

Excluding the Populists:  
The Unintended Effect of a Cordon Sanitaire on Political Trust

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**ABSTRACT.** A vast amount of studies on populism focus on the question how parties respond to the entry of new populist parties. A key finding in the relevant literature is that established parties frequently isolate populist parties by politically excluding them: they seek to exclude populist parties from any share of executive authority by stating their unwillingness to consider the populist party as a viable coalition partner. Considering the existing argument that voters are more likely to trust the political system when their preferred party gets the opportunity to govern, it is found troubling that little is known about the effects of political exclusion on voters' perception of politics. This paper strives to fill the scholarly gap by assessing the effect of political exclusion on the political trust of populist voters. Analyzing 38 cases of political exclusion in 10 European countries (2002-2016), it is found that the political exclusion of populist parties is associated with lower levels of political trust. In turn, this relationship is found to be mediated by government participation: politically excluded parties are found less likely to be part of government, which relates to lower levels of political trust. However, no effect was found for the voters that experience a *cordon sanitaire*: these voters seem to be aware that their preferred party will not govern and are likely driven by other motives than wanting to influence the composition of government.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Populist parties have increased their presence in Western Europe since the early 1980s. Originally, a vast amount of political science research focused on explaining the electoral success of these populist parties (see e.g. Pauwels, 2010; Kitschelt, 1998), but political scientists gradually shifted their attention to the question how other parties respond to the entry of these populist newcomers (see e.g. De Lange, 2008; 2012; Van Spanje & De Graaf, 2018). It was found that established parties respond in various ways, yet a key hypothesis in existing literature is that established parties decrease a populist party's electoral support by excluding it from government and governing majorities (see e.g. Van Spanje & De Graaf, 2018; Pauwels, 2011). This strategy of political exclusion was first thoroughly explored by Downs (2001).

According to Downs (2001), existing parties face a fundamental choice upon the entry of a new party into a representative assembly: they can either *engage* or *disengage* with the new party, the latter being either to 'ignore' or to deliberately 'isolate' the new party (Downs, 2001, p. 26). In fact, parties may follow a strategy of *political exclusion*: the existing parties recognize a new (populist) party as a threat and seek to publicly demonize it (Downs, 2001, p. 27). In essence, political exclusion means that other political parties will make it clear that they will not cooperate with the new populist party in terms of the formation of government (Otjes, 2012, p. 28); the new party is hoped to be excluded from any share of executive authority (Downs,

2001, p. 27). An (extreme) example of this political exclusion strategy can be observed in Belgium: in 1992, all parties in Belgian parliament collectively agreed to never cooperate with the populist radical right party Flemish Bloc (later Flemish Interest; *Vlaams Belang*, VB) under any circumstances and on any political level (Vlaamse Raad, 1992, p. 376). This agreement, referred to as the *cordon sanitaire*, was endorsed on the consideration that VB and its ideology formed a threat to liberal democracy. As a result, *no* Belgian party has been willing to form a coalition with VB, even though it won every single parliamentary election until 2004, capturing up to 24 percent of the votes (see e.g. Pauwels, 2011). Similar forms of political exclusion can be observed in other countries as well. For instance, the Dutch prime-minister Mark Rutte emphasized in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2017 that the chances of governing with the populist Party For Freedom (*Partij Voor de Vrijheid*; PVV) was zero: ‘it is just not going to happen’ (Van Soest, 2017). In Ireland, all major parties ruled out working together with the populist Sinn Féin since 2002: a coalition with Sinn Féin is ‘absolutely out of the question’, as stated by Ireland’s former prime-minister Bertie Ahern (The Sun, 2002). In Germany, the news media jokingly invented a new term to capture this increasing phenomenon of political exclusion: ‘*Koalition-ausschließertis*’ (roughly translated ‘coalition-exclusionism’; Reuters Limited, 2013). One might think that such a common phenomenon is heavily studied in existing literature, but this is unfortunately not (yet) the case.

Political scientists increasingly call for more research on the effects of political exclusion on voters and voting behavior (see e.g. Van Holsteyn, 2018, p. 1372; Jupskås et al., 2017, p. 63). In his study on the electoral decline of VB since 2004, Pauwels (2011) found that the *cordon sanitaire* deters policy-driven voters. More generally, Van Spanje and De Graaf (2018) found that parties plagued by a *cordon sanitaire* lose voters if other parties ‘steal’ their policy positions. Still, little is known about its effect on voters’ perceptions of democracy and politics. This is especially interesting, because the voters of the populist parties that get politically excluded generally already feel misunderstood or neglected by existing parties (see e.g. Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). In fact, populist voters are found to be generally less trusting of political institutions compared to other voters (Pauwels, 2011, p. 114; Ziller & Schübel, 2015, p. 382; see also Fieschi & Heywood, 2004); are other parties not adding fuel to the fire when they exclude the endorsed populist parties? Indeed, the relevant question is *how the political exclusion of populist parties affects the political trust of populist voters*. In order to fully grasp this question, it needs to be clear what is meant by political exclusion and a definition is therefore provided in the following section. Further, since the research question builds on the notion that voters of populist parties are relatively distrusting of politics, a brief review of the literature on the connection between populism and political trust is offered. In the

subsequent section of the literature review, it is argued that the political trust of (populist) voters relate to electoral outcomes: voters are more likely to *trust* political institutions if their endorsed party is able to be elected into power (Anderson & Guillory, 1997, p. 77; Norris, 1999, p. 219). Consequently, hypotheses are formulated on the notion that a strategy of political exclusion aggravates the (already low) political trust of populist voters; the hypotheses are tested and discussed in the subsequent part. Conclusively, this paper warns that the political exclusion of populist parties may make populist voters more distrusting of politics, at least in a situation when they do not expect their preferred party to be excluded.

### ***Defining political exclusion***

Political exclusion refers to a situation in which political parties, either individually or collectively, seek to exclude other parties from any share of executive authority by stating their unwillingness to consider the other as a possible coalition partner (see e.g. Downs, 2001, p. 27). In practice, political exclusion takes the form of a public statement in which an existing party states that it is not willing to cooperate with a certain party in forming a coalition or minority government. This definition is similar to Van Spanje's and De Graaf's (2018) definition (although they use the term 'ostracise' instead of 'exclude'), but differs in that it considers political exclusion to be a continuum instead of a dichotomy. In fact, the degree of political exclusion depends on the number of existing parties that publicly exclude the specific party as a coalition partner. In turn, the most extreme form of political exclusion is a *cordon sanitaire*, which is an agreement between all political parties to not cooperate with another party under any circumstances (Pauwels, 2011, p. 61; Mudde, 2016, p. 30). Furthermore, this paper exclusively focuses on the political exclusion of *populist* parties<sup>1</sup>. The relationship between political trust and populism is briefly discussed next.

## **POPULISM AND POLITICAL TRUST**

The research question of this study builds on the notion that there is an existing negative relationship between political trust and voting for a populist party. Before addressing this relationship between *populism* and *political trust*, it is necessary to define both concepts. In existing literature, political trust is mostly defined as 'an evaluative orientation toward the government, founded on how well the government is operating according to people's normative expectations' (Hetherington, 1998, p. 791; see e.g. Miller, 1974). However, it is argued here that political trust does not *only* refer to trust in government; it also refers to trust in politicians,

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<sup>1</sup> Note that populist parties may also exclude each other based on this definition.

political parties and national parliament (see also Rooduijn, 2018). Therefore, political trust is defined in this study as an evaluative orientation toward the political system (i.e. politicians, political parties and national parliament), founded on how well the political system is operating according to people's normative expectations. Indeed, political trust is about people's evaluation of the political system as a whole. In that sense, political trust differs from similar concepts such as political cynicism, which exclusively refers to a person's attitude towards the persona of politicians (Van Dalen et al., 2011, p. 155). Interestingly, the concept of political trust reestablished its relevance in scholarly literature with the proliferation of studies on populism.

