An Assessment of the threat of Right-Wing Populism in the European Parliament

Author: Elizabeth Neema Mkerenga
Supervisor: Lennart Wohlgemuth
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ABSTRACT

Over 500 million citizens in Europe are affected by the decisions taken at the European Union. However, the complexities of this supranational institution have people feeling voiceless and disengaged in the political system. The European Parliament - the organ meant to represent the European people – is alleged to being an elitist body that no longer represent the will of the ordinary citizen. This outcry of the people created the pool of potential for the rise of right-wing populist groups across Europe and their support has grown tremendously in what seems like a short span of time. But the tide is about to change. The surge of right-wing populism threatens to take over the European Parliament in the 2019 elections.

This research paper sets out to assess the sphere of influence of right-wing populism at the regional level. Using a bottom-up approach, the paper focuses on the attitudes and perceptions of the people and analyses their opinions by incorporating Eatwell and Goodwin’s four D criteria. As the analytical framework, Eatwell and Goodwin’s criteria offers the avenue for inspecting the legitimacy of the right-wing ideology. Once this is established, the question of influence is answered by looking at the potential implication of right-wing power. As a qualitative case study, the research implores the use of raw data from existing secondary databases. The paper acknowledges the extensive studies and cross-examinations that have been conducted at the national level and seeks to build upon this knowledge and illustrate the interconnected nature of our societies. In addition, this research paper was completed before the May 2019 elections were concluded.

The study indicates that right-wing supporters are motivated by the distrust of politicians and institutions, the destruction of the national group’s historic identity, perceived deprivation from rising inequalities and the de-alignment of people’s political positions. Furthermore, findings show a rising pattern of grievances rather than its decline. An indication that the phenomena of populism is here to stay. The polarization of right-wing populist groups in the political system threatens to tame the tone of politics if the institution does not take preventive action – some of which are discussed in the paper. With this in mind, the research paper acknowledges the threat of right-wing populism in the European Parliament.

Keywords: Populism, Right-Wing Populism, European Parliament, Europe
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALDE - Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

EAPN – European Alliance of Peoples and Nations

EB – Eurobarometer

ECR - European Conservatives and Reformist

EFDD - Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy

ENF - Europe of Nations and Freedom

EP – European Parliament

EPP - European People’s Party

EU – European Union

EUL/NGL - European United Left/Nordic Green Left

G/EFA - European Greens/ European Free Alliance

MEP – Member of Parliament

NA/NI - Non-Attached/ Non-Inscrits

OECD – Organization for Economic and Development

S&D - Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats

UK – United Kingdom

US – United States

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Table 1: European Parliament Election Seat Projections 2019

Table 2: Populist Power Projection
1. INTRODUCTION

As a bystander, one could not have predicted the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States of America nor the British vote to leave the European Union (EU). Yet this is the reality we face. Globalization – a double-edged sword – achieved peak heights of global integration whilst at the same time concentrated wealth in the hands of the few. Today, established organs such as the European Parliament (EP) are being challenged by political faces such as Nigel Farage, Matteo Salvini, Marine Le Pen, and Viktor Orbán among others who represent a ‘new’ ideology – right-wing populism.

Populism in itself is not a new concept. It can be traced back as far as the 1960s. A time where both the United States (US) and Russia were experiencing rising tension with farmers and thus giving birth to agrarian populism (Canovan, 1981). Having changed over time, today, populism has re-emerged with great vigour and is vastly spreading across the West (Cox, 2017). Without exceptions, it has been penetrating national institutions in governments like Denmark and it’s now making its way into the EU. Right-wing populists no longer want to be in the fringes of the political sphere but at its core.

The EP, the legislative organ of the EU prides itself as the only supranational institution whose Member States are democratically elected by direct universal suffrage (European Parliament, 2019). As it stands, European laws extend into policy areas ranging from market integration and the euro to employment and immigration. Recent trends indicate a decline of mainstream parties, particularly those that hold the majority of seats in the EU. Rather, there are new political players joining the ranks. Most significant however, is the rise of the populist actors who could be ushered at the European parliamentary election between 23-26 May 2019 (Lehne & Grabbe, 2018).

Nonetheless, while questioning the institution as a form of corrective democracy is noble, these politicians are framing politics as a Manichean battle between the will of ordinary people and corrupt, self-serving elites (Lewis, et al., 2019). In doing so, they have managed to muster increasing support that leaves their liberal centrist counterparts weary of the future of the European integration. Born out of historical circumstance, the EU began as “a bold attempt to bring together former enemies and to establish a lasting framework of binding cooperation among the states of Europe to ensure peace and stability” (Corbett, Jacobs, & Shackleton, 2000,
p. 2). At the time, its vision did not foresee the expansion to its current twenty-eight members from the initial ten founding members. As an unintended consequence, the evolution of the EU and its governing bodies has led to questions of its legitimacy, particularly by the marginalized fringe parties.

1.1 Research Problem

Several external shocks have shaken up the delicate equilibrium of the EU and given rise to populism in Europe. One can allude to the 2008 financial crisis in the United States which led to the 2009 European debt crisis. Before the region could stabilize, Europe was once again faced by the refugee migration crisis of 2015. However, according to Ruth Wodak (cited in Harris, 2018) “the populist wave in Europe began with the 9/11 attacks: the subsequent security crackdown legitimized cutting back on human rights and helped far-right parties touch on issues like law and order.”

However, today, populist ideologies propelled by populist parties transcends national borders. In 2014, the European Parliamentary elections recorded the highest share of populist Members of Parliament as 21.7% (Tartar & Warren, 2019). Since then, national support for populist parties has grown dramatically. Although there are numerous studies on populism at the national level, literature has yet to uncover the reach of populism at the regional level, in particular within the European Parliament. Therein, to what degree does right-wing populism have a bearing at the regional level? If so, can populist parties come together to influence policy processes and decision-making in the European Parliament? At last, is the institution capable of adapting to the changing circumstances?

1.2 Research Questions

The research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Why do right-wing populists question legitimacy in the EU?
2. What are the implications of increased right-wing populism in the EP?
3. Does the EP have the institutional capacity to combat the threat of populism?

1.3 Relevance

Populism is a current phenomenon in the study of European affairs today. There has been extensive research conducted at the national level both as a case study and through comparative
cross-country examinations which have been insightful. Yet, the discourse of populism has a completely different meaning in different local contexts (Wodak, 2016). Nevertheless, as an ever-expanding phenomenon, current literature does not adequately address the potential impact of the rising populist rhetoric particularly at the heart of the European legislation.

It is therefore important to examine the potential influence of right-wing populism in the EP because it can determine the future policy direction for the region. Consequently, the policy implications have rippling effects on both the national and international level. Hence, understanding how policies are shaped helps inform how countries organize their development agendas. In addition, the research aligns itself to the study of policy processes in the field of development as the study seeks to identify the challenges of decision-making caused by right-wing populist parties. It is a predictive study with the aim of preventing a legislative stalemate. It builds upon existing scholarship by expanding the study of populism at the regional level.

For this reason, the focus of the research is on the EP as the legislative body that is representative of the European people. In particular, the study is a pre-election analysis. While the focus in on the EP, one cannot refer to its nature and role without understanding the EU as a whole (Corbett et al., 2000). Although it is possible to examine the role of populist influence in the European Council (i.e. populist political leaders), given that the heart of populist ideology is at the state level and it is highly supported by the people, the EP is a fitting avenue to investigate populism in the EU.

1.4 Structure

After providing an introduction, the paper is organized by starting off with a background section as chapter 2. In order set the scene for the reader and develop the story that explains the need for the research study. Chapter 3 is a continuation of the background by looking deeper at previous work done by scholars in the field of populism. In chapter 4, there is a discussion of the analytical framework and what it entails. The research design and methodology are explored in chapter 5 and then followed with the findings in chapter 6. After the findings are presented, they are analysed in chapter 7 and a summary of findings is presented. Importantly, this section goes further to also answer the second and third research questions. The last chapter offers a conclusion of the study and recommends areas of future research.

Moreover, the study adopts an abductive logic of inquiry since the objective of the research is to understand and interpret phenomena. Using case study as the research design, the paper focuses on the influence of right-wing populism in the EP. Its main sources secondary data
from academic journals to official web pages as well as databases. This is particularly important to note because all European institution has designated websites with official information and data sources. But in terms of theoretical and analytical framework, the study first explores Beetham theory of legitimation and reviews the criteria proposed by Beetham and Lord’s for the assessment of legitimacy in a liberal-democratic society. This then leads to the exploration of Eatwell and Goodwin’s four D criteria for understanding right-wing populism. The latter then forms the basis for the analytical assessment.

1.5 Delimitations

In order to keep focus on the purpose of the paper, some delimitations have been made. Foremost, the paper examines the EP as it stands today. However, the paper does make reference and draws conclusions within the bounds of the EU as the governing bodies are interrelated. Moreover, the study maintains the purview of right-wing populism in the EU. Additionally, the choice to focus on the ‘threat’ of right-wing populism is not to indicate that the right populists are the antagonists but rather to concentrate on the implications that the right-wing populist ideology presents on democratic institutions. Lastly, the study strives to tackle on issues of policy choices and decision-making rather than areas of integration or security concerns.

2. BACKGROUND

This chapter provides an overview of the two areas of focus throughout the paper. This will provide the reader with sufficient foundational understanding of concepts and context for the research investigation.

2.1 Populism

The concept of populism is as elusive today as it was when Ernest Gellner and Ghita Ionescu (1969, p. 3) first attempted to capture it. They addressed the following questions: whether populism is an ideology, whether populism can be defined in terms of political psychology or as anti-phenomenon, if populism is a people-worshipping phenomenon, or finally if populism can be subsumed under nationalism, socialism, and peasantism. Current scholarship, however, has further fragmented the concept of populism in an effort to formulate a coherent understanding of its logic. Moving away from agrarian populism, modern scholarship has reignited the interest in political populism (Canovan, 1981; Akkerman, 2012). However,
whether this re-emergence of political populism is a movement, a revolt or a result of a shifting world order is relative (Shuster, n.d.).

In attempting to grasp its meaning, it is clear that populism is a widely used and contested notion (Barr, 2009). It can be explored from different lenses. For one, Kazin (1995) looks at populism as a style of political expression accessible to all politicians regardless of their place on the political spectrum – liberal and conservatives alike. Whereas, Barr (2009) terms populism as a political strategy that is dependent on the position of the sender within the broader political context. Wherein, upon acquiring power, populist use clientelism and plebiscitarian linkages to maintain their supporters. On the other hand, Mudde (2004, p. 543) focusing primarily on European right-wing populist parties, states that populism is “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous 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”.

