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**“Eurosceptic Populism in Hungary: Are Multidimensional EU Attitudes  
Enabling Democratic Backsliding?”**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

In the last decade, several Eastern members of the European Union (EU) have regressed in their democratic quality. This ‘democratic backsliding’ has most notably occurred in Hungary where the populist government led by Viktor Orbán continues to infringe upon the liberal democratic values championed by the EU. As the Hungarian populist government employs a Eurosceptic narrative, its continued success in combination with the rather pro-EU population is puzzling. Applying a multidimensional framework of EU attitudes, this study conducts a quantitative analysis of public opinion to explain the aforementioned puzzle and gauge the impact Euroscepticism has on the continued success of populism. It is argued that the government uses the underlying dimensions of EU attitudes to varying extent to mobilise public support. The binary regression’s results show that popular EU attitudes are not a definitive predictor for populist support. Nonetheless, the findings illustrate that the continued success of the Hungarian government is attributable to nationalist sentiments in the unique post-communist context.

**Key Words:** Democratic Backsliding, Euroscepticism, EU Attitudes, Hungary, Illiberalism, Nationalism, Populism, Public Opinion, Trust in Government.

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## I. Introduction

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In the last decade, the standard of democracy in Eastern Europe has been declining (Cianetti et al., 2018, p. 243). Scholars have identified the rise of populist parties as the catalyst for this ‘democratic backsliding’ in a region that had been previously believed to be democratically consolidated (Adamski, 2019; Batory, 2016; Grzymala-Busse, 2019; Krastev, 2016a). Moreover, Hungary has been found to be the most significant example of this phenomenon (Enyedi, 2016, p. 211). While the literature has further determined that a common characteristic of populists is a negative attitude towards the European Union (EU), their continued success in combination with the rather pro-EU population poses a puzzle (Krastev, 2018, p. 52). The following study aims to solve this enigma by asking *in what ways do public attitudes along the different dimensions of Euroscepticism affect constituents’ trust in the Hungarian government?*

This research follows scholarly suggestions to further study democratic backsliding by investigating how public opinion contributes to populist governments’ success (Enyedi, 2016, p. 216; Taggart & Kaltwasser, 2016, p. 346). Democratic backsliding in EU member states threatens the legitimacy of the European project by undermining the liberal values championed by the European Union (Adamski, 2019, p. 626). As populism has facilitated the democratic deficit in Eastern Europe, understanding the factors that underlie populist support is an important aspect of finding a way to counteract this illiberal development. To analyse popular EU attitudes’ effect on trust in the populist government, the present study employs the Standard Eurobarometer as well as Boomgaarden et al.’s (2011) framework of the underlying dimensions of EU attitudes to conduct a binary regression analysis.

Previous studies have shown that the Hungarian populist government only opposes certain aspects of European integration (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 1; Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017, p. 407). Hence, this paper argues that public opinion along the different EU attitude dimensions differs in its effect on people’s trust in the national government, depending on the extent to which a particular EU attitude dimension is used by the

Hungarian government to mobilise support. Thus, the divergence between a pro-European public and a Eurosceptic government can be explained by the latter's mobilisation of only certain aspects of European integration in domestic politics.

The statistical results illustrate that popular EU attitudes are not a certain determinant for trusting the populist government. Nonetheless, this paper is able to expand upon previous research of populist support by pointing out that some dimensions of EU attitudes are not politicised in national politics. The public's pro-EU stance can be explained by positive assessments of the EU's democratic quality as well as preferences for faster integration, while the continued success of populism in Hungary is based on appeals to national sovereignty and social benefits supplied by the government. These findings are further able to point out the importance attached to the framing of an issue in the domestic political context. Thus, a comprehensive basis for future research of ways in which to counteract democratic backsliding is presented by this paper.