Although the concept of populism is rising in scholar popularity, it is often poorly defined (as argued by Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 166). As a result, it is considered especially important to clarify what is meant in this study with the terms populism, 'populist party' and 'populist voters'. In essence, populism is defined here in terms of Mudde's ideational approach (2017): populism is 'an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people' (Mudde 2004, p. 543). According to this definition, populism consists mainly of two elements: people-centrism and anti-elitism (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017, p. 194). Further, the ideational approach considers populism to be distinct from classical ideologies such as fascism and liberalism, because 'its programmatic scope is limited' (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1669). In fact, populism is a 'thin-centered ideology' attached to other ideological positions. For instance, right-wing versions of populism rely on nationalism to formulate who 'the pure people' are; left-wing versions of populism rely on socialism to clarify who 'the pure people' are (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). In turn, a *populist party* is a political party that is characterized by this thin-centered ideology. The main strengths of defining populism as a thin-centered ideology is that a) it sets boundaries (populism can be distinguished from non-populism) and b) it enables cross-national 'travel' (Mudde, 2017, p. 41), which is crucial for this study since its analysis will encompass cases of populism in various countries. Further, note that the term 'populist voter' refers to an individual that supports a populist party through voting. As was briefly stated in the aforementioned: a vote for a populist party is generally associated with low levels of political trust (see e.g. Fieschi & Heywood, 2004).

In his essay on populist movements in Europe, Taggart (2004) found that the uniting factor between populist movements is 'their distrust of elites and politics – although the particular distrusted elites may be different' (p. 282). In fact, Taggart (2004) argues that populism feeds off sources of political discontent. Similarly, other existing literature on

populism found that populist voters are generally more dissatisfied with the functioning of politics compared to voters who do not vote for a populist party (Pauwels, 2011, p. 114; Ziller & Schübel, 2015, p. 382). In turn, populist voters hope to correct ‘the corrupt elite’ by voting for a party that puts them, the people, on a pedestal (Van Wessel, 2010, p. 517). In line with the aforementioned definition of populism (Mudde, 2004), the point is that populist voters are dissatisfied and *distrusting* voters who hope to change the status quo through their vote by supporting a populist party (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017, p. 194; Akkerman et al., 2014, p. 1327).

To conclude, it has been empirically established in previous studies that populist voters are relatively distrustful of political institutions. Since populist parties are generally electorally growing, one should consider how to address this political distrust. In relevance, note that it is consistently found that voters are more likely to *trust* political institutions if their endorsed party is elected to power (see e.g. Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Norris, 1999). The following section will elaborate on this point; it provides a brief review of the literature on the connection between electoral outcomes and the attitudes of (populist) voters. This will eventually lead to this study’s hypotheses.

## **ELECTORAL OUTCOMES AND POLITICAL ATTITUDES**

Studies that focus on the connection between electoral outcomes and attitudes towards democracy repeatedly found that supporters of winning parties are more politically satisfied compared to voters who support losing parties (Anderson & Guillory, 1997, p. 77; Campbell, 2015, p. 169; Norris, 1999, p. 217). In fact, in their study on citizen satisfaction with democracy in Europe, Anderson and Guillory (1997) found that ‘those who voted for the incumbent government in the most recent election are significantly more satisfied with the way democracy works than those who did not’ (p. 78). Additionally, Norris (1999) found that voters are more likely to feel that representative institutions are responsive to their needs when their endorsed party is elected to power (p. 219). Indeed, voters are more likely to *trust* the political system if their preferred party gets the opportunity to *win*, that is, to become part of government (Norris, 1999, p. 234; see also Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & Lotempio, 2002). In line with this argument, existing literature on voting behavior found that voters increasingly want to influence the composition of *government* when casting their vote in parliamentary elections. Indeed, in their study on the increasing number of late deciding voters in The Netherlands, Irwin and Van Holsteyn (2008) found that voters increasingly seem to wait with making a decision until they finalized their expectations of what the election outcome will be, as well as what impact their vote will have on the governmental coalition the parties may form (Irwin & Van

Holsteyn, 2008, p. 490; see also Blais et al., 2006). The point is that most voters want to *win* elections by influencing the composition of the coalition with their vote. In turn, ignoring or excluding a specific party from coalition negotiations is expected to fuel the annoyance of that party's electorate, because voters of the excluded party *cannot win*. This is troublesome when considering Anderson's and Guillory's (1997) finding that 'losing' voters, i.e. voters that did not vote for governing parties, are less satisfied with how democracy works (p. 78). Indeed, voters are less likely to trust the political system if they are (consistently) losing by voting on a party that does not become part of government (Norris, 1999, p. 234). On top of that, consider the populist voter who is *already* distrusting of politics; it is expected that voters of populist parties feel *even more* neglected if their preferred party is politically excluded by other parties, which may consequently negatively affect their levels of political trust further. On the other hand, populist voters are expected to feel heard when their preferred party gets the opportunity 'win', that is, the party is provided with the opportunity to join the new coalition. This expectation forms the first hypothesis that this study addresses:

HYPOTHESIS 1: An increase in political exclusion decreases the political trust of populist voters.

This hypothesis expects the causal effect between political exclusion and political trust to run *directly*: the fact that other parties dismiss populist parties as possible political partners negatively affects the political trust of the populist electorate. Nevertheless, the effect of political exclusion on political trust may also run *indirectly*: political exclusion decreases the chances for populist parties to become part of government, which, in turn, decreases the political trust of populist voters. In essence, the populist parties are not able to become governing parties due to the presence of political exclusion, which negatively affects the political trust of their electorate. In turn, the feeling of being the 'loser' of the election may be enhanced under populist voters. In line with this expectation, Gershtenson et al. (2006) found that American voters are more trusting of political institutions when their preferred party takes over the Senate; they are relatively less trusting when their party leaves government (p. 883). In that sense, it is not about the having the *opportunity* to become government (as the first hypothesis expects), but about *actually becoming* government (Campbell, 2015, p. 169). Indeed, the effect of political exclusion on populist voters' political trust is expectedly mediated by government participation:

HYPOTHESIS 2: The effect of political exclusion on populist voters' political trust is mediated by government participation.

