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**Populism and voting behaviour on European integration issues
in the European Parliament**

MSc Political Science (International Politics)

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Abstract

Both populism and Euroscepticism are contested concepts that have received much scholarly attention in recent years, partly because of the electoral surge of populist Eurosceptic parties. The two concepts are related, as both oppose European integration. However, there are also certain differences. Eurosceptics completely focus on opposing (further) European integration, whereas populism is a thin ideology that is less concrete and more theoretical. Although much has been written about both phenomena, there is a gap of research on how the two concepts interact in the European Parliament. Not much is known about whether populism influences voting behaviour in the pro/anti-EU-dimension. This dimension has become more important as a result of the Eurozone crisis and increasingly shapes voting behaviour in the European Parliament.

A binary logistic regression was conducted on a vote that emphasized the benefits of EU membership and called for further European integration. The results show that, when controlling for MEPs' positions on European integration, populism does not inform voting behaviour on European integration issues.

Introduction

In the past few years the European Union (EU) has endured several crises; most prominently the economic and financial crisis. This brought about socioeconomic and sociocultural concerns within the EU member countries. Populist parties took advantage of the perceived crises and elite failure (Pirro, Taggart & Van Kessel, 2018). In response to the crises, populist parties pushed their discourses opposing European integration, further reiterating their criticism (Pirro et al., 2018).

Most of the populist parties in Europe previously belonged the fringes of the political spectrum (Lewis, Clark, Holder & Kommenda, 20 November 2018). Currently, they are represented in parliament of most European countries and are increasingly overtaking mainstream parties electorally (Grabbe & Groot, 2014; Mudde, 2016). The combined vote share of populist parties in Europe at national parliamentary elections has risen from 8 percent in 1998 to 25 percent in 2018 (Lewis et al., 20 November 2018). They are not only gaining influence by being elected into national parliaments but are also joining governing coalitions in a growing number of European countries. In Greece for example the radical left-wing populist party Syriza now forms part of the government. All four members of the Visegrád Group, Hungary, Slovakia, The Czech Republic and Poland have populist parties represented in the government. In Austria and Italy populist parties too have an important role within the government (Henly, 20 November 2018).

In addition to receiving an increasing amount of votes at national elections, populist parties are also doing well at European elections (Grabbe & Groot, 2014). During the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections populist parties gained a quarter of the votes (Spiegel, 2014). Their advance has altered the tactics of mainstream parties and will affect EU debates about policies and legislation (Grabbe & Groot, 2014). It is unlikely that the popularity of populism in Europe will disappear anytime soon (Mudde, 2016).

The debate on the growing popularity of populist parties can be linked to related thread of academic attention: Euroscepticism (Kneuer, 2018). The rise of populist and Eurosceptic parties and the United Kingdom's decision to withdraw from the EU is an example of how the two concepts can interact (Pirro et al., 2018). European integration has attained much salience over time and political parties are therefore under increased pressure to take a stance on the subject (Arnold, Sapir & De Vries, 2012).

Populists pose a challenge to the process of European integration as they often view the EU as an elitist project that goes against the general will of the people (Pirro & Van Kessel, 2018). They argue that it, among other things, threatens national sovereignty and has negative socioeconomic consequences for EU countries (Pirro et al., 2018). Eurosceptics too oppose the process of European integration (Taggart 1998, p. 366) and there is thus a scope of coherence between the two phenomena (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). There are also differences among populists and Eurosceptics as for example Eurosceptics are not necessarily populist (Harmsen, 2010; Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2018). Euroscepticism is a concrete phenomenon that is focused on opposing further European integration, while populism concerns a more theoretical and principled understanding of the political world (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019).

Not much is known about the relationship between populism and Euroscepticism (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). There is a lack of linkage between the two research fields and the theoretical knowledge and findings they have both generated (Kneuer, 2018). Most of the research on populism concentrates on the populist far right (Taggart, 2004), the reasons behind the electoral surge of populists, and how their rise influences public opinion and liberal democracy (Hawkins, Riding & Mudde, 2012; Rooduijn, 2018). Further scope of research and interest thus lies in finding out how the two are connected and converge (Harmsen, 2010; Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019).