The following paper will be organised as follows. First, the main concepts will be elaborated, followed by a review of the key literature regarding the topic of democratic backsliding in Eastern Europe. Then, the theoretical framework and hypotheses as well as the research design, including the case selection, will be presented. This is followed by the analysis of the regression's results as well as a discussion thereof, situating the findings in the broader context of Eurosceptic populism in Eastern Europe. The conclusion will summarise the findings and point out the implications of this study as well as formulate suggestions for further research.

## **II. Conceptualisation: Euroscepticism, Democratic Backsliding & Populism**

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This section is concerned with outlining the main concepts of this research, namely democratic backsliding, populism, and Euroscepticism. The latter phenomenon is generally understood by scholars and politicians alike as the "opposition to the process of European integration" (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 3). European integration in itself

constitutes a complex issue, concerned with expanding the policy responsibility of the EU (Boomgaarden et al., 2011, p. 242).

Throughout the years, scholars have continued to rely on Easton's (1975) distinction between soft and hard Euroscepticism which coincides with Kopecký & Mudde's (2002) definition of diffuse and specific support for European integration. Hard or diffuse Euroscepticism denotes the inherent rejection of further political and economic integration as well as the general idea of EU membership itself (Taggart & Szcerbiak, 2004, p. 3; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, 300-301). On the other hand, soft or specific Euroscepticism describes opposition to the European project on the basis of concerns related to the national interest as well as criticism regarding specific policies (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 3; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002, pp. 300-302).

Moving beyond this one-dimensional approach of EU support and scepticism, Boomgaarden et al. (2011) outline the underlying dimensions that determine public opinion towards the European Union. The authors find empirical evidence for the effect that five factors have on popular EU attitudes. These are wariness of the EU on the basis of emotional resonance (*Negative Affection*), perceived benefits derived from the EU (*Utility*), the strength of individual identification with Europe (*Identity*), the subjective performance of EU institutions (*Performance*), and desired speed of European integration (*Strengthening*) (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). Hence, popular attitudes towards the European Union are not only a matter of support or opposition, but there are several dimensions underlying them. Thus, the authors point out that attitudes towards European integration are "multifaceted" (Boomgaarden et al., 2011, p. 243).

European integration is among other things based on the implementation of a democratic system. However, a declining standard of this principle has become evident in Eastern Europe in the past decade (Cianetti et al., 2018, p. 243). This development has been dubbed 'democratic backsliding', a term interchangeably used with 'democratic deficit' and 'illiberalism' (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1482). Bermeo (2016) describes this phenomenon as "the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the

political institutions that sustain an existing democracy” (p. 5). This means that the government embarks on a journey of gradually concentrating executive powers in its hands by weakening the constitutional checks and balances (Adamski, 2019, p. 626; Ágh, 2013, p. 2; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 279; Krastev, 2018, p. 49).

By systematically implementing new legislation, the incumbent governments of several Eastern European member states have skewed the political playing field in their favour (Adamski, 2019, p. 626). To do so, the legislature typically infringes upon the judicial and the media’s independence, violates minority rights, and often appoints partisans to key positions, as well as engages in corruption (Adamski, 2019, pp. 625-626; Batory, 2016, p. 294; Cianetti et al., 2018, p. 245; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 279; Meijers & Van der Veer, 2019, p. 838). However, a state suffering from democratic backsliding does not automatically develop into an authoritarian regime as political opposition still exists. This opposition is nonetheless barred from operating effectively and receiving sufficient electoral support because the illiberal government “uses propaganda and the state apparatus to dissuade voters from choosing the opposition” (Adamski, 2019, pp. 628-629; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 279). Thus, illiberal government practices are not outright un-democratic, but simply manipulate the existing political institutions to their advantage which results in a semi-authoritarian outcome as reflected in Freedom House scores (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1482; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 279).