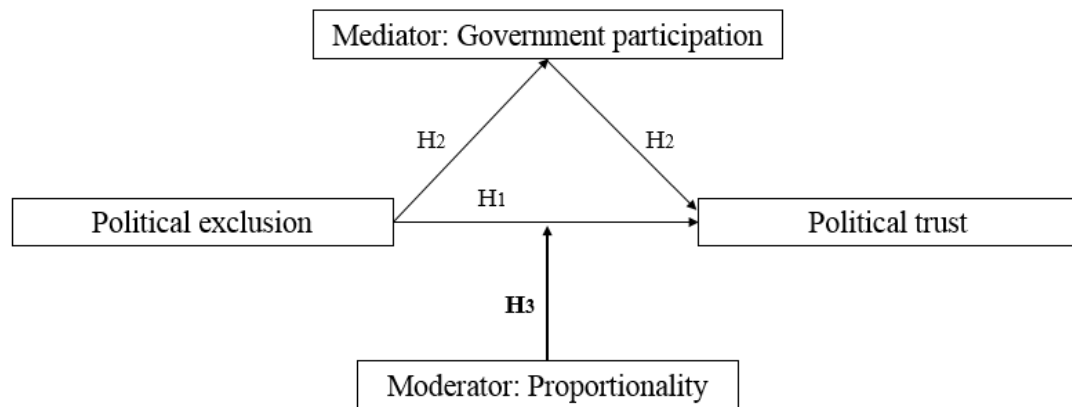
In addition, it is expected that the effect of political exclusion is exclusively relevant in countries with coalition governments. In fact, exclusion is not an issue in majoritarian democracies, because none of the bigger ('winning') parties are interested in forming a coalition; majoritarian systems are characterized by relatively few parties that function independent of one another in terms of forming a government. Parties will not bother to exclude other parties, because *they do not need to*. Indeed, political exclusion is inherent to the majoritarian system and not a noteworthy phenomenon. On the other hand, countries with an electoral system of proportional representation are generally characterized by a relatively high number of political parties, who together need to form a coalition in order to achieve parliamentary majorities (see e.g. Iversen & Soskice, 2006, p. 167). In fact, political parties *need* each other to govern in a PR-system, which means that politically excluding specific parties likely has considerable effects on both the coalition formation process and the political trust of voters. To take this logic further, it is interesting to differentiate between proportional electoral systems: the effect of political exclusion is expectedly even more relevant the more proportional a PR-system is (see e.g. Gallagher, 1991; 1992): the difference between the percentage of votes each party gets and the percentage of seats each party gets is small in relatively proportional systems, which means that (small) populist parties are more likely to gain seats and become relevant for the coalition formation process. Indeed, populist parties are relatively relevant for the coalition formation process in a relatively proportional PR-system compared to their counterparts in relatively disproportional PR-systems (see e.g. Brockington, 2004, p. 472; Dow, 2001, p. 112). In turn, excluding parties from the coalition formation process expectedly has a greater effect on the levels of political trust the more proportional a PR-system is. Consequently, this study's third hypothesis is:

HYPOTHESIS 3: The effect of political exclusion on populist voters' political trust is moderated by the level of electoral proportionality.

A schematic representation of the hypotheses is provided in figure 1. Before turning to this study's research method that is used to assess the aforementioned hypotheses, the operationalization of variables is discussed, as well as the case selection.



**Figure 1.** A schematic overview of the hypotheses.



## OPERATIONALIZATION

Since this study is exclusively interested in the effect of political exclusion on *populist voters*, it is necessary to explain how the group of populist voters is identified. By making use of data from the European Social Survey (ESS)<sup>2</sup>, European populist voters are identified as those who answered the question ‘which party did you vote for in the last national election?’ with the name of a populist party. The identification of populist parties is done on the basis of Rooduijn et al.’s (2019) ‘PopuList’: this list provides an overview of all political parties that can be considered populist based on Mudde’s (2004) aforementioned definition of populism. Note that the PopuList includes all European parties that obtained at least 2% of the vote in at least one national parliamentary election since 1998. However, a limitation of the PopuList is that it does not differentiate over time. This is troubling for, for instance, the Norwegian and Danish populist parties (Progress Party, FrP; Danish People’s Party, DF) who arguably became ‘less populist’ over time while in government (see e.g. Jupskås et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the PopuList is considered a reliable source for the identification of European populist parties, since it has been thoroughly peer-reviewed by more than 30 academics.

### *Measuring political exclusion*

This study’s independent variable is *political exclusion*: it is measured by assessing for every parliamentary election period which of the political parties publicly state their unwillingness to form a coalition with a specific populist party (either in the run-up to election day or after election day, up until the conclusion of the coalition formation). This is done by analyzing what

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<sup>2</sup> The decision to use ESS data is made on the basis of two considerations. Firstly, the ESS provides extensive data on both voting behavior and political trust. Secondly, the ESS provides the possibility to compare more than 20 European countries in a reliable manner with regard to the quality of the field work (as argued by many; see e.g. Rooduijn, 2018; Hooghe & Marien, 2012; Grönlund & Setälä, 2007).

is said by the political parties in the country's (inter)national news media. Additionally, scholarly election reports are analyzed when available. Political exclusion is first measured via a dummy variable that indicates whether exclusion is present at all for a specific populist party. The next step is to differentiate in levels of political exclusion. This is done by mapping out the collective parliamentary seat share of the uncooperative parties<sup>3</sup>. Every populist party is placed on a scale ranging from *no political exclusion* (all parties are willing to cooperate with the populist party) to *cordon sanitaire* (all parties have a collective agreement to not cooperate with the populist party). Table 1 provides an overview of all categories of the variable political exclusion: the in between categories are *low political exclusion* (parties that together have between 0 and 50 percent of the parliamentary seats are unwilling to cooperate with the populist party), *moderate political exclusion* (parties that together have more than 50 percent of the parliamentary seats are unwilling to cooperate with the populist party) and *high political exclusion* (all parties indicated their unwillingness to cooperate with the populist party, but did not formulate a collective agreement). Note that it makes logical sense to have the main cut off point between low and moderate exclusion at 50 percent: political exclusion is considered to be 'low' when the uncooperative parties have less than 50 percent of the parliamentary seats, because there is still a possibility that the populist party takes part in a majority coalition. Conversely, political exclusion is considered 'moderate' when more than 50 percent of parliamentary seats excludes a populist party, because no majority coalition can be formed after that point with the populist party. The highest form observable (so far) of political exclusion is the presence of a *cordon sanitaire*, which explains the decision to categorize a *cordon sanitaire* as 'highest political exclusion'. Note that the variable of political exclusion is ordinal of nature, because the *cordon sanitaire* category is qualitatively different from the other categories: it introduces a second dimension, namely whether a collective agreement between parties is present.

**Table 1.** *All categories of the independent variable political exclusion (X).*

<b>Percentage of parliamentary seats</b>	<b>Level of political exclusion</b>
$X = 0$	No exclusion
$0 < X \leq 50$	Low exclusion
$X > 50$	Moderate exclusion
All non-populist parties	High exclusion
<i>Cordon sanitaire</i>	Highest exclusion

<sup>3</sup> Note that the total seat share is considered more useful than the actual number of uncooperative parties, since not all statements by political parties are equally meaningful: a relatively small party (i.e. a party with few parliamentary seats) can state its unwillingness to cooperate with a populist party, but its influence in the government formation process is likely relatively small compared to bigger parties (see e.g. Golder, 2006).

Note that, identical to the selection criteria of the PopuList, it was decided to only measure the political exclusion of populist parties that represent a minimum of 2% of the electorate (unless the country's electoral threshold is higher), because other parties are expected to not bother with populist parties that are smaller.

### ***Measuring the dependent, mediating and moderating variable***

This study's dependent variable is *political trust*: it is measured by means of a scale including three variables of the ESS: 1) trust in national parliament, 2) trust in politicians, and 3) trust in political parties<sup>4</sup>. The average of these three items is taken and placed on a scale ranging from 0 (no trust at all) to 10 (complete trust). The reliability of this scale is satisfactory (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.88$ ). This measurement of political trust has also been proven reliable before in existing studies (see e.g. Rooduijn, 2018, p. 360).