Although populism is not as well-established as for example socialism or liberalism and often is used in combination with these 'core' ideologies it is regarded as a thin ideology by a growing number of social scientists (see Canovan, 2002; Mudde 2004). Even if it is a thin foundation that unites different populist parties this could be essential for the behaviour of these parties (Van Kessel, 2015). Thin ideologies are often used in combination with other ideologies (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2011). The question therefore is whether populism can be combined with Euroscepticism. More specifically, it is unclear whether populism as a thin ideology affects voting on European integration issues in the EP and increases already existing opposition against European integration.

In order to answer this question the voting behaviour of members of the European Parliament (MEPs) will be analysed. Studying the variety of populist MEPs and their voting behaviour is useful for several reasons.

Firstly, because many studies on populism are conducted on a national or regional level (see for example Otjes & Louwerse, 2015; March, 2017; Pirro & Van Kessel, 2018;

Lees, 2018), while literature that looks at populism in the European context is scarce (Taggart, 2002).

Secondly, it is useful to analyse the interaction between populism and voting behaviour on European integration within the EP as the EP has become a powerful body with a significant influence on the EU's legislative politics (Hix & Høyland, 2013). MEPs have gained more legislative power over time, it is thus of importance that research is conducted on their attitudes and voting behaviour (Hix, 2002; Scully et al., 2012).

Thirdly, the EP is interesting to analyse because of its distinct characteristics and because there are several interesting forces in play: MEPs are affiliated with national parties as well as with European party groups (Hix, 2001; Hix, Noury & Roland, 2006). The variety of, among other things, nationalities, ideologies and coalitions make the EP an excellent setting to study coalition formation (Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999).

Finally, most analyses on voting behaviour in the EP are based on the larger mainstream parties in the EP. Niche party behaviour therefore often falls out of the scope of study and important variations could therefore be overlooked (Jensen & Spoon, 2010).

What is currently apparent about voting behaviour in the EP is that the two most important conflict lines determining voting behaviour in the EP, are the left-right conflict line (see Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999; Hix et al., 2006; Cencig & Sabani, 2017) and pro-/anti-European conflict line (see Otjes & Van der Veer, 2016). Research by Otjes & Van der Veer (2016) shows that as a result of the economic crisis the European integration division in the EP increased.

Especially with the pro-/anti- EU dimension becoming more significant, it is of relevance that research on the relationship between this dimension and populism in the EP is conducted. When regarding populism as a thin ideology and taking into account populist's tendency to be opposed to the EU the research question that arises is: *To what extent does populism, independent of MEPs' positions on European integration, inform MEP voting behaviour related to European integration issues?*

In order to answer the research question, Euroscepticism and populism will be analysed. Both populism and Euroscepticism are contested concepts (Harmsen, 2010) that have become popular words to use among political scientists (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). An overview of the two concepts and a discussion of how they overlap and differ is thus necessary. Populism is perceived as a thin ideology in this thesis, therefore its core concepts will be discussed. Subsequently, voting behaviour within the EP will be addressed.

An EP roll-call vote on a motion calling for further European integration will be used to analyse whether populism has a significant effect on voting behaviour in the pro-/anti-EU dimension. A binary logistic regression, which will also include several control variables, is used to test the latter. This thesis will conclude by discussing the results of the binary logistic regression and its implications.

Theory

The debate on Euroscepticism is recent, with one of the earlier definitions on the concept of Euroscepticism provided by Taggart (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). Taggart (1998, p. 366) described Euroscepticism as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration”. Subsequently, this definition has been reconceptualised into ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ Euroscepticism. Hard Euroscepticism refers to a complete repudiation of European political and economic integration and membership of the EU. Soft Euroscepticism though does not completely reject the European project but opposes deepening European political and economic integration (Taggart & Szczepiński, 2004). Although the two forms of Euroscepticism thus slightly differ, they have in common that they both oppose further European integration.

Populists too have many reasons to oppose the EU (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). They are critical of the European integration project because this was established by elites who made agreements based on the tacit consent of the people (Taggart, 2004). Populists favour transparency and denounce complex procedures and decision-making processes. They oppose political intermediary organisations that do not represent the will of the people (Krouwel & Abts, 2007; Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). The EU, lacking these things, is therefore an obvious target for them (Canovan, 1999). More specifically, the populist right generally rejects European integration because they consider it to be a threat to national sovereignty (Hooghe, Marks & Wilson, 2002; Taggart, 1998). The populist left opposes European integration as they consider it to be neo-liberalistic (De Vries & Edwards, 2009; Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019).