Upon further exploration, however, Jansen (2011) argues that instead of considering populism as a stable ideology, we should see it as a political project “that can be undertaken by challengers and incumbents of various stripes in pursuit of a wide range of social, political and economic agendas” (p. 77). His definition consists of two dimensions: mobilization and discourse. Jansen defines populist mobilization as “any sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people” (p. 82). Populist discourse “posits the natural social unity and inherent virtuousness of ‘the people’” (p. 84). At the same time, it posits the people in an antagonistic relationship with the anti-popular ‘elite’. By Jansen’s analysis, the three approaches – populism as an ideology, discursive style, and political strategy – are not mutually exclusive (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013, p. 15). For the purpose of this research, we adopt Jansen’s perspective on populism.

So then, who is a populist? If appealing to the people is essential, then aren’t all politicians populists? According to Jan-Werner Müller (2016, p. 3) to qualify as a populist one must be critical of the elites, anti-pluralist and claim exclusionary representation as a form of identity politics. He continues to state that “it is necessary but not a sufficient condition to be critical of the elites… populist [also] claim that they and they alone represent the people”. Furthermore, it’s important to distinguish that while populists “espouse a notion of democratic representation of the popular will, they actually rely on a symbolic representation of the ‘real people’” (p. 27).
Moreover, although the ‘popular will’ is intended to favour the ‘silent majority’ in an emancipatory manner, it still remains difficult to pinpoint said homogenous group of people (Müller, 2016; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Rooduijin & Akkerman, 2017).

Regardless of one’s perspective, most scholars agree that “populism worships the people” (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 4). Meny and Surel (2002) claim three essential aspects core to populism’s characteristics namely the people, the betrayal of the people by the elite and the primacy of the people. Hence, if the people are met by unfavourable economic development and structural conditions, it may result in populist politics (Taggart, 2000). Yet Panizza (2005) critically suggests that before people resort to populist movements, he points to the breakdown of social order that comes first then results in an economic crisis that leads to social disruptions.

2.1.1 Right-Wing Populist Ideology

Populists can sit on either side of the political spectrum – left or right. This research focuses mainly on the ideas and the voice of the right-wing populist. Thus, the term may include moderate right-wing populists as well as extreme right-wing populists. Nonetheless, scholars contend that the right-wing populist ideology embodies nationalistic claims, exclusionism, xenophobia, and welfare chauvinism. In that, “nationalism aims for congruence between nation and state to be achieved by either internal homogenisation or external exclusiveness. This leads to a distinction between either ethnic or civic nationalism. The second characteristic is exclusionism, whether in the form of ethnopluralism, racism or anti-semitism. The third characteristic is xenophobia, while the fourth is an emphasis on the strong state particularly in providing law and order. Welfare chauvinism seeks to ensure that jobs, money, and welfare should be used to protect the indigenous community from external influences such as immigrants or international economic competition” (Clark, Bottom, & Copus, 2008, p. 513).

At the core, right-wing populists question the decline of the nation-state, the isolation of the elites and the growing unequal societies of the west (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). In comparison to their left-wing counterparts who define ‘the people’ on a socio-economic basis, the right prospers on questioning central aspects of democracy namely political contention and political contestation (Dahl, 1971). As a result, this has led some populist actors such as Hungary’s Orbán to speak of creating a new form of ‘illiberal democracy’ that raises worrying issues of democratic rights (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. xi).
Still, right-wing populism suffers from the generalization that it is an ideology for the desperate marginalized people of society to vent their frustration to the system. Some of the misleading notions of this movement include the idea that right-wing populism is exclusively powered by the unemployed or low-income groups. On the contrary, it reaches people of all ages, sexes and social class (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 4). Besides, although populism has become increasingly apparent in the recent years, its false to think that it was rooted from the financial crisis. The crisis narrative is drawn from the experience of inter-war Europe but its notion as the primary cause of populism is feeble (p. 6).

Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, p. 9) continue to highlight another popular myth. It claims that the traditional and conservative (stereotypically old white men), in their effort to hold on to power are the supporters of populism. The ‘old white men’ recall a society less mixed with immigrants and refugees whereas, the millennials are tolerant of such issues. This outlook frames the generational shift as a cause of populism, when in reality it is not. The insecurities of a hyper ethnic society have been echoed by the millennials as well. Ambiguous descriptions distract us from the fact that in reality right-wing populism encapsulates a wide and diverse group of people in society (p. 17).

2.2 The European Parliament

Speaking of democracy, the EP is the world’s largest multinational governing body consisting of 751 Members of Parliament (MEPs). Its members are selected then elected from national parties of each member state and serve for a period of five years. The allocation of seats is determined by a country’s population size through the use of a degressively proportional formula. As the body expanded over time, so did its responsibilities. Today, based on the revision of the Lisbon Treaty adopted in 2009, the powers of the parliament have been strengthened to approve budgetary matters, oversee legislative issues, scrutinize the work of the executive institutions and lastly electing the Commission President (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011).

The EP is organized into ideological lines that form eight political groups. They are consist of the European People’s Party (EPP), the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE), the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD), the European Greens/European Free Alliance (Greens/EFA), Europe of Nations and Freedom
(ENF), the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL), and the Non-Attached. In general, the groups correspond to the classic left/right spectrum but the degree of how far towards each direction they sway may differ. Furthermore, the EP has both supporters and sceptics of European integration. The right supports are against further integration but acknowledge the benefit of the EU from a capitalist perspective. Whereas left supports are more inclined to integration for the conservation of social standards. That is, during discussions of substantive decisions, MEPs alliance is determined by party, nation and personal preferences. Thus, ad-hoc alliances are formed (Lehne & Grabbe, 2018). As a result, decision-making in the EP is a game of numbers.

European citizens seem disinterested in EP elections. Voter turnout in elections have dwindled, from 62% in 1979 to an all-time low of 42.6% in 2014. Similarly, as its legislative powers increased, the parliamentary democracy at the EU level has long suffered from a structural deficit (Mårtensson, 2015). The consequence of this decades-long erosion of support has created an opening for outsiders to challenge the system (Rose, 2016). This is notable with Italy’s Matteo Salvini who heads one of the parties in power and is hard at work rallying populist support with the aim of taking over the EP in order to further block EU integration (Walt, 2018).

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

As the background chapter provided the foundation of the study, this chapter then highlights what previous scholars have contributed in the field of populism. Additionally, the information is meant to stir the reader in the direction of research by providing relevant cases and offering a diverse perspective of the topic.

Is populism a threat to democracy? That is the question. Populism today has assumed an international form, one that is starkly different to its national predecessor (Cox, 2017). Thus, in the spirit of global cooperation, this new wave of populism does indeed pose a threat. This is because, it has the ability to “leaves an imprint on important political phenomena” (Hawkins, 2010, p. 49). While the liberal argument can be easily dismissed as economical drawing from the financial crisis to austerity measures to explain its resurgence, other scholars such as Wodak (2016), Müller (2016) and Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) state that populism has deeper rooted causes - such as culture - that stretch further back into history. In 2006, Thomas Carothers
foreshadowed some of the acute challenges that were gaining steam and noted that the broader international context for promoting democracy was changing (Diamond & Plattner, 2015).

Unlike previous trends where democracies were threatened and overthrown through military might, political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt (2018) point out, when democracies die from within, as they do now, they do so slowly, in barely visible steps. This is how populism takes effect and meets its anti-democratic agenda according to Ignazi (2003). For instance, right-wing populist parties have already had an impact by dragging the west political systems to the right (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. xxxi) through the acceptance of coalition governments in states like Austria.

It’s worth mentioning that, although right-wing populism is gaining momentum and recognition in recent times, Western Europe experienced its first breakthrough of right-wing parties in the transition from the 1980s to the 1990s (Minkenberg, 2015). They include the likes of the French National Rally and the Danish People’s Party among others. Therefore, even as Taggart (2000) states that populism is a response to the principles of representative politics, its history disregards the claim that it is episodic.

Still, scholars like Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) contend that populism is positively related to democracy because of its focus on representing the will of the people. Similarly, Urbinati (1998) stresses that populism is a strategy of rebalancing the distribution of political power among established and emerging social groups. Therefore, the populist resurgence acts not as a reactionary opposition to modernity or a rejection of democracy but a struggle for economic reform through increased democratic participation (Postel, 2007). In this view, populism draws out the challenges of liberal democratic practice that are unspoken but lingering (Arditi, 2007). On the other hand, Subramanian and Kessler (2013) argues that modern populism is less the result of an identity crisis as such and much more the result of what has been termed ‘hyperglobalization’. That is, the downside of globalization that economists did not predict. For instance, wealth being concentrated in the hands of the few. In this manner, populism serves to inhibit the further development of democratic institutions (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013) which is essentially what right-wing populist want.

However, classifying right-wing populist does not come without its challenges. One common approach is to call them ‘far-right’, on the grounds that the term covers all those movements that focus on immigration and ethnic change as threatening the nation. But ‘far-right’ is very broad. It includes violent fascists who want to overturn democracy, in addition to those who
play by the democratic rules. It also encompasses blatant racists as well as those whose views on immigration are not significantly different to the mainstream right (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 67). Thinkers split the ‘far right’ into two groupings – the ‘extreme right’ and the ‘radical right’.

By this approach, the extreme right is characterized by a rejection of democracy and comprises authoritarians who do not tolerate the ‘marketplace of ideas’ where people broker and compromise, the essence of liberal-democratic life. Instead, extremists want to shut the marketplace down and divide the nation into an ‘us versus them’ situation (Lipset & Raab, 1971). They gained momentum during the third wave in 1980-2000 by establishing themselves in politics and party systems (Mudde C., 2000). The ‘radical right’, on the other hand, is typically used to describe groups that are critical of certain aspects of liberal democracy but which do not seek to overthrow democracy and are open to alternative forms of ‘rule by the people’ (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 69).

Furthermore, it is also possible to classify the right-wing populist based on ideological outlook. The fourfold variants being (1) autocratic-fascist, usually anti-democratic, including racism or xenophobia, and often approving of violence as a political means, (2) racist or ethno-centrist, but neither fascist nor clearly antidemocratic or violent, (3) populist-authoritarian, organized around a strong and charismatic leader and with a diffuse nationalist or xenophobic ideology, and (4) religious-fundamentalist versions, in which nationalism merges with religious rigidity (Minkenberg, 2015, p. 4). But regardless, it remains valid that right-wing populist movements are accelerated after crisis and in times of rapid political, socio-economic, and cultural change (Minkenberg, 2015; Funke, Schularick, & Trebesch, 2015).

3.1.1 Legitimacy in the European Union
A crucial area to understand in the rise of populism is the crisis of advanced representative democracies (Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999). The EU represents said advanced democracy. The EU plays a major role in managing interdependence but it is seen as being too far away from the people. “Take back control” was the slogan of the Brexiters during the referendum campaign. It is an outcry by the people that the additional supranational level of decision-making is contested and seen as illegitimate. Yet, it is at the European level that the nexus between internal and external policy plays out the most (Balfour, 2017, p. 58).

The populist right wants to reclaim national sovereignty from distant transnational organizations such as the EU. This argument is often linked back to immigration by pointing
finger at the ‘freedom of movement’ principle in the EU, which allows people to travel and work freely in its member states. This, in turn, is often linked to security issues. National populists often argue that the EU does not adequately police its external and internal borders, an omission which, particularly since the start of the refugee crisis, has enabled Islamist terrorists to cross borders and commit atrocities (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 69). It is also common for scholars to analyse said aspects as competing approaches. That is, it’s either economics or culture related, either jobs or immigrants. In reality, such a complex movement cannot be explained by either one or the other (p. xxiv).

