009, I have linked information about the parties individuals vote for and the newspapers they read to the degree of populism of these parties and newspapers. In this way, I have combined data at the level of parties and media with data on political satisfaction at the individual level. In contrast to most existing studies, I have analyzed the actual populist messages of parties. Most research simply defines parties as either populist or not populist. Following recent studies, I have conceived of populism as a matter of degree and have determined whether parties are more or less populist (Hawkins, 2009, 2010; Pauwels, 2011). I focused on five Western European countries: France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

By means of multilevel analyses, I have demonstrated that no significant relationship exists in the data between the degree of populism of the newspaper a person reads and his or her political satisfaction. The analyses did show a relationship between the degree of populism of the party one votes for and one’s political satisfaction, however. Moreover, structural equation modeling indicated that with regard to this relationship, both the expressing discontent model and the fuelling discontent model fit the data well. Although the expressing discontent model fits marginally better, the differences
between the two models are extremely small and not statistically significant. This means that political dissatisfaction can be modeled as both a cause and a consequence of voting for more populist parties.

This is an important conclusion because it means that previous studies that have used cross-sectional data and that have modeled discontent to be exogenous to voting for allegedly populist parties have most likely overestimated the strength of these effects (e.g., Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). After all, the correlation they have found is most likely due to causal effects in both directions.

Individuals who support a party that expresses a populist message might very well do so not because of the populist message, but because they agree with this party on other issues, concerning for instance taxes, migration or European integration (see Van der Brug et al., 2000, 2005). Various studies have shown that citizens who support a specific party because they agree with this party’s stances on, say, the issues A and B, are inclined to adopt this party’s attitudes on the issues C and D as well (Bartels, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Lenz, 2009). It is therefore highly likely that once citizens support a party, they will also be susceptible to other ideas of this party, such as, for instance, its populism.

This study is based on cross sectional surveys, as a result of which the internal validity of causal claims is less strong than it would have been if I used panel data. Unfortunately, cross-national panel data were not available for this study. Future studies might collect such data to further examine the logics of expressing and fuelling discontent. Another path of future research might be (survey) experiments in which one could test whether and how populist messages affect individuals’ ideas about politics. While I recognize the limitations of this study, I do feel it is an important first step in the endeavor of unraveling the complex relationship between the populist message and political disaffection.