Although Euroscepticism and populism are both critical of further European integration, they are distinct phenomena (Harmsen, 2010). Euroscepticism is not a category of populism and the two do not always coexist. There are Eurosceptics who are not necessarily populist and populist parties that are not Eurosceptic (Harmsen, 2010; Pirro & Taggart, 2018).

Euroscepticism dismisses the notion of European integration and the institutional set up of the EU. It thus primarily gives an indication of a party's position on one specific issue, European integration. Populism on the other hand is less concrete, it has a certain vision of how the world should be but does not focus on one particular issue (Rooduijn & Van Kessel, 2019). Populism is usually combined with other ideologies (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2011). The question therefore arises whether populism, if perceived as an ideology, combined with Euroscepticism has an enhancing effect on voting behaviour on European integration issues.

Since there is a lack of research on how the two concepts of populism and Euroscepticism interact in the EP, this is an interesting area to analyse. A closer look at the concept of populism is firstly required, as it is a contested concept that as has been applied to a variety of regions and different movement and especially in recent times has evoked much discussion (Stanley, 2008).

The term is often traced back to the American's People's Party that arose at the end of 19th century in the United States (Jagers, 2006). This party called for the mass mobilization of farmers and drew attention to populist subjects such as a colluding elite, moral decline and the will of the people in its preamble (Taggart, 2000, p. 28).

In the more recent public debate populism is sometimes interpreted as a superficial discourse (see for example Hawkins, 2009), or political communication style (see for example Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Abts & Rummens (2007), however, argue that the typical style of communication and use of simplistic language by populists are indeed features of populism but are not a reflection of its core. Rather, they should be interpreted as a manifestation of an underlying populist ideology (Abts & Rummens, 2007).

Above mentioned authors are not alone in their assertion that populism can be perceived as an ideology. The fact that populism has transcended time and space and emerged in Europe in the 20th and the 21st century, has led to a growing number of social scientists to assert that populism does actually have a core of coherent features (Stanley, 2008; Zaslove, 2008). One of those social scientists is Mudde (2004), who has drafted a very influential and much used definition within the populism literature (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014; Pirro & Taggart, 2018). The author defines populism as: "a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and '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). Mudde (2004), as well as Canovan (2002, p. 33), use Freedman's (1996) classification of ideologies to substantiate their argument that populism can be perceived as an ideology. Freedman (1998, p. 749) argues

that for something to be considered a thin ideology, it has to consist of a shared set of political concepts over time and space. For populism these concepts are ‘the people’, ‘politics’ and the elite’ (Taggart, 1998).

Firstly, the concept of ‘the people’ refers to the conviction of populists that the general will of the people is essential and trumps political institutions, laws and the constitution (Mudde, 2007). Celebrating “the people” is an essential part of populism. According to Taggart (2000) referring to “the people” brings with it flexibility which is why populists use the term so eagerly. Nonetheless he argues it is not an entirely empty phrase. He writes that . . . “Populist rhetoric uses the language of the people not because this expresses deeply rooted democratic conventions about the sovereignty of the masses, but because ‘the people’ are the occupants of the heartland and this is what, in essence, populists are trying to evoke” (Taggart, 2000, p. 95). Additionally, when referring to the ‘people’ it is implied that they are united and that there are many. This gives legitimacy to populist who speak in their name. The reference to the people is what sets populism apart from other types of discourses (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

To whom populists refer when they address ‘the people’ can differ. The populists of the New Left for example refer to confident, schooled and modern people. Whereas right-wing populists refer to a silent majority that is hard-working and traditional (Mudde, 2004). The fact that populism is used by both left-wing and right-wing parties is explained by the fact that populism as a thin ideology is not as well established as for example socialism or liberalism (Van Niekerk, 1972. It is therefore frequently combined with other more well developed ideologies (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2011).

Thirdly, the concept of ‘politics’ is important for populism as ideology. Populists aim to give power back to the people and want to restore popular sovereignty (Abts & Rummens, 2007). They consider politics as overly complicated and corrupted and prefer more direct forms of democracy, such as referenda. Political parties are thus viewed as being at odds with their preference for simplicity and directness. However, when there are crises they will mobilize through political parties, despite their reservations, in order to make a political impact (Taggart, 2000, pp. 99-100).