The reason for the aforementioned is a result of an inadequate system of political representation that fails to link the views of the European people on political matters to the agenda of the EP (Schmitt & Thomassen, 1999). It is such grievances that right-wing populist parties are trying to relay in the EP in an effort to first, highlight the lack of legitimacy of the institution and secondly to improve political representation. The question of legitimacy is further explored By Beetham and Lord in the following section.

3.1.2 Right-wing populism and policymaking

The understanding of the deeper reasons behind the symptoms of populism is needed to guide political and policy choices and to identify alternatives to the nationalist and anti-multilateral course advocated by populism (Balfour, 2017, p. 56). In organs such as the EP, these parties advocate for authoritarian social policies, like a tough stance on law and order, but also call for the greater use of referendums to strengthen the link between the rulers and the ruled (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). However, it’s important to note that these parties are so far not given much leg room in the EP. Although speaking from a national perspective, Minkenberg (2001, p. 10) posits that the oppositional nature of right-wing populist parties tends to produce only minor results mostly at the symbolic level.

Nonetheless, any form of participation of right-wing populists has its implications. For instance, the collaboration of right-wing parties with mainstream political group may not pose an immediate consequence, but fact of its direct or indirect engagement raises the issue of a certain level of de-radicalization of political issues. Furthermore, the right-wing in power can do among the following: redefine collective action and introduce new types of actors, they can normalize certain patterns of interaction such as a confrontational style and they can make irreversible change that can affect the political environment in the long run (Minkenberg, 2015, p. 1).
Today, populist actors are more encouraged than ever. The upcoming elections show promise for right-wing populist parties. Prominent figures such as Marine Le Pen and Matteo Salvini are among those talking up the likelihood of an anti-establishment surge in May, a result that could steer policy-making away from the so-called mainstream in favour of his agenda opposing immigration and further European integration. In doing so, they are turning the EU-wide vote into a test of the shared values of the populist-nationalist insurrection they (Kantar Public, 2018a) aspire to lead (Tartar & Warren, 2019).

The desire for right-wing parties in the European election is to win enough seats to obstruct the “EP’s work on foreign policy, eurozone reform, and freedom of movement, and could limit the EU’s capacity to preserve European values relating to liberty of expression, the rule of law, and civil rights” (Dennison & Zerka, 2019, p. 2). However, Kaltwasser and Taggart (2016) counters that in well-functioning democracies and institutions, elected populists are constrained by supranational organizations – whose power is taken from the Member States. Although pro-European parties may still come out of the election as the dominant political side, they have to alert of the game of numbers that can say decisions.

4. THEORETICAL AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter the theoretical and analytical framework are explained. The tool is used to examine the surge of right-wing populism and what it entails for legitimacy in an institution such as the European Parliament.

Two key factors standout from previous research. One, the need to examine the question of legitimacy raised by right-wing populists and two, the need to understand the motivating forces of populist behaviour. As a result, it is crucial to select an appropriate analytical framework that can guide one in the formulation of this assessment. This section thus presents two distinct approaches for investigating right-wing populism in the EP and explains the need to focus on one.

4.1 Overview of Frameworks

To illustrate how legitimacy is inspected, this paper adopts Beetham and Lord’s (1998) work as the theoretical framework. In their book ‘Legitimacy and the European Union’, the authors identify three elements for studying legitimacy both at the national and regional level. They are democracy, identity and performance. But first, the paper looks at Beetham’s (1991)
definition of legitimacy from his earlier book namely ‘The Legitimation of Power’. Unlike in political systems such as monarchies and dictatorships where power is concentrated in the hands of the few, in a democratic system, power is essentially in the hands of the people. It is the people who willingly choose to delegate this power to their representatives. It is because of this that Robert Dahl (1971) declared the unlikely survival rate of democracy when opposed by a large minority. Therefore, Beetham (1991, p. 15) recognized the multi-dimensional character of power and states that it is only legitimate when “it conforms to established rules, the rules can be justified by reference to beliefs shared by both dominant and subordinate, and, there is evidence of consent by the subordinate to the particular power relation”. Figure 1.1 illustrates what a power relation entail.

**Figure 1.1 Characteristics of a power system or relationship**

![Diagram](image)

*Beetham, 1991, p. 34*

Through his definition, Beetham establishes a liberal-democratic definition of legitimation and according to him, any actor, organization or government is legitimate when it conforms to the latter aspects. So, in a liberal democracy, legitimacy is conveyed through ‘popular authorization’. This expression reflects the consent referred to in earlier text and denotes the first criteria of *democracy*. It means that the subordinate, who comprises of the whole adult population, acknowledges the authority usually through an electoral process (Beetham & Lord, 1998, p. 7). The second crucial criteria for examining legitimacy is *identity*. It entails identifying the source of power that enables the question of legitimacy, that’s the people. According to Beetham and Lord this “makes issues of political identity, of territoriality, of inclusion and exclusion, equally crucial for political legitimacy”. The last criteria is *performance*. Herein, the government (or institution) is responsible for securing the needs of the people such as welfare, economic growth and civic rights. The question here being, how does the government’s power facilitate or hinder the performance of such activities (p. 6)?
After conceptualizing legitimacy, it is important to understand how right-wing populism is examined and how it relates to the aspects of legitimacy. In doing so, this paper looks at a criterion for understanding the populist movement as identified by Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) in their book ‘National Populism’. The authors believe that national populism – synonymous to right-wing populism – is here to stay. Throughout the book, they endeavour to illustrate the changing nature of politics that has led to the surge of populism and its challenging voice towards mainstream politics.

According to Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, p. xxi) right-wing populists are driven by four major issues that make up the ‘Four D’s’ criterion. Firstly, the distrust of politicians and institutions that has been endorsed by the elitist nature of liberal democracy that has always pushed to limit the powers of political participation. Doing this only resulted in many citizens feeling left out and unheard; an ironic gesture in a modern representative system that strides to achieve equality for all groups in society. Secondly, the destruction of national group’s historic identity caused by immigration and hyper ethnic change. Here, people have a strong sense that the nation is being eroded away by politically correct agendas that are being pushed from the global arena (p. xxii). The third criteria is caused by perceived deprivation from rising inequalities of income and wealth. People have become fearful about the future in particularly for their children. This feeling drives people to reassess their views on issues such as immigration and identity. The fourth criteria is the de-alignment of people’s political positions. The authors indicate the shift from the classical liberal era of political stability based on strong mainstream parties and loyal voters. Rather the bonds have weakened and the political system has become unpredictable (p. xxiii).

In sum, these frameworks provide insight to the complex nature of studying right-wing populism. Even though they are both sufficient tools, Beetham and Lord’s framework offers a top-down approach for addressing the legitimacy of right-wing populism. In particular, amidst the EU’s democratic deficit, its struggle to promote the European identity and its recovering economy. On the other hand, Eatwell and Goodwin’s criterion uses a bottom-up which narrows down of the experience of the people most affected. Therefore, going forward, this paper focuses on Eatwell and Goodwin’s four Ds criteria to respond to the research questions. The next section provides a detailed description of each category.
4.2 The Four Ds Criteria for Right-Wing Populism

4.2.1 Distrust

A core principle to populist rhetoric is anti-elitism. In their eyes, the elite are immoral parasites (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) who only cater to personal interests. However, these elites make up the majority of the people who represent our democratic institutions but the minority of the total populace. But were they not elected by the people? The underlying concern for the people is their voice. According to Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, p. 85) “liberal democracies are increasingly dominated by highly educated and liberal elites whose backgrounds and outlook differ fundamentally from those of an average citizen”. This argument thus forms the basis for deep-rooted distrust by right-wing populists who advocate for the people.

As democracy developed over time from the classical Athenian model of direct participation to modern day’s representative model, the people have been pushed further away from the political scene. Yet elitist scholars such as Joseph Schumpeter (2006) argue that it is the intrinsic nature of democracy to rule through competitive structures rather than through mass participation. This was short lived. The aftermath of the Second World War saw the diffusion of powers from national governments to transnational organizations; from nationally elected politicians to non-elected expert policymakers (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 97). In Europe, this saw the foundation of the European Economic Community in 1958 (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011).

At its inception, people were content with leaving political discussions about European integration to the bureaucrats, a term that came to be understood as permissive consensus (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 98). But as the direction of the organization started to shift politically, people wanted to express their opinion. Two prominent cases where people were by-passed include one, the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 which introduced the symbolic term ‘European Union’ and two, the launch of the ‘Euro’ single currency in 1999 (p. 99). At this point, it was an organization for the people but not by the people. By the 21st century public anxiety over European integration coupled by rising immigration concerns and the global financial crisis forged a wider gap between the ordinary people and its leaders. The gap is then promulgated by the diverging views about key issues in political debate (p. 102) such as how to maintain justice and order.

Moreover, the rise of political distrust across the West has been worsened by education. The working class – who form a majority of right-wing supporters – do not share the same
experiences with their representative counterparts who are college-educated (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 106). It is here that scholars Boven and Willie (2017) put forth that Plato’s dream of a meritocratic polity, run by ‘philosopher kings’ has more or less been realized. The two group hold fundamentally different lives and values. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2017 those aged 25-64 without tertiary level of education comprised an average of 66% in the EU (OECD, 2018). This represents a large share of the population.

Additionally, legislative complexities and bureaucratic hierarchies have further pushed right-wing populists to distrust institutions such as the EU. Rather than achieve transparency, the long chains of commands reduce the accountability of elected politicians at the national level (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 98). Although the European vision for integration is modest, it won’t be achieved if corrective action is not taken. For as long as people are discontent, they will continue to challenge and question liberal democracy.

4.2.2 Destruction

The second concern for right-wing populist is how immigration and ethnic change are cultivating strong fears about the eminent demise of the national group’s historic identity and established way of life (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). Unfortunately, as globalization has increased wilful mobility, wars and natural disaster have forced migration upon others. Nevertheless, right-wing populists reject the simplification that they are the refuge for racists and people driven by an irrational fear of ‘the other’ (p. 131).

Historian Noah Harari (2015) wrote in his bestselling book Sapiens that nationalism is losing ground. This is to say that the relevance of the nation-state is slowly withering away. However, time and again history reminds people of their attachment to the state as a form of identity (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 133). In most cases it is when the pace and inflow of ‘the other’ is immense. But right-wing populists are no saints. They exploit this divide to make a point. But the fact that it resonates with many, reaffirms that the issue is a concern for many and not just part of political mind games.

Contrary to expectations however, research finds that this fear of destruction coined by populists thrives in Eastern Europe, a region with relatively low acceptance of immigrants and foreign-born population. This should be compared with its Western European neighbours with higher percentage of foreign-born and higher tolerance and acceptance of immigrants (Ser, 2016). Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, p. 141) indicate that “public worry over immigration is
not only shaped by the actual number of immigrants or refugees entering a country or by the proportion of minorities, but is subjective in nature”.