The second hypothesis introduces a mediating variable, namely *government participation*. This dichotomous variable indicates whether the populist party in question became part of government after the elections. When a populist party supports a minority cabinet in parliament by means of a coalition agreement, the populist party is considered as being part of government. In fact, due to the government's parliamentary dependence on this supporting party, it is in the position to exert strong influence on government proposals (Godbout & Høyland, 2011, p. 460); effectively, the supporting party governs alongside the government.

The third hypothesis introduces a moderating variable, namely *proportionality*. This interval variable measures the proportionality of national elections by means of the Gallagher index (see Gallagher, 1991): high values on this index indicate that larger parties win a greater percentage of the seats than they did of the vote share; smaller parties obtain a smaller share of the seats compared to their share of votes. By contrast, low values on the Gallagher index suggest that there exists little deviation between the seat shares of the parties and their vote shares. In other words: the lower the value on the Gallagher index, the more proportional the electoral system is (Carter, 2002, p. 137).

### ***Control variables***

Additionally, two control variables are included in the analysis, namely *extremism* and *corruption*. The control variable *extremism* indicates whether the populist party in question can

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<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, 'trust in political parties' is not present in the ESS of 2002, which means that this item is excluded in the political trust measurement for the cases in 2002. However, this is not considered a problem, because the 'trust in political parties' variable has been proven to strongly correlate with both 'trust in parliament' and 'trust in politicians' (see Rooduijn, 2018, p. 359-360); the three items essentially measure the same thing.

be considered extreme or not based on its ideological position on the left-right scale. In fact, it is expected that the more extreme a populist party is in its ideology, the more likely it is that this party is politically excluded by other parties from the coalition formation process. Indeed, Downs (2001) explained how political exclusion is generally a tactic of forming opposition to extremism (p. 27). At the same time, it is expected that relatively extreme populist parties influence their voters' political trust negatively. For instance, Rooduijn et al. (2016) expect that populist voters grow more distrustful of politics the more extreme the message is of the populist party (p. 38). Therefore, this study should control for a populist parties' extreme ideological position; this is done by making use of party positioning data of the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES).

On top of that, the analysis should control for the countries' levels of corruption. In fact, it is consistently found by previous research that corruption negatively influences peoples' political trust (Van der Meer & Dekker, 2011, p. 4; see also e.g. DellaPorta, 2000). In addition, corruption is expected to influence political exclusion as well. In fact, anti-elitist populist parties are likely kept out of government by the corrupt establishment (see e.g. Učeň, 2007). In turn, this study controls for possible corruption effects by making use of country's Corruption Perception Index (CPI). Lower values on the CPI scale indicate more corruption. To summarize, an overview of all relevant variables is provided in table 2.

**Table 2.** *Overview of all relevant variables (N = 4177).*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Std.</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Political trust	The populist voters' level of trust in political institutions.	0 (none)	10 (a lot)	2.08	3.84
Political exclusion	The degree of political exclusion a party experiences.	1 (none)	5 (highest)	1.16	2.14
Political exclusion (dummy)	Is a party excluded (in any degree)?	0 (no)	1 (yes)	0.47	0.68
Government party	Is a party part of government?	0 (no)	1 (yes)	0.47	0.32
Proportionality	An election's degree of proportionality (i.e. Gallagher Index).	0.73	21.95	4.12	4.52
CPI	A country's degree of corruption (per year).	5.3	9.5	0.95	8.12
Extremism (dummy) <sup>5</sup>	Is a party extreme? (CHES= 2 > X > 9).	0 (no)	1 (yes)	0.41	0.21

<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, extremism is measured as the absolute distance to the midpoint of the CHES left-right scale. However, this alternative scale barely changes the overall results of the analyses (see tables A2 and A7 in the appendix). The dummy variant is preferred in the main text due to its simple interpretation.

## CASE SELECTION

The first step to assessing the effect of political exclusion on populist voters' political trust is to select relevant cases. In short, this study's population is identified as *all populist voters in long-standing democracies characterized by coalition governments, with one or more populist political party in its party system*. Indeed, it is in countries with a coalition government that political parties need each other to form a government. On top of that, this study is *only* interested in the political trust of populist voters, which means that only those elections that encompass populist parties are relevant. For that same reason, the decision is made to only focus on elections in the last 20 years, since this is generally believed to be the period of populist upsurge (see e.g. Meguid, 2005; Downs, 2001; Betz, 1993; De Lange, 2012). Additionally, it is argued that this study can only delve into the political trust of voters in long-established democracies, since political trust in relatively young democracies is likely tainted by the country's non-democratic tradition (see e.g. Catterberg & Moreno, 2005). On a practical note, datasets of the ESS are used to gather data on people's levels of political trust and voting behavior; cases must therefore be picked from ESS' pool of data. Furthermore, several selection criteria are kept in mind when deciding who of the populist voters should be included in this study's sample.

Firstly, populist voters need to be selected that experience different levels of political exclusion. On the basis of existing literature, Belgian and Danish situations are expected to differ the most (see e.g. Otjes, 2012): due to the presence of a *cordon sanitaire*, levels of political exclusion are (expectedly) relatively high in Belgian election periods compared to levels of exclusion in Danish election periods, where minority cabinets have been supported by a populist right party since the 1980s (Otjes, 2012, p. 27). In turn, the decision is made to *at least* include the populist voters in Belgium and Denmark.

Secondly, cases need to vary in government participation in order to analyze its mediating effect on the presumed relationship between political exclusion and political trust. As a result, the decision was made to expand the sample by encompassing Dutch, German, Swedish, Norwegian, Austrian and Irish populist voters.

Thirdly, cases need to vary in their levels of proportionality in order to assess its moderating effect on the presumed relationship between political exclusion and political trust. Consequently, populist voters in France and Italy are added to the sample due to their relatively

disproportional electoral systems compared to the electoral systems of the aforementioned countries (see e.g. Carter, 2002, p. 142)<sup>6</sup>.

Additionally, one practical criterium relates to the measurement of political exclusion: only those countries are chosen that are expected to have plenty of English news sources available, so that the possibility of missing a public statement of political exclusion is minimized. Keeping all the aforementioned selection criteria and practical arguments in mind, the case selection consist of the populist voters between 2002 and 2016 from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Ireland, The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, France, and Italy (table A1 in the appendix provides a complete overview of all the cases that are included). The next step is to measure the levels of political exclusion for all these cases. In order to provide some insight into the categorization process, the most notable categorizations of political exclusion are briefly discussed in the following section before turning to the analysis.

### **Categorization of political exclusion**

An overview of the political exclusion categorization for the populist parties under study is provided in table 3. Most notably, the *cordon sanitaire* against the Belgian VB was in place for all parliamentary elections under study (2003, 2007, 2010, 2014) and VB is therefore consistently categorized under ‘highest political exclusion’. The other Belgian populist parties did not experience high levels of political exclusion for the elections in which they participated. In fact, Lijst Dedecker (LDD) and Front National (FN) experienced no exclusion in 2007; both parties were expected to remain small, which might be a reason for why no other party bothered to publicly exclude them (Thewissen, 2007; Agentschap Belga, 2007). Nevertheless, other parties started to exclude LDD in 2010: the two biggest parties (N-VA and PS) stated that LDD was not welcome at the coalition negotiations after the elections (Agentschap Belga, 2010).