Thirdly, the notion of ‘the elite’ is an important element. Populist parties are united in their rejection of political and economic elites and celebration of the people (Rooduijn & Akkerman, 2017). They are therefore inclined to oppose the EU as they perceive it to be an elitist project that only serves professional politicians and not the people (Canovan, 1999).

Populism thus has a shared set of political concepts and can be considered a thin ideology. This is relevant, because ideology explains much of the differences in voting behaviour in the EP (Kreppel, Tsebelis, 1999; Hix, 2001). Two ideological dimensions in particular are of importance in the EP. The first one is the left-right dimension (Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999; Hix, Noury & Roland, 2006; Cencig & Sabani, 2017). This line of conflict is influential because much of the voting in the EP is on economic issues (Otjes & Van der Veer, 2016).

The second dimension that structures voting behaviour is the pro-/anti-EU dimension. Recent research by Otjes and Van der Veer (2017) has demonstrated that this dimension has become more important in the EP due to the economic crisis, especially for voting regarding economic issues. Otjes and Louwse (2015) also found that, in the Dutch parliament, voting is not always structured along the traditional left-right dimension. When it concerns voting on Europe, different structures emerge. On the topic of European integration the left-wing Socialist Party (SP) and right-wing populist Freedom Party (PVV) voted very coherently, while this was not the case for left-right issues such as migration. The expectation therefore is, when perceiving populism as a thin ideology and with European integration being an important topic for populists, that populism will affect voting behaviour on the European integration dimension in the EP. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H1: Populist MEPs vote more in a Eurosceptic manner than non-populist MEPs who occupy similar anti-European ideological positions.

Methodology

Case selection

The research design that will be used is the most likely case approach. A most likely case can confirm whether a theory is correctly applied, by checking if the hypothesized relationship between X and Y exists (Eckstein, 1975, see also; Bennett, 2004). A roll-call vote on further European integration, discussed more elaborately below, will be taken as a most likely case.

Roll-call votes are recorded by the parliament's official minutes and are easily retrieved, for example from VoteWatch.eu (2019). Roll-call votes produce about one-third of all votes in the EP and have taken place more often over the years, in line with the EP's expanding powers (Hix, Noury & Roland, 2006). A roll-call vote takes place for the final vote

on legislation and non-binding resolutions based on reports from EP's committees, if requested by a political group or at least 40 MEPs (European Parliamentary Research Service Blog, 11 September 2014). These votes are usually requested to force political groups to publicly take a stance on an issue, or to check the participation and voting position of an individual MEP (Corbett, Jacobs & Shackleton, 2007, pp. 175-176).

In addition to roll-call votes there are two other types of votes casted by MEPs, the 'show of hands vote' and the 'electronic vote'. These are not registered, unlike roll-call votes. Roll-call votes are thus useful because they give an indication of how MEPs vote when they cannot hide behind anonymity (Hix et al., 2006; Votewatch, n.d.).

To test the hypothesis the vote on the motion 'Report on the state of the debate on the future of Europe' will be used as a most likely case. This vote was held during the EP's eight term, on 13 February 2019. The rapporteur is Ramón Jáuregui Atondo, a Spanish MEP from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D) (European Parliament, 28 December 2018).

The report is part of a wider debate on the future of Europe. It for example refers to the Bratislava and the Rome Declaration of 2017. These declarations were signed in 2017 when EU heads of state came together to discuss the current state of the EU and the future (European Council and Council of the EU, n.d^a). In the Rome Declaration, the EU is described as indispensable. The latter and the Bratislava Declaration also both underline the Union's importance with regards to providing a safe, prosperous and social Europe (European Council and Council of the EU, n.d^{ab}). After the signing of the declarations debates on the future of Europe were also held in the EP with heads of state and government leaders (European Parliament, 5 December 2018).

In the sitting prior to the vote Jáuregui Atondo emphasizes how this report draws together several trends, such as the EU's problems with economic governance and the issue of Brexit. These development require people to rethink the notion of Europe. The EP, according to Jáuregui Atondo, calls upon states to "do more together". He further emphasized that nationalism is not the solution. He adds that that guidelines for better integration have to be set up and that the tendency of member states to bring about a "Europe a la carte" (European Parliament, 11 February 2019).