Furthermore, worries about immigration and refugees have also become entwined with wider fears over security. Paired with large populations of Muslims particularly in Europe, many have fallen for the predicament that refugees increase the risk of terrorism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 154). Whether it’s coincidence or not, between 2014 and 2017 the refugee crisis overlapped with the occurrence of over sixty acts of ‘Jihadist terrorism’ in Europe and North America (Poushter, 2016), giving more momentum to this argument. At the end of the day, the ongoing cultural changes and fears are breeding grounds to further the right-wing populist revolt.

4.2.3 Deprivation

This leads us to deprivation. In general, people are more welcoming and open-minded when they feel safe and secure. The rising inequalities of income and wealth in the West do not assure the average citizen of this. On the contrary, this awareness has the citizen feeling uncertain about their positions which reflects a lost faith in a better future. It is a belief among certain groups, even within the same national bounds, that they are losing out relative to the other. These fears in turn have the ability to sway their political decisions and choices (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

Capitalism traces its roots back to the industrial revolution wherein Karl Marx coined the division between two class groups: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. This system gave rise to the pursuit of self-interest as a means of maximizing economic growth for the benefit of all and gave way to the outburst of neoliberalism (Schumpeter, 2006). For those who share the views of the right, neoliberalism threatens national jobs. It’s not the elite who are affected but rather the working middle and lower class. At the same time, it is misleading to associate anxieties over globalization only with economic effects. Globalization also increases social inequalities (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 199).

Linked to issues of distrust of the one percentile and the destruction of national identity, the rise of neoliberalism conjured a state of mind that was subjective and had the ability to affect not only the poorest in society but even the middle class and young voters (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 181). It is in this manner that Harvard scholars Noam Gidron and Peter Hall (2017) point out that economic factors cannot be omitted in examining right-wing populism because they are interwoven into people’s perceived levels of respect, recognition and status relative to
others in society. Therefore, although objective deprivation such as the experience of living on a low income, losing a job or enduring slow economic growth are substantive, it is clear that relative deprivation is critically important (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 213) as well.

4.2.4 De-alignment
Lastly, what Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) call de-alignment refers to the breakdown of traditional bonds between people and the traditional parties. Unwavering loyalty in political systems has been faced with “higher rates of volatility at elections, a growing willingness among some citizens to back new parties, the rise of new value-led conflicts, stronger feelings of alienation and apathy, and a striking decline of bedrock support for movements that were once dominant” (p. 225). Yet, it is essentially maintained that political parties form a crucial aspect of people’s identity.

The expansion of democracy demanded a system that could educate citizens and mobilize their votes hence the rise of political parties. They later became training grounds for new leaders who would govern the country and help to broker compromise among the different elites and interest groups in society (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 227). Over time, parties would associate themselves with underlying dividing lines to which people developed a strong sense of allegiance which translated into their daily lives.

These political divides started to change as key patterns such a migration shifted from rural to urban, from industrialization to globalization and as religious ties wore off. Just as it’s feared that a new tolerant millennial cohort will overturn the political scene in a few years, the same took place in 1970s as observed by Ronald Inglehart (1977). The new generation were less worried about their basic economic and physical security and had passed through the liberalizing effects of higher education, these new generations were far more likely to adopt a different set of ‘post-material’ values (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 233). As a result, this new generation of voters are unpredictable in politics.

Moreover, the downward spiral of party membership over the years is an indicator of weakening mainstream party support. Some of the reasons to explain this include non-allegiance of political actors and the refusal of the young to align themselves with mainstream parties. Overall, Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, p. 266) denote that “the dividing lines of politics are in a process of fundamental transformation and will continue to evolve in the years ahead”.

18
Conclusion

This research paper only focuses its analysis on Eatwell and Goodwin’s framework because their four Ds criteria manages to capture the root causes of right-wing populism. Their approach examines and explains why an ordinary citizen would feel inclined towards a populist ideology. Additionally, the framework infers that populism as a phenomenon can only be eliminated from its roots. If people’s grievances are left unanswered then populism will persist. Moreover, the framework aligns with an ontological objective of interpreting why a phenomenon develops in a certain way, as further discussed in the next section.

5. METHODOLOGY

A description of the methodological design is expanded in this chapter. It highlights the study as an abductive study that applies a case study as its research design. The process of data selection is also be presented.

5.1 Method

According to Morgan and Smircich (1980) it is the nature of a social phenomenon that determines the appropriate research method. The purpose of this research is to examine the influence of right-wing populism on the European Parliament. This points to two things: one, the objective of the study is to understand and interpret phenomena; two, the study focuses only on one particular institution. This then infers that the research applies a qualitative approach and can be best examined using a case study research design. In addition, it draws from an ontological assumption that is supported by social constructivists who hold a subjective understanding of reality.

Bryman (2012, p. 66) defines a case study an “an intensive examination of the setting … [that] is concerned with the complex and particular nature of the case in question”. By providing a detailed analysis of a specific case, the research design is useful in testing whether a specific theory or model actually applies to phenomena in the real world. As Gerring (2004, p. 341) indicates, the case study is understood as a means of defining cases, not a way of analysing cases or a way of modelling causal relations.

Yet, case study methodologies remain highly questioned and favoured at the same time in social science research (Yin, 2002; Gerring, 2004). This presents a paradox. There is still wide confusion over the use of said methodology and how it can be distinguished from other types of qualitative research. In line with this, case studies can be particularistic, descriptive, heuristic
and often inductive. Particularistic entails looking at one particular phenomenon; descriptive offers a narrative of a phenomenon; heuristics highlights the understanding of a given phenomenon whilst the drawing of concepts from data makes case studies inductive. However, case studies are not limited to one logic or method. They can be used with a different logic of inquiry and can employ a variety of methods (Merriam, 1988).

On the one hand, case studies are beneficial in detecting potential issues in specific settings and the patterns of movement within such settings especially in rapidly changing environments (Noor, 2008). Additionally, they provide a holistic picture of the situation and may extend to identify further issues for future discussion. Thus, case studies are significant knowledge building tools (Merriam, 1988). On the other hand, it is argued that to focus on a single scenario, event or group of people makes it difficult to draw generalizations (Bryman, 2012). The rebuttal to this argument highlights the purpose of a case study is to investigate an area of interest in an in-depth manner. Besides that, it is true that case studies risk being detailed oriented and case specific. That is, they can easily lose their audience in long texts. As a result of this, depending on the objectives of the researcher, conducting case study research may be time-consuming. Guba and Lincoln (1981) additionally criticize case studies for either oversimplification or exaggeration of phenomena (cited in Merriam, 1998).

With regards to data analysis, Bryman (2012, p. 69) criticizes scholars of qualitative research for not considering factors such as reliability and validity. For constructivist scholars such as Stake (1995) and Merriam (1988) such factors of data validation are tackled through the triangulation of information. This is because they regard qualitative methodology approaches to validity and reliability differently. But, scholars such as Yin (2002) advocate for the use of these factors and suggest ways of application.

Therefore, looking at replication in a case study design is difficult based on the foundational logic of qualitative approaches. Reliability may be influenced by variables such as the researcher’s epistemological point of departure, the skill set of the researcher and the nature of the study itself. All of which are relative. Merriam (1988, p.17) diverges from the traditional view and instead raises that results should be consistent and dependable. In this scenario, prominence of case study methodologies may be based on the numbers of citations by other members in one’s community of practice and may remain so unless disproven by new evidence.

Nonetheless, the scope of this research is on the EP. Thus, to ensure internal validity while striving to answer the first research objective, the study analyses legitimacy (or the lack there
of) using Eatwell and Goodwill’s four D’s. How does distrust, destruction, deprivation and de-alignment affect the legitimacy of the institution? With regard to external validity, generalizability contradicts the core purpose of a case study – which is to highlight a particular case. Hence Bryman (2012, p.71) argues that in such a case, the quality of theoretical reasoning is of greater concern.

This research is an abductive study. It attempts to use a different perspective in explaining the phenomenon of populism that has engulfed Europe. The logic of inquiry attempts to “discover whether certain behaviour is a manifestation of a normative structures” or an individual event. (Danermark, Ekström, Jacobsen, & Karlsson, 2002, p. 89). When comparing to other modes of inference such as induction and deduction, Collins (1985) states that “abduction is neither a purely empirical generalization like induction, nor is it logically rigorous like deduction” (as cited in Danermark et al., 2002, p. 90).

At any rate, since new events are rate in the field of social sciences, Danermark et al (2002, p. 74) point to the importance of inference and “how mechanism manifest themselves under specific conditions”. That is, the ability to draw new patterns and observations by using new analytical perspectives that build on existing knowledge. The main advantage of an abductive study is ensuring that the meaning given to phenomena is guided by a set of ideas that could either be specific or generalizable to a larger context (p. 80). So then, assessing the influence of right-wing populism on the European Parliament is another point of entry to deciphering the phenomena.

5.2 Data Selection

As populism focuses on the people, it is crucial to gain an understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of European citizens. One of the most efficient tools that measure public opinion in Europe is the Eurobarometer survey that is published twice annually. As a cross-national and longitudinal study, the Standard Eurobarometer survey series examines trends to gauge and compare within Member States of the EU including potential new members. Although Special Eurobarometer surveys are conducted for specific thematic issues from time to time, the norm is to maintain the survey as constant so that data is comparable over the years. However, since it was initiated in the 1970s, the range of questions has also expanded with time. It is a comprehensive study with approximately 1000 face-to-face interviews conducted per country (European Commission, 2019b). This study will mainly use the Standard Eurobarometer for spring 2018 (EB 89) and autumn 2018 (EB 90). In addition, a Special Eurobarometer for spring
2019 (EB 91.1) is also utilized focusing particularly on the EP election. The European Commission generally provides the empirical data on public opinion surveys for public use.

Other sources used to collect data for the findings include the European Parliament website that has a subsection on all previous parliamentary election results as well as the press room news which provides information such as projections for the 2019 EP elections. In collaboration with Kantar Public, Parliament’s Public Opinion Monitoring Unit calculated the number of projected seats per the existing political groups based on national statistics on voting intentions (European Parliament, 2019b). Hence, Kantar Public provides projects seats for the month of March and April. Furthermore, forecast for the projected seats for the month of May was based on Polls of Polls, a website that regularly collect electoral polls from different pollsters in EU countries. However, Polls of Polls was merged with Politico Europe. Due to this, its May projections had to be triangulated with similar trusted sources such as Europe Elects (2019) website and European Elections Stats (2019) website. Additional complimentary data to aid the study was collected from Eurostat (2019a; 2019b) and the Pew Research Center (2017; 2018).