Interestingly, another party that experienced a *cordon sanitaire* was the French Front National (FN) in 2002: all parties made it clear that they were not willing to consider FN as a political partner and agreed to work together to boycott Le Pen (i.e. FN’s leader). At one point, the Socialist Party even urged voters to vote for the alternative right-wing Union for a Popular Movement (*Union pour un Mouvement Populaire*; UMP) in an attempt to steal FN’s thunder (Agence France-Presse, 2002). This *cordon sanitaire* was lifted by president Sarkozy (UMP) in the run up to the parliamentary elections of 2007; he invited Le Pen to discuss European policy and was even referred to by news media as being ‘dangerous’ for ‘flirting with Le Pen’

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<sup>6</sup> Populist voters in Greece were originally part of the sample for the same reason. However, it was found that political exclusion was not observable in Greece since no coalitions were formed in the relevant timeframe due to the simple majorities of the winning parties. In turn, it was decided to drop the Greek cases.

(De Volkskrant, 2007; Agence France-Presse, 2007). Interestingly, other parties also did not publicly restate that they were unwilling to govern with FN. However, other parties started to exclude FN again in 2012 (perhaps due to its electoral success), but no new *cordon sanitaire* was formed (see e.g. L'Echo Républicain, 2012). Unfortunately, not all categorizations can be discussed in detail here<sup>7</sup>. Instead, this paper will continue by discussing the research method.

**Table 3.** *Overview of political exclusion for populist parties under study.*

Country	0- No exclusion	1- Low exclusion	2- Moderate exclusion	3- High exclusion	4- Highest exclusion
Austria			FPÖ2013 TS2013		
	BZÖ2013				
Belgium	LDD2007 FN2007				VB2003 VB2007
		LDD2010			VB2010
					VB2014
Denmark	FrP2001 DF2005	DF2001			
		DF2007 DF2011			
France	FN2007				FN2002
		FN2012			
Germany		Linke2009 Linke2013			
				AfD2013	
Ireland			SF2002 SF2007		
		SF2011			
			SF2016		
Italy	FI2001 LN2001				
Norway	FrP2001 FrP2005				
		FrP2009			
	FrP2013				
Sweden				SD2010	
The Netherlands	SP2002	LPF2002			
	SP2003		LPF2003		
	SP2010	PVV2010			
			PVV2012		
		SP2012			

<sup>7</sup> A complete overview (including sources) of the categorization per party per year is available upon request.

## METHOD

Multilevel regression models will be constructed to test the aforementioned hypotheses: in the ESS data, individuals (level 1) are clustered within a country (level 2)<sup>8</sup>. The first hypothesis is tested by conducting a linear regression analysis; the effect of political exclusion on political trust is assessed. For the first part of the analysis, political exclusion is treated as a dummy variable (with 1 indicating the presence of political exclusion in *any* degree). This will offer a first indication whether an effect is present between political exclusion and political trust. Subsequently, political exclusion is treated as a categorical variable and the effect is assessed in between categories. Note that ‘no political exclusion’ is excluded as the baseline category and dummy variables are included for the other categories of the independent variable. Secondly, the second hypothesis is tested by analyzing whether a mediation affect is present. This is done by applying Baron and Kenny’s (1986) four step approach. In turn, the regression coefficient for the indirect effect of government participation is tested for significance using Sobel’s test (1982)<sup>9</sup>. Thirdly, the third hypothesis is tested by including an interaction variable in the linear regression analysis; the interaction indicates whether the effect of political exclusion on political trust is different for different levels of electoral proportionality. The following section will discuss the results of the analyses. However, note that whenever is spoken of an effect, it is meant in terms of association rather than claiming strict causality.

## RESULTS

The first hypothesis states that an increase in political exclusion decreases the political trust of populist voters. As shown in Model 1 of table 4<sup>10</sup>, there is empirical support for this hypothesis. In fact, political exclusion is related to political trust: the highly significant coefficient of -0.260 indicates that one unit increase in political exclusion may decrease the levels of political trust of the populist voter by -0.260. In other words: populist voters who voted on a party that got politically excluded (to any degree) are negatively affected in their levels of political trust as a result. Interestingly, the significant coefficient for the control variable corruption indicates that political trust increases when corruption decreases<sup>11</sup>, which is in line with findings of previous studies (see e.g. Van der Meer & Dekker, 2011). Although insignificant, the coefficient for the

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<sup>8</sup> The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient is 0.15, which indicates that 15% of the variance in political trust of populist voters can be explained by country membership; the multilevel character of this data should thus be recognized.

<sup>9</sup> Although this test is rarely used in political science research, it is widely used and respected in psychological research; its calculation is believed to be the concluding step of mediation analysis (see e.g. Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012, p. 203; Valentino et al., 2008, p. 264)

<sup>10</sup> Model 1 is found to fit significantly better than the null model ( $\chi^2(1) = 6.45, p=0.01$ ).

<sup>11</sup> Note that higher scores on the CPI indicate less corruption.



control variable extremism indicates that extremism is associated with lower levels of political trust. Nevertheless, note that model 1 is limited. In fact, it is limiting to treat political exclusion as a dichotomy (i.e. it either happens or it does not): one expects the association between political exclusion and political trust to be *stronger* for voters of populist parties that experience relatively high levels of political exclusion than their counterparts that experience lower levels of political exclusion. Expectedly, the regression coefficients should consistently decrease for ‘low political exclusion’ to ‘highest political exclusion’. However, as shown in Model 2 of table 4, this is not the case: although the negative coefficients become greater for the first three categories, the coefficient for the highest category of political exclusion (i.e. the presence of a *cordon sanitaire*) indicates an (insignificant) increase.

**Table 4.** *Multilevel linear regression results for political trust (models 1 and 2)<sup>12</sup>.*

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)	1.503	1.090	1.361	1.079
Political exclusion dummy (1=excluded)	-0.260**	0.100		
<i>Political exclusion</i>				
Low			-0.352**	0.110
Moderate			-0.397*	0.181
High			-0.680**	0.225
Highest ( <i>Cordon sanitaire</i> )			0.142	0.226
<i>Controls</i>				
Corruption (CPI)	0.306*	0.136	0.336*	0.135
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	-0.132	0.142	-0.279	0.157
Log likelihood	-8569.1		-8565.7	
Variance: country (Intercept)	0.465		0.417	
N (individuals)			4114	
N (countries)			10	

Multilevel linear regression coefficients on political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.

\*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05.

<sup>12</sup> See tables A5, A6 and A7 in the appendix for various robustness checks. Additionally, ordered logit and ordered probit models have been fitted (see tables A3 and A4 in the appendix), because there is no consensus in the literature on what type of model is best to fit a regression with a 10-points scale outcome variable such as ‘political trust’. Nevertheless, outcomes of all models are (very) similar and comparable.

Upon closer inspection (see table 3), the group that experiences highest political exclusion consists of voters who voted for the Belgian VB (in 2003, 2007, 2010, 2014) and of voters who voted for the French FN in 2002. Apparently, these voters are not (negatively) affected by the *cordon sanitaire* in their levels of political trust. In fact, these voters seem to be relatively trusting of politics compared to the voters that experience either moderate or high political exclusion (see table 5). Although this sounds counterintuitive given this paper's theory, previous studies offer a feasible explanation: those who voted for VB or for the French FN (in 2002) are not interested in influencing the composition of government with their vote, since they are aware of the *cordon sanitaire* (Pauwels, 2011, p. 76; Van Spanje & De Graaf, 2018, p. 18). In other words, voters know that the party that experiences a *cordon sanitaire* has no chance of taking part in government; those that want to influence the coalition formation with their vote will vote for another party. That said, the voters that decided to vote for VB and FN had other motives and in turn, political exclusion hardly affected their levels of political trust. The subsequent discussion section will discuss and explain this point more thoroughly. For now, the first hypothesis is partly accepted: levels of political trust are negatively associated with political exclusion, but not in the case of a *cordon sanitaire* due to its prefiltering effect on voters' expectations. In general, however, it is argued that political exclusion is negatively associated with political trust. Consequently, this brings the analysis to testing the second hypothesis: the relationship between political exclusion and political trust is mediated by government participation.