Studies have found that democratic backsliding in Eastern Europe is closely connected to the rise of populist governments (Adamski, 2019, p. 626; Ágh, 2015, p. 23; Krastev, 2007, p. 57). The populist ideology is commonly centred around representing ‘the will of the people’ against the political elite (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, pp. 2-3; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 279). Consequently, the illiberal practices leading to democratic backsliding are generally framed as being in the national interest (Adamski, 2019, p. 628). According to populist thought, the existing representative institutions fail to cater to the common person because they are focused on serving the corrupt elite’s interests (Krouwel & Abts, 2007, pp. 264-265). Hence, populism seeks to eliminate any intermediate political institutions, thereby trying to establish a direct democracy based



on the people's sovereignty (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, pp. 2-3; Krastev, 2018, p. 52; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, pp. 264-5). In line with this argumentation, populists tend to adhere to nationalism when framing the issues on their agenda (Helbling et al, 2010; Krastev, 2007, p. 58; Krastev, 2018, p. 51). This narrative is also employed in reference to the European Union.

Populist parties generally oppose European integration based on the claim that it infringes upon national sovereignty as well as threatens the nation's unique identity (Hooghe et al., 2002; De Vries & Edwards, 2009; Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017). As this narrative regarding the EU is widespread among populists, Csehi & Zgut (2020) "argue that Eurosceptic populism is a distinct type of populism where critique against the EU is used to crystallise anti-elitism and people-centrism" (p. 2). Therefore, populists tend to call upon feelings of nationalism and mobilise a narrative regarding the 'self', namely the nation, against 'the other' in terms of an externally imposed form of domination, here the European Union (Winzen, 2020, p. 3; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 279). The practice of Eurosceptic populism and how it contributes to the Eastern European democratic deficit will be further elaborated on in the following review of academic literature on the topic of democratic backsliding.

### **III. Literature Review: Democratic Backsliding in the Post-Communist Context**

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In the run-up to EU accession, post-communist countries in Eastern Europe registered a steady increase in their democratic standard (Cianetti et al. 2018, p. 244). At the time they were granted European Union membership, several countries, such as Hungary, Poland, and Czech Republic, were considered consolidated democracies (Cianetti et al, 2018, p. 252; Dawson & Hanley, 2019, p. 710; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 276; Krastev, 2016a, p. 88; Rupnik, 2007, p. 17). However, over the last decade a consensus among scholars has emerged, stating that several Eastern EU members are showing evidence of democratic backsliding (Bíró-Nagy, 2017, p. 31; Cianetti et al., 2018, p. 243; Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 21; Rupnik, 2007, p. 17).

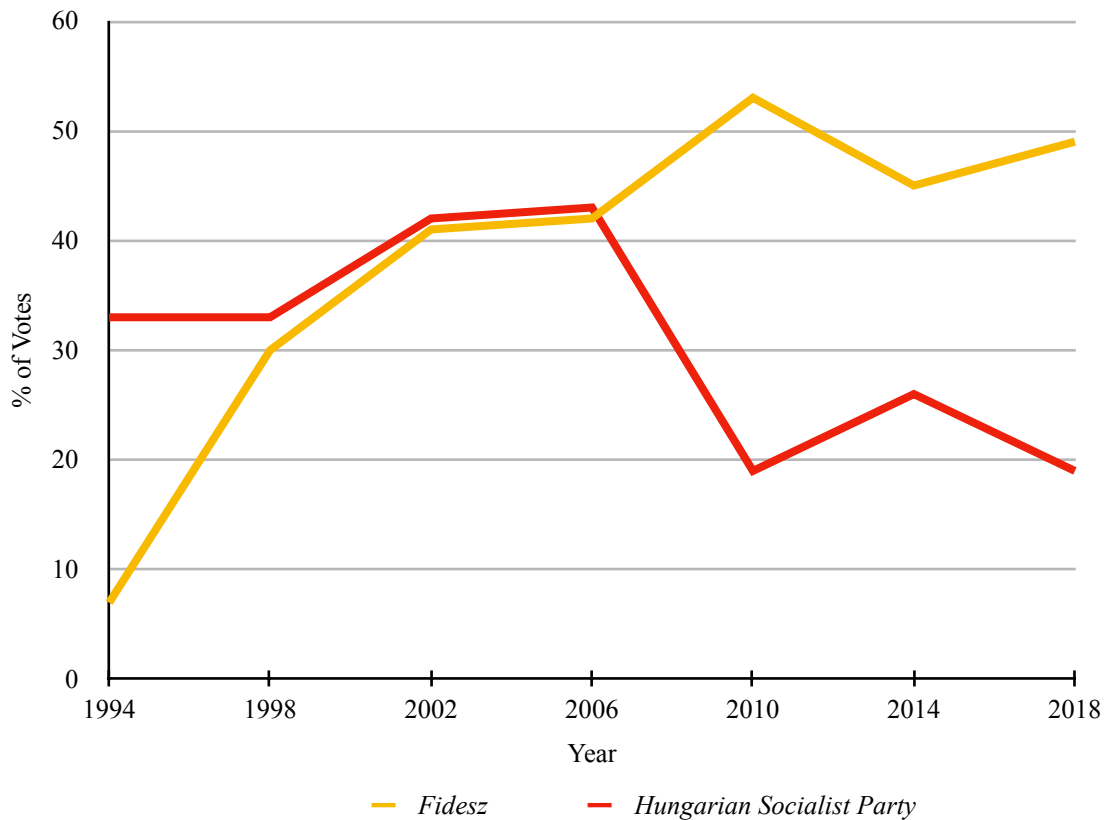
Trying to explain the democratic demise of Eastern Europe, scholars agree that the European accession criteria were not effective in bringing about lasting democratic changes (Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017, p. 278; Cianetti et al., 2018, p. 244; Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 21; Krastev, 2018, p. 49; Rupnik, 2007, p. 22). This circumstance can be attributed to the absence of the conditionality of pre-accession criteria as the EU provided no incentive to uphold democratic standards after accession (Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017, p. 292; Rupnik, 2007, p. 22; Sedelmeier, 2014, p. 105).