One could argue whether this paper’s methodology doesn’t belong under a mixed method research design. This research paper was dominantly conducted through the use of qualitative approaches but indeed does simultaneously use elements of quantitative data collection methods. The use of mixed methods in this research paper is considered to serve a complementarity function. According to Brannen (2005, p. 25) the “data analyses from the two methods are juxtaposed and generate complementary insights that together create a bigger picture” (as cited in Sumner & Tribe, 2008, p. 110). But at the end, distinction is based on the researcher’s preferences.

6. FINDINGS

*This section provides empirical data from existing databases that explain the real situation on the ground and the position of European citizens with regards to their perception and attitudes about the European Union.*

In order to reflect the level of distrust, destruction, deprivation and de-alignment data from existing secondary sources such as the Eurobarometer (EB) surveys. The questionnaires target useful areas that highlight and provide insight on European citizen perceptions and attitudes towards the EU. The findings in this section tackle the first research question.
6.1 Distrust

The Brexit event that took place in 2016 surprised many Europeans. However, when asked ‘if a referendum would be held regarding membership in the EU the public opinion survey indicates that 68% of the citizens across the EU27 countries would vote to remain in the EU. The results are considered to be their highest since 1983. A slight difference is notable however in the EU28 countries - which includes the UK - with those voting to remain in the EU at 66%. This feeling is mutually shared by both sexes, men and women along the ages of 15-55+. Still, a similar number of 16% against 14% respectively would vote to leave the EU (EB91.1, 2019).

Similarly, when asked whether their countries had benefited from being a member of the EU, 67% responded positively with only 27% stating their countries have not benefitted from the membership. Yet when asked whether if they considered their membership as a good or bad thing, a figure of 27% said that membership in the EU was neither a good thing or a bad thing. While 59% of respondents agreeing that being part of the EU was a good thing, an almost equal measure do not believe that their voice is heard in the EU. In the EU28, 49% agree that their voice counts in the EU but as high, 45% disagree. Nationally however, 60% of Europeans believe their voices count in their countries compared to 36% who do not. (EB91.1, 2019).

Moreover, with the EP elections around the corner, citizens were asked to share the reasons why they would or would not vote. The top three reasons why people would vote include a sense of civic responsibility mentioned by 44% of the respondents; followed by respondents who usually vote in political elections with 28% and 26% of respondents would vote because they share a strong sense of the European identity – that is, they are citizens of the EU. On the other hand, there were respondents who would not vote in the EP elections. The main reason cited by 33% of the respondents was their belief that their vote would not change anything. Whereas, 30% of the respondents distrust the political system and 23% state that the EP does not sufficiently deal with problems that concern people like them. In this latter group, the survey also illustrates that most of the respondents belonged within the economically active cohort of ages 34-64 and a majority of them are either unemployed or working as manual workers or other forms of white collar jobs (EB91.1, 2019).

According to European Statistics (Eurostat) only an average of 47.6% of European citizens aged between the ages of 18-64 have attained up to upper-secondary and post-secondary, non-tertiary level of education. This figure has been fluctuating over the years with the high record in 2014 with 48.4% within the same cohort. In comparision, the average number of citizens
who have only managed to completed less than primary, primary, and lower secondary education has been gradually falling over the year and stands at 22.4% in 2018 compared to 28.5% in the year 2009. Similarly, the number of Europeans with tertiary educational attainment increasing positively over the last decade from 20% in 2009 to 30% in 2018 (European Commission, 2019a). Additionally, the data is further supported by the EB91.1 (2019) survey that indicates that on average, 43% citizens in the EU28 complete their full-time education between the ages of 16-19 whilst 31% complete their full-time studies after the age of 20.

6.2 Destruction

A sense of destruction is closely related to the feeling of losing one’s nation state and consequently the loss of one’s national identity. Globalization has had greater impact on transnational organizational than national institutions. According to the Standard Eurobarometer survey of spring 2018 (EB89), Europeans’ trust in their national governments and parliaments continues to decline. 60+% of EU28 citizens do not trust their national authorities whilst 34% tend to trust them. In comparison with the levels of trust in the EU, 42% of Europeans tend to trust the EU as an institution but 48% tend not to trust it. Thus, it is not surprising to find out that 51% of Europeans citizens would like to see the EP play a more important role in the EU compared to the 24% who would not (EB91.1, 2019).

With regards to which topics are to be given priority during the electoral campaign, Europeans are interested in the economy and growth, combating youth unemployment and immigration. The trends for these themes have fluctuated with the biggest difference in economy and growth moving up from fourth place (42%) in April 2018 to first place (50%) from March 2019. Combating youth unemployment has maintained stable position at second place with 49% in 2019 whilst immigration lost ground from first place (50%) in September 2018 to third place (44%) in March 2019 (EB91.1, 2019). Interestingly, these trends are also divided amongst the different age groups. While economy and growth concern all age groups equally with more than 50% of respondents, the theme of combating youth unemployment is unsurprisingly dominated by those between the ages of 15-24 with 54%. Whereas, the issue of immigration mostly concerns those between the ages of 55-74 with 47%.

In a study of 15 Western European countries, the Pew Research organization (2018) discovered that a net of 85% of Europeans are proud of their national identity as compared to the net 69% who are proud of their European identity. Countries such as Spain (54%), Sweden (51%),
Denmark (48%) and Italy (45%) are very proud of their national identity (p. 52). However, the study identifies additional factors that respondents state are equally as important to national identity. They are one’s respect for a country’s institutions and laws (94%) and the ability to speak the language (87%) (p. 56). For selected European countries, it is not enough to share the national identity and speak the language. In order to be ‘truly one of us’ a high share of people in populist parties such as Italy’s Northern League (86%), Alternative for Germany (AfD) (78%), France’s National Rally (73%), Netherland’s Party for Freedom (55%) and the Swedish Democrats (40%) are in favor of the view it is important also to share the country’s family background (Pew Research Center, n.d.).

It is also observed that religion plays an important role in the fulfillment of a sense of national identity. In the EU15, on average most Western Europeans predominantly identify as Christian with 91% stating they are baptized, 81% raised as Christian, 71% as currently Christian but only 22% as regularly attending church services. To measure openness toward members of minority religious groups, those in the EU15 would on average be 10% more willing to accept Jews as family members than Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2018, p. 64). But data shows that the number of Muslim refugees in Europe skyrocketed to an annual average of 390,000 between 2014 to mid-2016. A stark difference from the 80,000 refugee migrants between mid-2010 and 2013 (Pew Research Center, 2017b, p. 15). Overall, the European Muslim population has risen from 3.8% in 2010 to 4.9% by mid-2016 (p. 5). On the other hand, of the Orthodox majority countries, such as Greece (89%), Armenia (84%), and Russia (69%) viewed their cultures as superior to others (Pew Research Center, 2017a).

6.3 Deprivation

In order to determine the living standards of Europeans today, the spring 2018 Eurobarometer survey asked the respondents to state whether they were very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life that they led. The results showed that a majority of Europeans in the EU28 were satisfied with the life they led (83% versus 16% of those dissatisfied). At a closer look, at the national level, there are large variations of satisfaction. Denmark recorded the highest levels of satisfaction by citizens with 99% satisfied against 1% who were dissatisfied. The lowest record was coming from Bulgaria with 47% satisfied against 49% dissatisfied with the lives they led.

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1 These figures are combined (i.e. very satisfied + fairly satisfied).
When asked in general in which direction they believe things are going, 51% of respondents believe things are going in the wrong direction in the EU compared to 27% who thought otherwise. The feeling is also reciprocated at the national level where on average 54% of citizens believe that things are going in the wrong direction in their countries compared to 29%. Nationally, this perspective is largely shared by those between the cohort of 25-54 years of age whilst regionally it is prompted by those who are 55+ (EB91.1, 2019). Similarly, asked to assess their expectation in various areas of life in the next twelve months, majority of respondents reported that they expected things to remain the same. Some of the areas inquired about included: one’s general life situation where 10% expected life to get worse, 30% expected it to get better and 58% expected it to remain the same; in terms of the financial situation of their household, 12% expected it to get worse, 24% expected it to get better and 62% expected it to remain the same; whereas 19% of Europeans expected the economic situation in the EU to get worse, 21% expected it to get better and 48% to remain the same (EB89, 2018).

Globalization has been a key issue in the current neoliberal economic system with 51% of respondents conjuring positive thoughts while 37% thought negative of it (EB90.3, 2018). Globalization has promoted growth in many household families. Majority of Europeans consider they belong to the middle class (69%) while other social groups are the working class (26%) and the higher class (1%) (EB91.1, 2019). But then again, they still face similar concerns. At the personal level, rising prices/cost of living represents the most important issue for Europeans at 32%. This concern is followed by health and social security (17%), pension (16%), the financial situation of the household (13%), taxation (12%) and unemployment and educational system (10%). However, at the national level, concerns over unemployment are still prominent with 23%. Followed by the cost of living and immigration (21%) and health and social issues (20%). At the EU level, Europeans are concerned with immigration as mention by 40% of respondents. In second place, concerns of terrorism at 20% and in third place, the state of Member States’ public finances with 19%. Other areas of concern include climate change with 11% and the environment with 8% (EB89.1, 2018).

Looking at statistics on income and living conditions, the median equivalized net income varied considerably across the EU Member States ranging from Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) 5,239 in Romania to PPS 28,820 in Luxembourg by 2017. The EU28 average was PPS 16,748. Correspondingly, the top 20% of the population with the highest national net disposable incomes accounted for at least one third of total income. By contrast, the bottom 20% of the
population with the lowest incomes together accounted for less than one tenth of all income. On a positive note, median disposable income is still on the rise. On a negative note, there are still many people – an equivalent of 22.4% of entire EU28 population - at the risk of poverty or social exclusion (Eurostat, 2019a; 2019b).

6.4 De-alignment

Democracy is a people-based concept that requires the voice of the people - most of whom are affiliated to political parties. In the run up to the parliamentary elections, interest levels remained almost equal with 49% of respondents interested in the election in general; 50% not interested and 1% unsure of their position. Responses from the latter question resulted in a clear generational gap. That is, of the Europeans interested in the elections, more than 50% were above the ages of 40 years whilst less than 47% belonged within the ages of 15-39. On the other hand, of those uninterested in the elections, the younger cohort made up a larger percentage as compared to the elder generation, 60% against 46%. The same pattern is reflected amongst the respondents’ likelihood to vote during the EP elections. The figures stand at 31% of respondents very unlikely to vote and 35% as very likely to vote. Of those unlikely to vote, the largest group (43%) were between the ages of 15-24. Whereas, of those likely to vote, the largest group (44%) were 75+ years (EB91.1, 2019).