**Table 5.** Average levels of political trust per category of political exclusion

<b>Degree of political exclusion</b>	<b>Mean scores of political trust</b>
No political exclusion	4.41
Low political exclusion	3.81
Moderate political exclusion	3.03
High political exclusion	3.01
Highest political exclusion ( <i>cordon sanitaire</i> )	3.35

As argued before, it is reasonable to expect that the effect of political exclusion on political trust runs through government participation, since voters are found to be relatively distrusting of politics when their preferred party is not in government (see e.g. Gershtenson et al., 2006; Campbell, 2015). In order to see whether government participation is a mediator, it must first be assessed if a relationship is present between political exclusion and government participation. Logically, it is expected that political exclusion makes it difficult for parties to

take part in government. In fact, when a populist party is rejected as a viable coalition partner by other parties (which is the case with political exclusion), the number of possible coalition governments that include the populist party decrease. Indeed, the distribution of political exclusion and government participation presented in table 6 shows that 77 percent of the voters that voted on an excluded populist party did not get represented in government. Merely 23 percent of the politically excluded did get represented in government via their party. Further, results of a Chi-squared test indicate that this difference in proportions is significant,  $\chi^2(1, N = 4177) = 285.01, p < 0.001$ ). Consequently, it is argued that a negative association between government participation and political exclusion is present. Furthermore, a regression model needs to be fitted in order to assess whether mediation is present in the relationship between political exclusion and political trust. The results of this model are presented in table 7.

**Table 6.** Crosstabulation for ‘Part of government (n/y)’ and ‘Political exclusion (n/y)’.

	No exclusion	Exclusion
Not part of government	678 (50%)	2167 (77%)
Part of government	667 (50%)	665 (23%)
Total	1345 (100%)	2832 (100%)

**Table 7.** Multilevel regression results for political trust with ‘government party’ as mediator.

	<i>Model 3</i>	
	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)	1.217	0.983
Political exclusion dummy (1=excluded)	-0.178	0.101
Government party (1=yes)	0.546***	0.104
<i>Controls</i>		
Corruption (CPI)	0.302*	0.122
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	0.333*	0.170
Log likelihood		-8555.7
Variance: country (Intercept)		0.314
N (countries)		10
N (individuals)		4114

Multilevel OLS coefficients on political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \* $p < 0.05$ .

The highly significant coefficient for government party indicates that government participation is indeed positively associated with political trust. On top of that, the effect of political exclusion on political trust is *smaller* than before and no longer significant. This indicates that the effect of political exclusion on political trust is indeed mediated by government participation. A Sobel test is conducted to test the significance of this mediation effect (see also e.g. Lecheler & De Vreese, 2012, p. 203; Valentino et al., 2008, p. 264); the Sobel test returns a significant z-value of -11.79, which means that the indirect effect (political exclusion → government participation → political trust) is significant. In other words, the analysis provides strong evidence that political exclusion negatively affects the chances for a populist party to take part in government, which, in turn, negatively affects the political trust of the voters of the politically excluded party. In conclusion, the second hypothesis is accepted.

Lastly, the third hypothesis expects proportionality to be a moderator of the relationship between political exclusion and political trust. In fact, political exclusion is expected to have a relatively great effect on the political trust of voters in relatively proportional electoral systems, since populist parties expectedly play a relatively relevant role in the coalition formation process. In order to assess this expectation, a multilevel model is fitted that includes an interaction term (political exclusion × proportionality); the results are presented in table 8.

**Table 8.** *Multilevel regression results with ‘proportionality’ as moderator.*

	<i>Model 4</i>	
	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)	-0.692	1.387
Political exclusion dummy (1=excluded)	-0.165	0.150
Political exclusion × proportionality	-0.042	0.035
<i>Controls</i>		
Corruption (CPI)	0.521**	0.164
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	-0.089	0.159
Log likelihood	-8564.5	
Variance: country (Intercept)	0.601	
N (countries)	10	
N (individuals)	4114	
Multilevel OLS coefficients on political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.		
***p<0.001, *p<0.05.		

Counterintuitively, the negative coefficient for the interaction term indicates that when political exclusion is present, political trust is lower in relatively disproportional systems. Nevertheless, the coefficient is insignificant and no plausible interaction is likely present: the relationship of political exclusion on political trust does not necessarily vary between proportionality levels. However, the limited power of model 4 should be acknowledged: merely 10 countries are included and variation on proportionality is scarce. In fact, the limited variation in proportionality might also be the reason why the significance of the main effect disappears; future research that is interested in proportionality as a moderator should encompass more variation in proportionality.

### **DISCUSSION: *Why the cordon sanitaire is different***

It was found that levels of political trust are negatively associated with political exclusion, but not in the case of a *cordon sanitaire*. This particularity of the *cordon sanitaire* needs to be further discussed, since it was previously hypothesized that more political exclusion is associated with lower levels of political trust. Findings of previous studies offer a viable explanation: voters who vote for a party that experiences a *cordon sanitaire* are not motivated by a need to influence the composition of government and are therefore not affected by it in their levels of political trust.

In a recent study of Van Spanje and De Graaf (2018), it was found that a *cordon sanitaire* affects a party's electoral support if it is combined with 'parroting': the adoption of an excluded party's policy position by other (not excluded) parties negatively affects the excluded party's electoral support. In fact, voters who want to influence policy and government will *switch* from the politically excluded party to a party that is able to exert such influence. In line with this argument, Pauwels (2011) argues that many previous VB voters stopped voting for VB in 2009, because they got fed up with its permanent opposition status. At the same time, the parties N-VA and LDD (partly) overtook the issues that originally VB brought to the table. In turn, previous VB voters switched to parties like N-VA and LDD, because these parties were more able to put their preferred policies into practice (Pauwels, 2011, p. 75-76). Indeed, since its creation in 1992 (see Vlaamse Raad, 1992), the *cordon sanitaire* had a deterring effect on policy-driven VB voters, who 'gradually became aware of the political exclusion, and adjusted their actions accordingly' (Pauwels, 2011, p. 76). Interestingly, Van Spanje and Van der Brug (2009) found similar behavior for French FN voters: FN became less electorally attractive for policy-driven voters due to its exclusion (p. 376). In short, those who care about influencing the composition of government do *not* vote for a party that is systematically excluded from government participation via a *cordon sanitaire*. Instead, those who are left voting for VB or

FN are motivated by other motives, such as signaling their discontent with ‘the establishment’ (Pauwels, 2011, p. 77; Van Spanje & De Graaf, 2018, p. 5, Van Spanje & Van der Burg, 2009, p. 376). Interestingly, the most recent Belgian National Election Study of 2014 questioned voters how important they considered the composition of government when casting their vote. The mean scores presented in table 9 show that, on average, VB voters indeed care the least about the composition of government compared to all other voters. No similar data is freely available for the French national election of 2002, so it is unclear whether FN voters share these sentiments with VB voters. Unfortunately, a more thorough analysis of the particularity of Belgian VB and French FN voters and the *cordon sanitaire* is not possible within the scope of this study; a more thorough analysis remains a task for future research.