This latter finding has raised concerns regarding the European project's credibility due to members' continued infringement of democratic principles (Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 30; Börzel & Schimmelfennig, 2017, p. 278). Several scholars have found that the declining democratic standard in Eastern EU member states can be attributed to the rise of populist parties (Cianetti et al., 2018, p. 245; Batory, 2016; Grzymala-Busse, 2019; Krastev, 2016a, p. 88). As Eastern Europeans are relatively supportive of the European Union the rise in populism is puzzling due to this party type's Eurosceptic tendencies (Krastev, 2018, p. 52). Populists' electoral success has led them to form the government in many Eastern EU countries, a development that has not occurred in other EU member states (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 1).

The regional divergence in this regard can be accounted for by Eastern Europe's Communist past. With the transition to liberal democracy and a market system, socio-economic disparities widened and the level of civic engagement decreased after being tightly controlled by the socialist state (Bíró-Nagy, 2017, pp. 31-32; Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 23; Krastev, 2007, p. 60). The result was little attachment to the liberal value-system and the new democratic institutions remained 'hollow' (Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 22; Krastev, 2016a, p. 94; Krastev, 2016b, p. 36). Thus, the EU accession procedure was primarily driven by domestic elites, incentivised by economic gains (Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 22; Krastev, 2007, p. 58; Rupnik, 2007, p. 22).

This circumstance fostered anti-elite sentiments among the population which were heightened by cases of corruption in the absence of EU conditionality (Adamski, 2019,

**Figure 1: Parliamentary Election Results Hungary, 1994-2018**



*Note:* Data adapted from Political Data Yearbook interactive (updated March 18, 2020).

p. 633). Citizens' declining trust in the government led to the loss of trust in the democratic system as a whole, causing popular disenchantment with the way democracy works in their country (Hooghe et al., 2017, p. 217; Krastev, 2007, p. 57; Rupnik, 2007, p. 18). These sentiments incentivised constituents to put their confidence in a party that claimed to represent 'the will of the people' (Krastev, 2007, pp. 56-57; Kaltwasser & Taggart, 2016, p. 360; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 254). Scholars agree that Hungary's governing party Fidesz has been the most successful populist party in the region, having remained in power since 2010 (Adamski, 2019, p. 628; Krastev, 2018, p. 50). Its success in the face of post-communist corruption and citizens' resulting dissatisfaction with the political elite is illustrated by *Figure 1* which shows how, as Fidesz gains substantial support, the share of votes of its predecessor dramatically decreases.