Looking at voter’s political interests also necessitates measuring their political preferences. A majority of Europeans classify themselves as centrists (35%). However, there are 27% who identify themselves among the left in the political spectrum and 21% among the right. Comparing these statistics to spring 2016, the share for centrists on the political spectrum have fallen by 1% whilst the shares of left respondents have risen by 1% and right respondents have risen by 2%. (EB85.1, 2016). A further assessment of these views reflects that support for any political ideology is individualistic and less affected by age, gender, education attainment or occupational choices. For instance, among those on the right, their socio-professional categories are as diverse as the self-employed (24%), managers (22%), other white collars (23%), manual workers (21%) as well as the retired (24%) (EB91.1, 2019). But just as important is reflecting the political positions of those who represent the people in the EP – the MEPs. In a survey conducted in 2015, the same question of political preference was voiced. When asked where MEPs would place themselves on the left-right spectrum on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'left' and 10 means 'right', most MEPs ranged below 5. But when asked their views on European integration in a similar scale, where 0 means 'integration has gone too far' and 10 means 'EU should become a federal state', most MEPs responded that their European
political groups ranged below 5. That is, there was still room for further integration (Whitaker, Hix, & Zapryanova, 2016).

Moreover, the rise of protesting political parties in various European countries has not gone unnoticed. A large number of respondents (60%) view parties protesting against the traditional political elite as a matter of concern (EB91.1, 2019). An observation into the projection of seat for the EP 2019 indicates a downward trend for traditional mainstream political groups. With projections provided on monthly interval between March to May, dominant groups such as the EPP have lose at least 40 seats. Yet, other groups have gained momentum such as the formerly ENF and current European Alliance of Peoples and Nations (EAPN) expected to gain at least 30 seats. Further observation of political groups and seat movement indicate that centrist parties are struggling to maintain the majority of seats. Comparing EP8 election results and May 2019 election seat projections, data shows that the right-wing party group – including the moderate ALDE group – have gradually moved from 443 to 452 seats. In the same timeframe, the left-wing party group have fluctuated but managed to maintain a close range from 360 seats to 356 seats. (Politico, 2019).

7. ANALYSIS

This chapter serves two purposes. First, it provides an analysis of the findings thereby answering the first research question. Secondly, it goes forth to answer the second and research questions.

7.1 Discussion of Findings

The previous chapter was a selection of empirical data that can be used to assess the influence of right-wing populism. The data was selected largely based on the perceptions of the European citizens and in part based on the perceptions of MEPs - as the people’s voice in the EP. The discussion is as follows:

7.1.1 Distrust

According to public opinion surveys, there are more Europeans who feel that their voice counts more in their countries than in the EU. This is because a large number of them do not believe that their vote carries any weight for bringing about change on the European level. The ordinary citizen still harbours distrust towards political systems and the feeling that institutions such as the EP do not sufficiently deal with problems that concern people like them. These perceptions by the people confirm the suspicions of transnational institutions as more concerned with
bureaucratic affairs than the needs of the people. At the same time, however, a strong sense of togetherness still binds Europeans today (Schulmeister, et al., 2019; Kantar Public, 2018b). This is reflected by their strong sense of civic responsibility. Some may go as far as to say that Brexit was a blessing in disguise. The challenges of the Brexit process have renewed the European commitment to the EU. More than half the respondents indicated that their countries have benefitted from EU membership, the membership is seen as a good thing and in a referendum, most would vote to remain in the EU.

Another crucial matter acknowledged by Eatwell and Goodwin for distrust was education. The average European completes full-time education at secondary level and stands to represent the majority group in any national government. On the other hand, most MEPs are considered educational elite with tertiary level education - more than eight in 10 are higher education graduates; 26.5% have a PhD – and come from higher sphere of social life (Beauvallet-Haddad, Michon, Lepaux, & Monicolle, 2016, p. 13). Due to higher educational attainment, these candidates are perceived as, less likely to have experience on matters such as agriculture, construction or military service and also, less likely to share in the views of the majority. This, however, may not be due to a fault of their own. Pippa Norris (1999, p. 86) suggests that “the recruitment of experienced career politicians to the European Parliament is essential to produce an effective and cohesive body which can act as a counterweight to the expertise of Brussels bureaucrats and national ministers”. Hence, it is a socialization factor that has been nurtured over time. This aspect is confirmed by Gaxie and Godmer (2007, p. 115) who state that “the lack of formal education is felt to be a handicap by those who are directly concerned”. Higher educational attainment in political environments is no longer optional but rather a pre-requisite to a political career.

All in all, it can be argued that according to Eatwell and Goodwin, the criteria of distrust has been met. Yet, it can be argued that the level of distrust among the people was not predetermined. That is, how much distrust is needed to determine people’s aversion to the establishment and its actors? How would distrust be measured or quantified? It can similarly be argued that an awareness of rising levels of distrust at the European level is an indication of a greater problem at the national level. For instance, a generalized figure of 40% could mean something different to a small country like Malta as compared to a large country like Germany. On the other side of the spectrum, it is also plausible to argue that the criteria has not been met. The findings suggest that there is still a large number of Europeans committed to the European project. That stands to reason that there are Europeans who still believe in the merit of the
institutions and it works. It can also imply that there will always be a margin of people unsatisfied with the system.

7.1.2 Destruction

Within the criteria of destruction, globalization has blurred the lines of what can today be considered a national identity. The findings indicate a net of 85% of Europeans who are proud of their national identity. But then, what constitutes a national identity? Is it birth place or citizenship? Among the EU15 countries, respondents identified the respect for a country’s institutions, ability to speak the national language and a share in the country’s family background as strong indicators of national identity (Pew Research Center, 2018). However, in the wake of the refugee crisis, Europe witnessed an influx of immigrants fleeing war torn countries such as Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. Inadvertently, this rose the figures of refugees in European countries. These immigrants came from regions that are predominately Islamic. They represent a completely different culture and belief system to that of Europeans who are predominantly Christian. Today Europe is one of the world’s most secular regions (Pew Research Center, 2018).

The influx of Muslim refugees unconsciously raised an innate fear among Europeans who felt their historical and national identity as Christians – which forms part of their core values – being threatened. The Christian identity however, is largely based on historical rather than religious affiliation. It is a new form of racism that focuses on ‘cultural threats’ to national identity. The idea that that immigration and ethnic change present an imminent risk to the cultural distinctiveness of the national group, to national values, identity and ways of life (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 73). Among ethnic minority groups, data indicates that Western Europeans are more likely accept a Jew than a Muslim as a family member.

Consequently, immigration has been one of the most crucial themes of concern for Europeans both nationally and regionally, followed by terrorism. Right-wing populists from Western Europeans have openly shown hostility towards Islam and rapidly growing Muslim communities. In their defence, they anchor their argument in support of women’s and LGBT rights and outlook that is shared by some of their voters. However, this line of argument is not an attempt to promote religious beliefs: its main aim is to attack Islam as a highly repressive form of what the likes of Geert Wilders call totalitarianism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 72). But surprisingly, moving closer to the ballots, statistics indicate that while immigration is still
a major concern - ranking at third place - more people are concerned about economic growth, combating youth unemployment and the climate as matters of significance to their well-being.

It would have been sufficient to demonstrate the continuous decline of European trust in national governments under the criteria of distrust. However, to illustrate the erosion of the nation-state, findings support that there are more Europeans who tend to trust the EU institutions compared to the number of those who trust their national governments and parliaments. In a similar manner, there are many Europeans who would like to see the EP play a more important role in the EU. This reflects the view of many Europeans that decision-making powers now reside at the regional level. Departing from this perspective, one is able to relate how losing one’s national identity can propel negative connotations of ‘the other’. Needless to say, this criterion was sufficiently met.

7.1.3 Deprivation

Apart from dealing with the influx of immigrants, Europeans today are more insecure than ever about their living conditions. The driving forces for these insecurities differ according to age groups but are evident as mentioned above. The economically active group between the cohorts of 25-54 are largely concerned with economic matters as whereas the older generation above the ages of 55 lean more towards cultural matters. Looking into the future, half of the respondents felt that things were progressing in the wrong direction at the regional level, a number that is very closely reciprocated at the national level. People’s perception of what going on around them is also echoed when respondents were asked to indicate their expectations of life in the next 12 months. One logical assumption would be: if things are going in the right direction nationally or at the EU level, then citizens would have a positive outlook of their future. On the contrary, a majority of respondents reported they expected things to remain the same in their various areas of life such as the financial situation of their households. A response that is not particularly positive.

On the upside, the neoliberal economy has been received positively well by most Europeans. But the flip side is, the same globalization that championed neoliberalism, has led to the further fragmentation of the middle-class group. This division has increased socio-economic inequalities amongst the same group of people resulting in a sense of relative deprivation. By 2017, the divide on disposable income – the money available after tax reductions – between the richest stood at nine times higher than to that of the poorest (OECD, 2017). In spite the fact that unemployment, cost of living and immigration issues are of national concern for most
Europeans, it is issues such as the rising cost of living, concern over health and security and pension matters that are more critical at the personal level.

Additionally, the socio-economic divide no longer targets only children and the elderly, but rather family households and young voters. Even though on average 83% of respondents in the EU28 declared that they were satisfied with the life they led, at a closer look the levels of prevailing inequality in Europe persist. For instance, life satisfaction in Denmark was recorded at its highest percentile whilst the people of Bulgaria recorded the lowest levels of life satisfaction. In a similar way, the disparities of income and living conditions are visible across the region with total income only concentrated to a small majority. Therefore, the assessment of relative deprivation is highly beneficial at the national level away from large European disparities such as country size, population and wealth. At the same time, it is such disparities that support this criterion of deprivation and the surge of populism in Europe. The more people feel insecure, the greater the chances for individualist notions that go against the principle of European unity.

7.1.4 De-alignment

People’s uncertainty, citizens’ policy choices, political affiliations, and voter turnout are all factors that are influenced by an individual’s state of mind. In layman’s words, a happy citizen means a thriving political campaign. Unfortunately, the trends described above do not indicate this direction. Much to the contrary, loyalty in mainstream political parties – or simply party democracy – have been dwindling across Europe (Müller, 2016, p. 78). People are unsatisfied with the slow progression of development particularly the younger cohorts. This frustration is emulated by low voter turnout in elections. Rather, people are on the lookout for new avenues of expression. In particular, studies have shown that political parties have been struggling to recruit new and younger voters as party membership remain in decline (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). But, in as much as this period is an opportunity for the growth of new political parties, there are many Europeans who share the view that parties protesting against the traditional political elite is a matter of concern than a case of liberation.

Furthermore, while political participation may be influenced by age, findings indicate that political preferences are not swayed by factors such as age, gender or education. Even though the Europeans in general are still politically moderates, the years have shown the growth of right-wing supporters. Yet, within the EP, it is notable that MEPs are leaning largely to the left and are supporters of further European integration. Nevertheless, the growing numbers of
Eurosceptic MEPs opens the possibilities for changing coalition formations in the EP away from the domination of a single grand coalition (Whitaker, Hix, & Zapryanova, 2017b, p. 10).

Moreover, the political divides within the EP are characterized by policy choices. The ability to influence policy decision has seen a shift in political coalitions and the rise of new groups in the EP. In the projection of seats for the upcoming elections, findings show that newer and more radical groups are gaining traction. For instance, the new group supported by Italy’s Salvini, the former ENF and today’s EAPN. Compared to 2014, right-wing group combined seems to manage to increase their number of seats to proximately one third of the parliament (Dennison & Zerka, 2019). Overall, there is enough empirical evidence to support the realignment of political groups.