**Table 9.** Mean for ‘On a scale of 0 to 10 (0 = not at all important, 10 = very important), how important do you consider the composition of government?’ per party.

Political party <sup>13</sup>	Mean	N
PS	5.64	222
CdH	5.43	193
Sp.A	5.04	120
Ecolo	5.00	316
MR	4.80	358
Groen	4.76	69
FDF	4.71	103
Open VLD	4.71	97
CD&V	4.64	92
PP	4.61	93
N-VA	4.58	226
PVDA-PTB	4.57	214
FN	4.52	132
VB	4.09	51
<b>Total</b>	<b>4.86</b>	<b>2288</b>

Source: Bol, D., Beyens, S., Deschouwer, C., Pilet, J.B., Verthé, T., Stephenson, L., Blais, A. (2017). *MEDW 2014 Belgian National Election Study*, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/7GA3IT>, Harvard Dataverse, V1.

<sup>13</sup> The political party LDD was also included in the Belgian National Election Study of 2014 (mean score is 8.50), but it consists of only two observations and is thus excluded from this table.

To summarize, the point is that voters who vote for a party burdened by a *cordon sanitaire* do not care about being politically excluded. On the other hand, voters that vote for a populist party without a *cordon sanitaire* are relatively uncertain whether their party can become part of government and those who want to influence the composition of government, (i.e. those who are affected by political exclusion) are not deterred from voting for their preferred populist party. In turn, these populist voters may be affected in their political trust when their endorsed party is unexpectedly excluded by other parties.

## CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study has been to explore the link between political exclusion and the political trust of populist voters. The initial argument was that the exclusion of populist parties by other parties negatively affects the political trust of populist voters. Indeed, the fact that other parties dismiss populist parties as viable political partners was expected to aggravate the political distrust of the populist electorate. This relationship was expected to run via government participation: populist parties are less likely to become governing parties due to political exclusion, which forces the populist voters to be the ‘losers’ of the election, which negatively affects their political trust. This negative association was expected to be moderated by the elections’ degree of proportionality: the link was expected to be greater for relatively proportional elections, because then (small) populist parties are relatively relevant for the coalition formation process.

As expected, the presence of political exclusion appears to lower political trust in the group of populist voters. However, the populist voters that experience a *cordon sanitaire* appear unaffected in their levels of political trust: these voters likely know that their party will not become part of government and are driven by other motives than wanting to influence the composition of government. Indeed, these voters do not mind the political exclusion. This raises the expectation that, in order for political exclusion to affect political trust, a sense of uncertainty about the coalition formation process needs to be present. Although this argument is derived from existing studies (Pauwels, 2011; Van Spanje & De Graaf, 2018), it lacks an empirical analysis in this study and a thorough analysis remains a task for future research. Further, the negative relation of political exclusion and political trust is found to run via government participation. This is in line with the findings of previous studies that argue that voters’ political trust is affected by being the ‘winners’ or ‘losers’ of elections (see e.g. Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Norris, 1999). Additionally, an election’s level of proportionality is found to not moderate the effect of political exclusion on political trust. Nevertheless, the

analysis of the moderator effect of proportionality is limited in that it lacks variation in proportionality.

In summary, this study contributes to existing literature in various ways. Its results offer insight into the (unintended) effects of the understudied phenomenon of political exclusion. On top of that, it introduced a new way of measuring political exclusion. Still, some limitations of this study need to be addressed. First and foremost, this study cannot account for a certain campaign effect: it is possible that initial voters of populist parties have been influenced by political exclusion *before* they made their final voting decision on election day. For example, some parties signal in the run up to the elections that they do not want to form a coalition with a populist party and as a result, voters may switch to another party with a better chance of governing the country (see e.g. Van Holsteyn, 2018, p. 1372). Unfortunately, the datasets of the ESS can only provide an account of voters that stuck with the populist party in their voting decision. Nevertheless, political parties generally wait with making definitive statements about coalition partners until the election results are in (usually on the grounds of ‘offering all voters perspective’; De Volkskrant, 2014). In turn, voters remain relatively uncertain about the coalition formation at the time of voting. Therefore, the campaign effect is expected to be small, unless political exclusion happens systematically for a specific party (which is the case with a *cordon sanitaire*). On top of that, the analysis did not consider how populist parties deal with political exclusion themselves. In fact, populist parties may use other parties’ statements of political exclusion to agitate the political discontent of its voters in hopes of holding on to their sympathy. For instance, in 2004 VB was able to use the *cordon sanitaire* to mobilize voters on the ‘undemocratic exclusion of the VB by the establishment’ (Pauwels, 2011, p. 75). In turn, a decrease of political trust as a result of political exclusion may also be a result of the populist party’s own doing. An important direction for future research is to also consider the role populist parties play themselves in influencing voters’ political trust when politically excluded.

On a more normative note, this study has shown that there is a danger in excluding populist parties: populist voters who do not expect their endorsed party to be politically excluded are negatively affected in their levels of political trust when the party *does* get politically excluded. Therefore, it is considered (very) troubling that Van Spanje and De Graaf (2018) end their research with the argument that, in order to safeguard democracy, ‘political elites can effectively prevent [populist] parties from gaining access to power by ostracizing them.’ (p. 19). However, this study has shown that ostracizing parties is not without consequences: the voters that already feel neglected by existing parties are cast aside, which aggravates their political discontent. In fact, one should consider whether ‘there is not some truth in the criticism of populists as they stress the fundamental democratic issue of how to



control the controllers' (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). Indeed, politically excluding populist parties presumes that the populists are *irrelevant* rather than *not dominant* and the 'democratic' solution to populism – if there is any at all – is *not* simply disregarding its voters.

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## APPENDIX

<u>SECTION</u>	<u>Page.</u>
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## DESCRIPTIVES

**Table A1.** Overview of all countries, parties and elections that are included in the sample.

Country	Populist party	Election day	ESS data*	Notes
Austria	FPÖ; TS; BZÖ	29-6-2013	2014	
Belgium	VB	18-5-2003	2004	
	VB; LDD; FN	10-6-2007	2008	
	VB; LDD	13-6-2010	2010	<i>Data retrieved between 10-10 and 05-11</i>
	VB	25-5-2014	2014	<i>Data retrieved between 09-14 and 02-15</i>
Germany	Linke	27-9-2009	2010	
	Linke; AfD	22-9-2013	2014	
Denmark	DF; FrP	20-11-2001	2002	
	DF	8-2-2005	2006	
	DF	13-11-2007	2008	
	DF	15-9-2011	2012	
Ireland	SF	17-5-2002	2002	<i>Data retrieved between 12-02 and 04-03</i>
	SF	24-5-2007	2008	
	SF	25-2-2011	2012	
	SF	26-2-2016	2016	<i>Data retrieved between 11-16 and 05-17</i>
The Netherlands	LPF; SP	15-5-2002	2002	<i>Data retrieved between 09-02 and 02-03</i>
	LPF; SP	22-1-2003	2004	
	SP; PVV	9-6-2010	2010	<i>Data retrieved between 09-10 and 04-11</i>
Norway	FrP	10-9-2001	2002	
	FrP	12-9-2005	2006	
	FrP	14-9-2009	2010	
	FrP	9-9-2013	2014	
Sweden	SD	19-9-2010	2010	<i>Data retrieved between 27-09-10 and 03-11</i>
France	FN	16-6-2002	2002	<i>Data retrieved between 09-03 and 12-03</i>
	FN	17-6-2007	2008	
	FN	17-6-2012	2012	<i>Data retrieved between 02-13 and 06-13</i>
Italy	FI; LN	13-5-2001	2002	

\*The ESS provides measurements of political trust and voting behavior for the **previous** elections. Consequently, this overview matches the data with the actual elections in countries (within a timeframe of 24 months, otherwise political trust data is considered outdated).