In the motion itself it is stated that the EU has brought peace, prosperity and welfare. Subsequently working together based on shared sovereignty is emphasized, as well the fact that "the Union must tackle the challenges of its future with greater and better political integration". It is underlined that the EP "Reiterates it's belief that differentiated integration

must remain open to all Member States and continue to act as a method of deeper European integration and solidarity” (European Parliament, 5 December 2018). Furthermore, the report mentions that the values of the EU are defined in such a way that all its citizens can identify with them. It is thus clearly a motion that calls for further integration and that emphasizes the positive aspects of the EU and advantages of EU membership. Therefore, this motion is used as a “most likely case” of a vote on further European integration.

Methods of data collection and operationalization

The outcome of vote on the motion ‘Report on the state of the debate on the future of Europe’ will be retrieved from VoteWatch.eu. (2019). VoteWatch processes the outcome of roll-call votes and publishes them on its website.

A binary logistic regression will be conducted to see whether populism affects voting behaviour when controlling for EU integration positions. This binary logistic regression includes a variable on how all of the 750¹ MEPs voted. The MEPs that voted in favour of the motion are given a score of 1 and those that voted against the motion are given a score of 0.² In order to find out which MEPs are member of a national populist party the ‘PopuList’³ will be used. This is an “overview of populist, far right, far left and Eurosceptic parties in Europe since 1998” (Rooduijn et al., 2019). It is composed by academics and journalists and is updated every couple of months. (Rooduijn et. al., 2019). MEPs that belong to parties⁴ mentioned on the PopuList are given the value 1, those that do not are given the value 0. The national parties that MEPs are a member of retrieved from the website of the European Parliament (see European Parliament, n.d.^a). Information on MEPs’ membership of national parties was retrieved from the website of the European Parliament (see European Parliament, n.d.). For each MEP a page can be retrieved that includes information on their national party group membership, and is necessary in order to find out which MEPs can be classified as

¹ At the time of the vote this was the total number of members of the EP.

² Of the 750 MEPs that were allowed to take part in the vote, 104 did not vote or were absent, they are excluded from the binary logistic regression. 41 MEPs voted to abstain, please see table 5 in the appendix for a separate binary logistic regression that includes abstentions.

³ The definition used by PopuList to classify populist parties is as follows: “Parties that endorse the set of ideas that society is 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; in Rooduijn et al., 2019).

⁴ For an overview of all the populist parties elected into the EP in 2014 please see the appendix.

populist. For most MEPs the national party of which he or she is a member on the date of the vote of the motion is included.⁵

Additionally, a variable that consists of the EU integration positions of MEPs will be included in the binary logistic regression. Data for this variable is derived from Van der Veer (2018). He used the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) to calculate national parties' positions on an EU integration scale. This scale ranges from 0 to 1; a score close to 1 means that an MEP is strongly in favour of European integration, a score close to 0 means that an MEP is strongly opposed to it. Scores closer to the middle reflect a more neutral and moderate stance on the issue of European integration (see Bakker et al., 2012).

Control variables

Several control variables will be added to the binary logistic regression analysis. The first control variable is one that reflects national party positions on the left-right dimension. An analysis of voting behaviour of Dutch populist parties by Otjes & Louwse (2015) showed that their positions on the left–right spectrum were an important predictor of their voting behaviour (Otjes & Louwse, 2015). Within the EP as well the positions of parties in the left-right dimension often determine their voting behaviour (Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999; Hix et al., 2003).

Additionally, a survey conducted in 2010 found that MEPs who are right-wing are more likely to be against further European integration (Scully et al., 2012). This is in line with findings from Hooghe et al. (2002) that left/right positions influence support for European integration.

To find out whether the left-right ideological dimension determines voting behaviour on European integration, the data on MEPs left-right positions gathered by Van der Veer (2018) will be retrieved. Van der Veer used data from CHES on the left-right positions of national parties. Parties that have a score between 0 and below 0,5 are considered to be 'left-wing', parties that have a score around 0,5 are centrist and parties with a score between 0,5 and 1 are considered to be right-wing. A score very close to 0 or 1 is an indication of the party being extremist in its ideology (Bakker et al., 2015).

The second control variable will be for the 'Grand Coalition'. The Grand Coalition refers to agreements made between the European's People Party (EPP) and the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists & Democrats (S&D)⁶ to vote together (Corbett et al., 2007).

⁵ Please see the appendix for exceptions.

⁶ Previously known as the Party of European Socialists (PES)

One of the reasons they often agree to vote together is because they want to act as a unified front to the outside world or the Council of the EU (Attinà, 1990). Because of their large size the EPP and S&D combined can obtain a majority when voting together, other party groups need to form a coalition with multiple other party groups to achieve this (Corbett et al., 2007, p. 109).