7.1.5 Conclusion of Findings

In sum, an examination of the four D’s as presented by Eatwell and Goodwin (2018) provides views as to what drives populist supporters and explains the surge of populism across European countries. The findings highlight several indicators in each category that help portray the phenomena of populism both nationally and regionally. In addition, the findings communicate
the following. Firstly, the root causes of populism come from the perception shared by citizens that their voices are futile in the eyes of bureaucrats and transnational institutions. Albeit unintentionally, the rise of meritocratic complexities in the system further exasperate this notion. Secondly, the shift of power at the regional level has had profound intrinsic effect on European identity. The struggle for the State to maintain relevance and the struggle for the people to adjust to a new normal of what national identity could be, one that includes diverse ethnic backgrounds. Thirdly, when globalization increased opportunities, its unintended consequence was the need to share resources. However, the resources do not seem to be trickling down to the most in need and this has widened people’s socio-economic divide. Lastly, traditional mainstream political parties are struggling to maintain their political control but find themselves challenged by new and competitive players.

With regards to the question of legitimacy, in the eyes of right-wing populists’ legitimacy not only refers to legal jurisdiction of a law or regime or governing body, it also entails the acceptance of that authority by those being governed. That is to say, right-wing populists acknowledge the EU as a legal institution, however, they do not accept many of its decisions and the direction taken by those in power. According to Chantal Mouffe (2005), right-wing populists question institutions such as the EU because they “lack effective democratic debate about possible alternatives” – also known as a democratic deficit. In turn, this opens doors for the rise of populist parties. Hence, Eatwell and Goodwin’s criteria provide the means to analyse the validity of this claim. Essentially, the analysis does confirm the existence of a potential pool for right-wing supporters.

7.2 The Implications of Right-Wing Populism

The EP’s party group system has changed since the 2014 EP elections. For instance, Matteo Salvini has founded an anti-establishment radical right group the EAPN in hopes of swaying political decisions. According to Minkenberg (2015, p. 22), right-wing populists in power make a difference and leave a mark. With that in mind, the latter is an example of developments that have the ability to change the organizational dynamic of the EP. In this section, we discuss three core implications of what an increased share of right-wing populists in the EP entails. The section also responds to the second research question. The core components as presented in the analytical framework above are: the lack of consensus, the loss of credibility and ideological shift.
7.2.1 Lack of consensus

In the EP8 (2014-2018), the political parties EPP and S&D hold the majority share. With this composition of political forces several potential “majority winning” coalitions have been possible. For example, a “super grand coalition” of EPP, S&D and ALDE that commands 63% of seats, while a “grand coalition” of EPP and S&D commands 54%. If the two largest groups do not vote together, a centre-right coalition of EPP, ECR ALDE and ENF would command the majority with 52% of the seats, while a centre-left coalition of S&D, EUL-NGL, G/EFA and ALDE would just be short with 48% of seats (Hix, 2013, p. 3). However, based on seat projections made on the 15th of May predicting the upcoming election, the grand coalition loses its majority dominance for the first in history. The projections indicate that a centre-right coalition of EPP, ECR, ALDE, ENF and EFDD would be able to control 60% of the EP and even surpassing the super grand coalition (with 56% of the seats). But given the moderate nature of ALDE as the main centrist party, the competition between the left and right wing is neutralized. That is, the centre-right coalition of EPP, ECR, EFDD and ENF would hold 46% of seats and the centre-left coalition of S&D, EUL-NGL, G/EFA and ALDE would hold 47% of seats (Politico Europe, 2019).²

Even though the fate of the EP lays in the hands of the people, the battle of ideological positions that has been launched has been set in motion (Dennison & Zerka, 2019, p. 2). For right-wing populists, acquiring a certain number of seats gives them power. Being at the center of political discussion allows them to influence key processes and decisions. One of EU most prominent legislative procedure is the majority voting system. With the grand coalition no longer dominant, its trickles down between charismatic leaders to convince the non-attached and new MEPs to join their crusade or downright political ideology.

Some of the key policy areas of concern in this new progress include trade, migration and the EU budget. A crucial role of the EP is the approval of international trade agreements to which veto power has been given by the Lisbon Treaty. But the approval to use said veto power an absolute majority vote. This forms the first problems, the inability to reach a consensus amongst Members means that the adoption and passing of new policies or agreements becomes difficult. The second problem is when both side of the spectrum are unable or unwilling to compromise on their positions. In such cases, a having a dominant political group or coalition of groups with the seats required for a majority vote is beneficial because it increases the

² See table 1 in appendix for seat projections
organ’s decision-making efficiency and foregoes the time-consuming process of negotiations (Dennison & Zerka, 2019). Nevertheless, the forecast for EU trade policies indicate an increase of protectionism but maintained support for free trade policies (VoteWatch Europe, 2018). On the issue of migration policies, it is clear that views of MEPs are diverging. For instance, on the question of ‘whether individual member states should be allowed to place restrictions on the free movement of people into their country’ there is strong support coming from countries such as Denmark and Croatia but least support from Italy and Spain (Whitaker, Hix, & Dreyer, 2017a). But in this case, the EP mostly has a non-legislative consultation role. The European Council must seek the opinion of the EP before proceeding with any policy suggestion. (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011). Once again, the EP’s opinion is decided by a majority vote. In such a position, the right-wing members can exercise their authority by either refusing to provide an opinion or delaying proposals by referring them back to committees. Additionally, taking into consideration right wing’s negative perception on immigrants, Dennison and Zerka (2019, p. 4) state that the major threat to EU’s migration policy would be the limited capacity of Member States and the Council to seek a humanitarian and solidarity-based approach towards migration challenges”. As a result, this will affect the EU position as an international advocate for peace and democracy which are part of its foreign policy. Moreover, a majority share of the centre right would have the biggest impact on the EU’s budget. The budget can single-handedly affect all areas of policy. From financial redistribution to and shifting EU priorities. The Multiannual Financial Framework may be the tool most scrutinized by right-wing MEPs. The EP however, much like the national parliament has checks and balances that should balance each out. This means. That even with the majority of seats, they right-wing members must adhere to democratic procedures put in place. As Minkenberg (2001, p. 18) puts it “the parliamentary presence of right-wing radical parties alone does not result in any impact as long as other parties preserve the radical right’s pariah status”. Therefore, an increased share of right-wing parties and actors in the EP could result to a legislative stalemate following a lack of consensus which in turn also hinders internal cohesion.\footnote{See table 2 on appendix for right-wing power in the EP}

\subsection*{7.2.2 Loss of credibility}

The EU is a symbol of global governance at the regional level. It is an internationalized example of how countries can come together despite their national differences. Right-wing
parties however reject this notion. They reject European integration as the symbol of liberalism and cooperation (Neumayer, 2008). As a result of this, right-wing populists are not threatened by the demise of the institution. They are, after all, against the establishment. But isn’t the demise of the institution a disadvantage for the same people they claim to protect? The failure to reach consensus on the EU’s foreign policy affects the overall readiness of the institution to tackle arising issues such as security.

If a governing body cannot agree amongst itself, why should those around trust it? Among the goals of right-wing parties is the return of political power to the national sphere. The breakdown of legitimacy at the regional level through the loss of credible action will result in the loss of credibility. One of the biggest weaknesses within the right cohort is its lack of cohesion. Amongst populist themselves, between the left and the right, there is no unified alliance. Hence ensuring MEP voting patterns becomes difficult. For example, would the same group of members vote for the same policy if they were placed in a different environment? If not, the lack of consistency could lead remaining pro-Europeans towards abandoning the EU project (Dennison & Zerka, 2019).

Consequently, the loss of political credibility in the EU would also lead to an economic deterioration. Instead of using trade as an instrument to boost prosperity and pursue the Union’s foreign policy objectives, investors will be forced to look elsewhere for stable opportunities. It is at this point where the left-wing and the right wing would not meet eye to eye. While right-wing populist may not be in agreement on economic matters, the left are supporters of liberal market economies and state expansion (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). In a similar manner, the growing number of centre-right political leaders in the Council would decrease credibility of the organ as their decisions would be viewed as biased. For instance, right-wing actors would be biased in their capacity to defend democracy and the rule of law (Dennison & Zerka, 2019). Additionally, the use of political games to delay proposals, deter decisions and coerce policy choices is not a strategy. Rather, it is the promotion of insufficiency and ineffectiveness in the EP. In the long run, this act will only ensure that the organ is weakened and remains a superficial instrument in the EU.

7.2.3 Ideological shift
One of the greatest concerns in the increase of right-wing parties and actors is their rise into executive organs in the EU. One of these crucial positions in the EU is the Commission president who is approved by the EP. The president of the Commission has the most influential
role within the institution. The president’s role entails providing political guidance for the EU, they are the face of international and bilateral meeting of the EU and promote EU interests. (Lelieveldt & Princen, 2011). Such a position requires an impartial leader.

At a time when trust in EU institutions is in decline and more people leaning towards a more protectivist narrative, there needs to be a leader that unites all European people. Right-wing populist prone to nativist notions, given the audience, can influence large groups of people on the need to focus on national growth than regional concerns. In addition to advocating for authoritarian social policies such as the protection of its external and internal borders (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). Even though Minkenberg (2001, p. 18) argues that the most substantive impact right-wing leaders achieve once at the executive office is on a cultural basis, it is important to remember that people have gone to wars because of patriotism which is a form of cultural identity. The appointment of a right-wing populist Commission president could lead to the much-needed ideological push that populists are waiting for.

The greatest threat of an ideological shift is the normalization of right-wing rhetoric in politics. But according to Eatwell and Goodwin (2018, p. xxxi) populists are “already having a clear impact by dragging the West’s political system further to the right”. In the past, right-wing actors and Eurosceptics were sidelined to the fringes of the European project and their voices came from below (the people); the recent trends indicate such connotations as descending from above. The change of tone of political leaders such as Angela Merkel, David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy in admitting to the limitations of the European project have legitimized arguments of ethnic disruptions (Berezin, 2013, p. 240).

In assessing the power of ideological shift, one refers to Wodak (2016) who argued that the populist wave began with the September 11th 2001 (9/11) attacks by Islamic extremist group Al-Qaeda in the US. An outcome that led to the declaration of ‘war on terror’ by the Bush administration. But instead of combating terrorism, critics argue that the campaign was an “ideology of fear […] that promoted violence rather than mitigating acts of terror and strengthening security” (Global Policy Forum, n.d.). This had a ripple effect into the great recession where widening economic gaps and cultural fault lines became intensified. At this point, domestic issues cascaded into the regional platform. (Funke et al., 2015; Minkenberg, 2015; Berezin, 2013).

The end result is then, a majority share of centre-right MEPs have the ability to select and approve a candidate who is predisposed to their views. The risk of this is electing a leader that
does not promote the principles of the European project but is rather willing to bend on issues such as free trade, human rights and support for migration. In addition, such a leader may signal to the world the shift of political order just as right-wing leaders are doing at the national level.