**Table A2.** *Overview of all variables in analysis (N = 4177).*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Std.</b>	<b>Mean</b>
Political trust	The respondent's level of trust in political institutions.	0 (no trust)	10 (a lot)	2.08	3.84
Political exclusion	Measures the degree of political exclusion a party experiences.	1 (none)	5 (highest)	1.16	2.14
Political exclusion (dummy)	Indicates whether a party is excluded (in any degree).	0 (no exclusion)	1 (exclusion)	0.47	0.68
Government party	Indicates whether a party is part of government after the elections in question.	0 (no participation)	1 (participation)	0.47	0.32
Proportionality	Measures an election's degree of proportionality (i.e. Gallagher Index). Lower values indicate more proportionality.	0.73	21.95	4.12	4.52
CPI	Measures a country's degree of corruption (per year). Lower values indicate more corruption.	5.3	9.5	0.95	8.12
CHES Left-Right	Measures parties overall ideological position on the left-right scale.	1.63	9.92	2.74	7.10
Extremism (dummy)	Measures whether the populist party in question can be considered 'extreme' Derived from the 'CHES Left-Right' variable ( $2 > X > 9$ ).	0 (not extreme)	1 (extreme)	0.41	0.21
Extremism	Measures the absolute distance to the mid-point of the CHES left-right scale.	1.90	4.92	0.72	3.37



## ALTERNATIVE MODELS

**Table A3.** Multilevel ordered logit results for political trust (models 1 and 2).

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)				
Political exclusion dummy (1=excluded)	-0.222*	0.092		
<i>Political exclusion</i>				
Low			-0.288**	0.101
Moderate			-0.351*	0.171
High			-0.549**	0.208
Highest ( <i>Cordon sanitaire</i> )			0.071	0.205
<i>Controls</i>				
Corruption (CPI)	0.251*	0.124	0.279*	0.126
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	-0.128	0.128	-0.233	0.143
Log likelihood	-13982		-13980	
Variance: country (Intercept)	0.411		0.368	
N (countries)		10		
N (individuals)		4114		
Multilevel ordered logit estimates for political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.				
**p<0.01, *p<0.05				

Table A4 on the next page.

**Table A4.** *Multilevel ordered probit results for political trust (models 1 and 2).*

	<i>Model 1</i>		<i>Model 2</i>	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)				
Political exclusion dummy (1=excluded)	-0.136*	0.053		
<i><u>Political exclusion</u></i>				
Low			-0.185**	0.058
Moderate			-0.199*	0.097
High			-0.356**	0.118
Highest ( <i>Cordon sanitaire</i> )			0.078	0.118
<i><u>Controls</u></i>				
Corruption (CPI)	0.160*	0.071	0.174*	0.070
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	-0.069	0.074	-0.147	0.083
Log likelihood		-13945		-13941
Variance: country (Intercept)		0.121		0.110
N (countries)			10	
N (individuals)			4114	
Multilevel ordered probit estimates for political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.				
**p<0.01, *p<0.05				

## ROBUSTNESS CHECKS

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### Alternative scales for political exclusion

The main models in the main paper use a specific categorization for the independent variable political exclusion. It is interesting to assess the models' robustness by altering the scaling of the independent variable in alternative viable ways. For instance, it may be argued that it is troublesome that the categorical political exclusion variable includes the *cordon sanitaire* as a category, since it adds a second dimension to a scale variable (which makes it ordinal). Model 3 in table A5 presents the results of a multilevel model that makes no distinction between 'high political exclusion' and 'highest political exclusion' (i.e. a *cordon sanitaire*). Interestingly, the results of this model are similar to the results of the main model.

**Table A5.** *Multilevel linear regression results for political trust (alternative scale for exclusion).*

	<i>Model 3</i>	
	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)	1.490	1.110
<i>Political exclusion</i>		
Low	-0.238	0.105
Moderate	-0.183	0.164
High	-0.391*	0.178
<i>Controls</i>		
Corruption (CPI)	0.307*	0.139
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	-0.091	0.149
Log likelihood	-8568.6	
Variance: country (Intercept)	0.476	
N (countries)	10	
N (individuals)	4114	

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Multilevel linear estimates for political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.  
\*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

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*Table A6 on the next page.*

**Table A6.** Multilevel linear regression results for political trust (>80% = high exclusion).

<i>Model 4</i>		
	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)	0.939	1.108
<i>Political exclusion</i>		
Low	-0.356**	0.110
Moderate	-0.202	0.197
High	-0.667***	0.175
Highest ( <i>cordon sanitaire</i> )	0.158	0.226
<i>Controls</i>		
Corruption (CPI)	0.387**	0.139
Extremism dummy (1=extreme)	-0.297	0.158
Log likelihood	-8563.2	
Variance: country (Intercept)	0.457	
N (countries)	10	
N (individuals)	4114	
Multilevel linear estimates for political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.		
*** p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05		

Additionally, one may argue that the criteria for the ‘high exclusion’ category is too strict. In the main paper, a party is encompassed in the ‘high political exclusion’ category when *all other* political parties exclude it as a political partner. In turn, one may argue that the difference between ‘moderate’ and ‘high’ political exclusion is too big. However, the model returns similar results even when the categorization criterium for ‘high political exclusion’ is loosened (i.e. more than 80% of the parliamentary seats exclude the populist party); this model is presented in table A6.

**Alternative scale for extremism**

The control variable *extremism* is treated as a dummy variable in the main paper. Alternatively, the variable can be treated as the absolute distance to the midpoint of the CHES left-right scale. Alternative models that encompass this absolute distance extremism variable are presented in table A8: the coefficients are generally similar to the coefficients in the main model. Although the significance disappears for the ‘moderate’ category of political exclusion (and instead

becomes borderline significant), the coefficients consistently decrease for the first three categories.

**Table A7.** *Multilevel linear regression results for political trust (extremism = absolute distance to scale midpoint).*

	<i>Model 5</i>		<i>Model 6</i>	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE
(Intercept)	1.085	1.159	1.022	1.164
Political exclusion dummy (1=excluded)	-0.226*	0.088		
<i><u>Political exclusion</u></i>				
Low			-0.240**	0.090
Moderate			-0.259	0.169
High			-0.559**	0.216
Highest ( <i>Cordon sanitaire</i> )			0.007	0.241
<i><u>Controls</u></i>				
Corruption (CPI)	0.293*	0.144	0.325*	0.147
Extremism	0.136	0.105	0.088	0.112
Log likelihood		-8568.7		-8566.9
Variance: country (Intercept)		0.585		0.547
N (countries)		10		
N (individuals)		4114		

Multilevel ordered probit estimates for political trust, with countries as the second-level unit.  
 \*\*p<0.01, \*p<0.05

Conclusively, it is argued that the model in the main paper is proven to be robust: results remain similar even when the scaling for the variables ‘political exclusion’ and ‘extremism’ is done in alternative ways.