When it concerns economic and social issues the EPP and PES are divided. However, they have more similar ambitions regarding European integration (Hix, Kreppel, Noury, 2003). Research on voting behaviour has shown that the EPP and S&D are ideologically close when it concerns the pro/-anti-EU dimension (Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999; Hix, 2001) and that they are inclined to vote in favour of further European integration (Hix, 2001). Additionally, after the 2014 elections the cooperation between the EPP and S&D became stronger due to the rise of the anti-establishment parties within the EP (Christiansen, 2016). MEPs of the EPP and S&D will therefore be coded as 1, MEPs from the other political groups are coded as 0. Data on which MEPs are part of the Grand Coalition party groups is retrieved from Van der Veer (2018).

The final control variable that will be included is whether an MEP's national party government is part of a government. An analysis of parliamentary votes on European issues in the Dutch parliament suggests that whether a party is member of the government or the opposition influences voting behaviour (Otjes & Louwse, 2015). With regard to the EP Hix et al. (2006) find that there is a significant relationship between national party participation in government and voting behaviour. Particularly in the EU integration dimension this is apparent. Conflicts between party groups are influenced by government participation versus opposition, with parties represented in the Council voting differently than those that are not (Hix et al., 2006).

To make sure that it is not government participation that influences voting behaviour on the motion a control variable on government participation is included in the binary logistic regression analysis. The database on the website 'Parties and elections in Europe' will be used to classify parties that are in government. 'Parties and Elections in Europe' consists of an extensive database on elections results and governments.⁷ Those national parties that are indeed in government are coded 1, those that are not are coded 0.

⁷ Please see: <http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/index.html>

Results

Table 1 shows that a majority of the 171 populist MEPs voted against the motion. However, it is interesting to note that not all MEPs from populist parties opposed the motion calling for further European integration; 12 percent of populist MEPs voted in favour of it. Among the 12 percent, consisting of 21 MEPs, there are MEPs from several different populist national parties. Most notably all eight MEPs from the populist Bulgarian GERB voted against the motion, as well all eight MEPs from Forza Italy. In addition, two MEPs from the Polish PiS, two independent MEPs and one MEP from the Estonian Isamaa voted in favour. With the exception of the two MEPs from the PiS, all the above mentioned MEPs are members of the EPP. The EPP often votes in favour of further European integration (see Hix, 2001). Compared to non-populist MEPs, more than twice as many populist MEPs voted to abstain. However, populism does not have a significant effect on voting to abstain.⁸

Table 1.

Results of the vote on the motion ‘Report on the state of the debate on the future of Europe’ (in %)

	Non-populist MEPs	Populist MEPs
Voted against	16.8	59.1
Voted in favour	66.8	12.3
Voted abstain	4.0	9.9
Did not vote	5.0	8.2
Absent	7.4	10.5
<i>N</i>	578	172

When analysing how the party groups voted it turns out that the S&D has the highest percentage of MEPs voting in favour of the motion, with 82.6 percent. The S&D is followed by the Greens with 80.8 percent of its MEPs voting in favour, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) with 72.1 percent, and the EPP with 69.9 percent. All four

⁸ Please see table 5 in the appendix for the binary logistic regression of the effect of populism on voting to abstain.

party groups are classified as pro-European (Europe Elects, 2019). It was thus expected that these parties would vote in favour of the motion.

Most of the legislators of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE-NGL) opposed the motion. Less than 10 percent of MEPs belonging to these party groups voted in favour of it. The MEPs of the Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) and Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) overwhelmingly voted against the motion, and both party groups had no MEPs at all that voted in favour. Since the ECR, GUE-NGL, ENF and EFDD are Eurosceptic party groups (Europe Elects, 2019), it is not very surprising that they predominantly voted against the motion.

Although a majority of populist of MEPs voted against the motion, table 2 shows that when controlling for European integration positions populism does not have a significant effect. Being populist does not have much influence on MEPs’ voting behaviour related to European integration issues, when other indications of voting behaviour are included. EU integration is very significant though and has a high odds ratio score, indicating that a high score on the EU integration scale very much increases the likeliness that an MEP votes in favour of the motion. Thus, when it concerns issues on further integration the pro-/anti-European dimension remains the main explanatory factor for voting behaviour.