7.3 Institutional Capacity

The question that remains then is whether the EP has the institutional capacity to cope with the rising right-wing rhetoric and protect its democratic reputation. The parliamentary elections are yet to determine the outcome of EP9. However, researchers such as Dennison and Zerka (2019, p. 6) have indicated the likelihood of right-wing parties crossing the one-third threshold that signifies a qualitative change in the EU. Given this possibility, how can the EP counter right-wing mobilization? This section responds to the third research question.

The EP has potential for legislative expansion. While it has been strengthened over the years, it is still not powerful enough to initiate legislative procedures. However, within its given mandate, the institution is capable of confronting the changing dynamic of the EU. The first suggestion by Dennison and Zerka (2019, p. 8) is the need for pro-Europeans to take back control of the European narrative. For a while now, anti-European parties have claimed the media as their main instrument of mobilization. In this regard, they have managed to promote key beliefs namely: “EU institutions have too much power, European citizens want governments to place a greater emphasis on security, and Europe requires tighter border controls”.

As a counter measure, the EP should highlight the true benefits of the European project that many citizens still believe in (as illustrated by the public opinion surveys). “Rather than simply fight defensively on the issues that anti-Europeans favour, pro-European forces should be creative in constructing an image of a reinvigorated, hopeful European project” (Dennison & Zerka, 2019, p. 14) while addressing the issues of concerns to voters. This is a form of institutional rebranding that is needed to pinpoint the impact of the EU that has been overshadowed by strong images of the right.

Moreover, the institution could take action against rising populism by showing initiative amidst claims of democratic deficit. By using the weakness of the opponent - the right-wing’s lack of cohesion and struggle for cooperation – to illustrate the merit of a unified front. This unified front will boost EU foreign policy power which in turn may promote economic gains. On the objection of multiculturalism, the first task of the EP is to acknowledge “people’s concerns over immigration and ethnic change as legitimate in their own right” (Eatwell & Goodwin,
2018, p. 261). This initiative will firstly, respond to the people’s innate need to feel heard; secondly, it once again draws the attention of the people back into politics. This is important because the silent majority still maintains the largest voice in the EU. If this cohort implicitly decides to align themselves with any political group, it is possible to balance the political games of those on the left and the right (i.e. opinion polls indicate large group of Europeans as centrist on the political spectrum).

Alternatively, the EP could heed to some of the suggestions of the right such as increasing the use of referendums at the national level. With the purpose to increase direct participation, the EP could discuss the use of referendums particularly in highly contested issues such as migration (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). As a procedural matter, national referendums would act in a similar consultative manner as the EP does before the Council. The national outcomes are to be given appropriate consideration in the policy and decision-making processes. However, if this is not an option, the institution can focus on demonstrating the costs of right-wing proposal in the real world. How would the EP election affect voters’ lives? Needless to say, Brexit is a good example.

Another option, one that may be viewed as radical by liberal democrats is for the institution to engage populists in political discussion. Müller (2016, p. 84) proposes that right-wing populists need to be addressed at face value. However he clarifies that “talking to populists is not the same as talking like populists”. He continues to say that having the conversation might not discourage populist supporters particular those with a strong moral ties to the movement, it can avert some challenges and maintain democratic principles.

8. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

8.1 Conclusion

So how does the future look? At the moment, populism is undergoing a period of rapid growth and the European Parliament is at the centre of this storm. Starting from Eastern Europe, the tide of populist is now also prevalent in Western Europe. It is this surge of right-wing populism in particular that is the focus of this research paper. Like any phenomena, analysts have assessed its emergence and roots particularly at the national level. But given the interdependent nature of the European Union, it is necessary to also assess the influence of right-wing populism at the regional level. Therefore, in the run up to the parliamentary elections of 2019, this paper investigates the potential threat of rising right-wing rhetoric in the EP.
The research is guided by Eatwell and Goodwin’s ‘Four Ds’ criteria that forms the basis of our analysis. The authors identify that populist supporters are driven by the distrust of politicians and institutions, the destruction of their national identity, the relative deprivation experienced from increased socio-economic inequalities and the de-alignment of political allegiances. Whereas, populist leaders – whether independent or as part of political groups – are charismatic individuals responsible for the advancement of nationalistic and xenophobic notions. They combine the use of their discursive style, the ideology of populism and political strategies such as visual assault to promote their message. This idea of encapsulating all aspects together, rather than mutually exclusive entities is supported by Jansen in his definition of populism as well as Eatwell and Goodwin in their assessment of right-wing populism.

Before the threat of populism can be determined, it was important to understand why right-wing populists question the legitimacy of the EU. In the eyes of the populist, the people are the most important subjects of the political sphere. Therefore, political leaders must do everything in their power to maximize the welfare of its citizens and listen to their wishes. However, these elected leaders, once in the position of power become driven by self-interests. Over the years, they have become further distant from the people and their views do not reflect those of the ordinary citizen. Accordingly, unaccountable transnational institutions and multiculturalism are promoting the decay of the State, loss of sovereignty and national identity; all while failing to deliver on the needs of the people. The key finding in this regard was people’s feeling of being unheard within the institutions. This perception is then reflected in many issues that the EU has been struggling to tackle such as economic growth, youth unemployment and immigration. Coupled together, right-wing leaders have alleged that the EU no longer works for the people.

But, in assessing the implication of increased right-wing influence in the EP, whilst responding to the second research question, the research identifies three core issues: the lack of consensus amongst MEPs, the loss of the institution’s credibility and a potential ideological shift. These crucial aspects have the potential to change the tone of regional politics by influencing policies and shifting decision-making patterns. Up until now however, all arguments are guided by predictive data from election projections. In reality, the outcome of the EP election will determine the power of right-wing parties. Nevertheless, the findings do illustrate increasingly, the end of the line for mainstream dominance as a grand coalition. Given the opportunity, at the verge of populist decisions, populist actors – both of the left and right – would be willing
to cooperate and increasing their chance of the majority. Therefore, regardless of the number of seats gained by the right-wing, this would still be a win.

Despite this fact, the institution still has the potential to control the damage and maintain an equilibrium. In doing this, the paper is addressing the third research question. Balancing the populist rhetoric in the EP may require a shift from traditional conservative thinking and the acknowledgment of the fast-paced environment surrounding the EU. In its capacity as the EP, the institution can avail resources targeted at raising awareness of the message that the institution is promoting. An institutional rebranding is simply the use of new technology to revitalize a still powerful message that has been overshadowed. In doing this, it also informs the people of the cost and benefits of European integration. Additionally, the EP could expand the avenue for political debate that allow the citizens to critically assess political messages. Notwithstanding, there are still many MEPs who are pro-integration, expansion and liberal socio-economic initiatives.

Populism is indeed a threat to democracy. Illiberal democracies do not bring politics closer to the people nor increase mass participation in politics. However, they do point out to the clear division in society where a majority are unrepresented at the cost of the few. The research clearly illustrates how, although there are still many Europeans committed to an integrative process, their concerns have been rising over the years with no promise for a better future. This explains why one would take a protectivist stand on politics. But since the ascension of right-wing populism seems inevitable in some form, the EU and its institutions should recognize this and strive to narrow the gap between regional, national and local levels. After all, they all depend on that same person. Furthermore, the populist ideology has proven relevant and persistent. It is an error of democratic leaders if they dismiss it as anything but so.

8.2 Recommendation

This research does identify areas that require further investigation. For one, since this is a pre-election analysis, a longitudinal post-election study assessing the implication of right-wing populist once in power could be explored. Such research is open to many outlets of investigation such as: the use of power by right-wing populist, the trends and patterns of policy choices and decision-making, the capacity for right-wing parties to form coalitions or foster cohesion. Furthermore, as populism has no boundaries, it also has the potential to spread to other countries. That is, research should explore the relationship between the rise of populism in Europe with the surge of authoritarianism in developing countries in continents like Asia
and Africa. Much like the consequences of the cold war, is there a causal link between the impact on populism on developed countries and the development of democratic institutions in the south. It has been argued recently that democracy is in decline. Are these factors singular occurrences or part of a holistic phenomenon? The research could be further narrowed by specifically look at independent cases such as aid flows, or human rights abuses. Does a protectivist and nationalist world view interfere with the political sphere of developing countries?
9. REFERENCES


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## 10. APPENDICIES

Table 1: European Parliament Election Seat Projections 2019

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European People’s Party (EPP)</td>
<td>Centre-right</td>
<td>221</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>168</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socialists and Democrats (S&amp;D)</td>
<td>Centre-left</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>147</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)</td>
<td>Centrist and Pro-European integration</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>104</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Conservatives and Reformist (ECR)</td>
<td>Centre-right and Eurosceptic</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL)</td>
<td>Left and Eurosceptic</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>European Greens/European Free Alliance (G/EFA)</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe Of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) (New SStar + Brexit)</td>
<td>Right and anti-European</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe Of Nations and Freedom (ENF) (New EAPN)</td>
<td>Right and anti-European</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Attached/ Non-Inscrit (NA/NI)</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others (new incoming unaffiliated members)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>751</strong></td>
<td><strong>751</strong></td>
<td><strong>751</strong></td>
<td><strong>751</strong></td>
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</table>

**POSSIBLE COALITIONS (based on May projections)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Seats</th>
<th>in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Super Grand coalition (EPP+SD+ALDE)</td>
<td>419</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand coalition (EPP+SD)</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre right (EPP+ALDE+ECR+ENF+EFDD)</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre right (EPP+ECR+ENF+EFDD)</td>
<td>348</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centre left (SD+ALDE+GUE+EFA)</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Politico Europe, 2019*

(Compiled by author)
Table 2: Populist Power Projection

| What populists can achieve in the European Parliament with 33.3-49.9 percent of seats |
|---|---|---|
| Constitution of the European Parliament | If the mainstream is divided: hamper the election of a leading candidate for EP president (absolute majority needed) | Appoint between four and six vice-presidents | Appoint the chairs of one-third of committees, albeit the least sensitive and prestigious ones |
| Control of the European Commission | If the mainstream is divided on the candidate or a rule to follow the Spitzenkandidat practice: hamper the election (absolute majority needed) | Hamper the approval of a commissioner-designate by a committee | If the mainstream is divided: hamper the appointment of the College of Commissioners or weaken its political mandate (simple majority required) | Hamper the censure of the Commission |
| Legislative role | If the mainstream is divided: derail or influence the shape of laws under the ordinary legislative procedure | If the mainstream is divided: affect the text of the EP’s proposals for treaty change once the Council has convened the Convention | If the mainstream is divided: derail some of the EU’s international agreements under the consent procedure | If the mainstream is divided: influence the text of the EP’s non-binding opinions or the pace of the process |
| Budget and the rule of law | If the mainstream is divided: influence the shape of the MFF and its programmes | If the mainstream is divided: influence the EU’s annual budget | Block the rule of law mechanism under Article 7 in the EP |
| Other pressure | If the mainstream is divided or a wide coalition is preferred: influence the EP’s resolutions |

*Dennison & Zerka, 2019, p.2*