Table 2.
The effect of populism and EU position on voting in favour of the motion for further EU integration (“State of the debate on the Future of Europe”)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Intercept	-4.062***	0.597	0.017
Populist	0.364	0.467	1.439
EU integration position	7.573***	0.795	1944.204
2LL	307.224		
Cox and Snell’s R ²	0.426		
Nagelkerke R ²	0.614		
N	750		

Note: *** $p \leq 0,001$, ** $p \leq 0,010$, * $p \leq 0,05$

When adding several control variables, left-right position, being member of a party group that is part of the Grand Coalition, or being a legislator from a national party that is in government, populism remains insignificant.

Being a member of the Grand Coalition does significantly increase the likelihood a voting in favour of the motion. This outcome corresponds to previous research that proves that the EPP and S&D tend to vote together on, and in favour of, issues concerning European integration (see Hix, 2001; Hix, Kreppel & 2003; Kreppel & Tsebelis, 1999).

More remarkable is the outcome of the control variable regarding membership of a party that is in government. Government participation increases the likeliness of voting in against the motion. Since many national parties that belong to the Grand Coalition party groups are in government (see Hix, Noury & Roland, 2005, p. 502), there is a possibility that the low odds ratio is caused by more niche governing parties that are not part of the Grand Coalition. However, when excluding the variable Grand Coalition, the variable measuring government participation still has an odds ratios smaller than 0 and also remains significant.⁹

Nonetheless the most important outcome for this thesis is that populism does not have any significance. Therefore the hypothesis *H1*, that populist MEPs vote more in a Eurosceptic manner than non-populist MEPs who occupy similar anti-European ideological positions, is rejected.

Table 3.

The effect of populism, EU integration positions and control variables on voting in favour of the motion for further EU integration (“State of the debate on the Future of Europe”)

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Intercept	-3.329 ***	0.776	0.036
Populist	0.438	0.547	1.549
EU integration position	6.579***	0.929	719.581

⁹ Please see table 6 in the appendix for the results.

Left-right position general	-0.731	0.865	0.482
Member of the “Grand Coalition”	2.077***	0.377	7.978
National party government membership	-1.570***	0.402	0.208
<hr/>			
-2LL	244.072		
Cox and Snell’s R 2	0.489		
Nagelkerke R 2	0.705		
N	750		
<hr/>			

Note: *** $p \leq 0,001$, ** $p \leq 0,010$, * $p \leq 0,05$

Discussion and Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to find out whether populism independent of MEPs’ positions on European integration, informs MEP voting behaviour related to European integration issues. The literature shows that there is some overlap between populism and Euroscepticism, however not much is known about whether populism influences Eurosceptic voting in the EP. Additionally, because populist and Eurosceptic parties in Europe have done well electorally in recent years and are part of governing coalitions in an increasing amount of European states it is of importance that research is conducted on their voting behaviour.

Since populism is often combined with other ideologies, the question arises whether it affects voting behaviour on European integration when MEPs’ positions on a EU integration scale are also included. Previous research confirms that the pro/-anti-EU dimension in the EP has become more important when it concerns voting behaviour, however not much is known on whether populism too affects voting behaviour in this dimension. This thesis aimed to fill this research gap.

The results of the binary logistic regression shows that when controlling for European integration positions populism is insignificant. When adding control variables such as left-right positions, government participation and Grand Coalition membership populism is also insignificant. This leads to a rejection of the hypothesis that populist MEPs do vote more in a

Eurosceptic manner than non-populist MEPs who occupy similar anti-European ideological positions. The answer to the research question, whether populism independent of MEPs' positions on European integration, informs MEP voting behaviour related to European integration issues, is thus that it does not.

This finding is of relevance for the existing literature on populism and Euroscepticism. It shows that in the EP populism as a thin ideology does not have any influence on voting behaviour in the pro-/anti-EU dimension. Rather party positions on European integration, and being a member of the Grand Coalition and/or of a party that is part of a national government, determine voting behaviour in the above mentioned dimension. Furthermore, the significant effect of party positions on European integration underlines the finding by Otjes & Van der Veer (2016) that the importance of the pro-/anti-EU dimension has increased.

Additionally, the results in this thesis suggest that the influence of populism as a thin ideology differs from parliament to parliament. This is because Otjes & Louwse (2015) found that when it concerns voting on EU matters in the Dutch national parliament populist parties do vote coherently. In the EP populism thus seems to have a different effect on voting behaviour than in national parliaments. It is therefore of importance that additional research is conducted on the effect of populism on voting behaviour in the pro-/anti-EU dimension, and that this is compared to national parliamentary voting behaviour. Additionally future research that compares several EP terms would be useful. This can give an indication of whether populism did affect voting behaviour in previous terms.

Finally, for future research on voting behaviour it would be useful to take into account the various degrees of populism. This can tell us more about intragroup variation (Aslanidis, 2018).

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Appendix

Classification of populist MEPs

The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) is classified as populist by the PopuList. The party however has seen a large number of its MEPs resign after being elected in 2014. At the time of the vote on the motion 15 of the 24 UKIP MEPs that were elected into the EP in 2014 had left the party. Nine MEPs had joined the Brexit Party at the time of the vote, they were still classified as populist. There are a variety of reasons for their departures from the party, most prominently discontent about the party's leadership and their strong anti-Islam approach (Kate Whannel, 16 April 2009). The exodus of MEPs thus does not seem related to the party's populist attitude.

There are several other MEPs that were elected under the banner of a populist party but were no longer member of the latter at the time of the vote on the motion. Of those MEPs, the ones were "independent" at the time of the vote were still coded as populist. Those MEPs that were member of a populist party but had joined another non-populist party at the time of the vote were no longer coded as populist.

Table 4.*Populist parties in the European Parliament (2014-2019)*

Country^a	Populist parties
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria FPÖ
Belgium	Flemish Interest (VB)
Bulgaria	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) Reload Bulgaria Party / Bulgaria Without Censorship (BBZ/BBT)
Czech Republic	ANO
Denmark	Danish People's Party (DF)
Estonia	Pro Patria and Res Publica Union
Finland	Finns Party (Ps)
France	National Rally / Front (FN)
Germany	The Left (Germany) Alternative for Germany (AfD)
Greece	Syriza - The Coalition of the Radical Left Independent Greeks
Hungary	Fidesz - Hungarian Civic Alliance Jobbik, the Movement for a Better Hungary
Ireland	Sinn Féin (SF)
Italy	The People of Freedom / Forza Italia (FI) Northern League (LN) Five Star Movement M5S
Lithuania	Order and Justice (TT)
The Netherlands	Party for Freedom (PVV) Socialist Party (SP)
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS)
Slovakia	Ordinary People (OLaNO)
Spain	Podemos
Sweden	Sweden Democrats (SD)
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)

Note: The classification of populist parties is derived from the PopuList, composed by Rooduijn et al. (2019)

^aCroatia, Cyprus, Latvia, Luxembourg, Norway, Romania and Slovenia are not included in the table because there were not any populist parties from these countries elected into the European Parliament in 2014

MEPs that did not vote on the motion

Of the 750 MEPs that could vote on the motion there were 41 MEPs that voted to abstain. In the results section these MEPs were left out of the binary logistic regression. To check whether populism has an effect on MEPs choosing to vote abstain, perhaps as a way of showing opposition against it, a binary logistic regression was conducted. MEPs that voted to abstain were coded as 1, all the other MEPs were coded as 0. Table 3 shows that the variable depicting populism still remains insignificant when including MEPs that voted to abstain.

Table 5.

Binary logistic regression analysis of the effect of populism and EU position on voting to abstain on the motion “The state of the debate on the future of Europe”

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Intercept	-3.215***	0.703	0,240
Populist	0.873	0.587	2.394
EU integration	0.149	0.826	1,161

-2LL	246.631
Cox and Snell's R ²	0.006
Nagelkerke R ²	0.019
N	750

Note: *** $p \leq 0,001$, ** $p \leq 0,010$, * $p \leq 0,05$

Table 6.

Binary logistic regression analysis of the effects of populism, EU integration, left-right position and government participation on voting in favour of the motion “The state of the debate on the future of Europe”

	B	S.E.	Exp(B)
Intercept	-3.947***	0.781	0,19
Populist	8.610	0.517	1.855
EU integration	0.548***	0.924	5484.337
Left-right position	-4.18	0.824	0.658
National party in government	-1.519***	0.361	0.219
<hr/>			
-2LL	276.034		
Cox and Snell’s R ²	0.456		
Nagelkerke R ²	0.656		
N	750		

Note: ***p < 0,001, **p < 0,010, * p < 0,05

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