Analyses of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's discourse have shown that the basis for his party's support lies in the for populists typical nationalist and anti-elite

narrative (Batory, 2016; Dawson & Hanley, 2016). Helbling et al. (2010) argue that a “party’s framing of an issue generally depends on the interests they traditionally defend at the national level” (p. 496). Hence, the European Union is a popular target, framed by the Hungarian populist government as an elitist project, while European integration is portrayed as a threat to national sovereignty (Batory, 2016, p. 289; Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017, p. 407; Rupnik, 2007, p. 22). This narrative resonates with people due to their shared communist past which has fostered a disdain for external domination. Thus, the populist governments in Eastern Europe have been successful in framing the EU “as imperial power led by the corrupt elite against the will of the people” (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 2).

However, as the European Union is a complex topic, it is often politicised in the national arena by conflating it with other issues such as migration (Hoeglinger et al., 2016, p. 46). Hence, the EU became a common target of the populist narrative especially during the financial and the migration crises (Ágh, 2015, p. 23; Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 1; Krastev, 2018, p. 50). As the European Union demanded Hungary accept its share of refugees, the populist government used this situation to their advantage by arguing against a common migration policy on the basis of national sovereignty (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 11; Grzymala-Busse, 2019). The situational use of Euroscepticism by populists is reflected in Functionalist theory which argues that the increased centralisation of policy responsibility at the EU level leads to enhanced mobilisation of European integration in national politics (De Wilde, 2014; Pirro & Taggart, 2018, p. 258).

Moreover, following the global financial and eurozone crisis from 2008 onwards, Orbán’s governing party registered a substantial increase in electoral support, as illustrated by *Figure 1* (Ágh, 2015, p. 23; Krastev, 2018, p. 50). However, as the crisis abated over the years, Hungary has become less critical of the European Union in economic terms as the country is one of the main beneficiaries of European economic integration (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 3). Consequently, Pirro & Van Kessel (2017) argue that the populist government is not outright “Euroreject”, but rather mobilises popular

Euroscepticism in certain situations and frames it in the traditional populist narrative that resonates with constituents (Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017, p. 407; Taggart & Kaltwasser, 2016). Thus, the Hungarian government can be said to employ a soft Euroscepticism regarding certain policies that they oppose based on concerns relating to national sovereignty (Easton, 1975; Kopecký & Mudde, 2002).

As this Eurosceptic populism is mainly based on “defensive nationalism”, scholars have attempted to study whether there are certain characteristics that unite the populist voter base (Kopeček, 2018, pp. 75-76). While Schumacher & Rooduijn (2013), as well as Deegan-Krause (2007), point out that voters respond to the main characteristics of populist parties, namely anti-elitism and personalistic leadership, they do not consider citizens' EU attitudes. On the contrary, Rooduijn (2018) incorporates Eurosceptic sentiments in her study but finds that the voter bases differ for different types of populist parties, as well as that they are not necessarily Eurosceptic (pp. 361-362). However, the author treats Euroscepticism as a one-dimensional concept, a short-coming that the following study will circumvent by looking at the underlying dimensions of EU attitudes. In addition, the previous studies of populist support bases focus on Western European countries, which differ from Eastern Europe in terms of the extent of populist parties successes (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 1). Given that the region’s populace tends to support the EU, the continued success of several Eurosceptic populist governments is perplexing.

#### **IV. Theoretical Framework: Formulating the Hypotheses**

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Trying to explain the puzzle of a Eurosceptic government in combination with a rather pro-EU public, the following theoretical framework draws upon the EU attitude dimensions put forward by Boomgaarden et al. (2011). As there are several aspects underlying European integration, the topic is very complex and populists may focus their criticism on different parts of “Europeanisation” (Hoeglinger, 2016, p. 48; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 252). Similarly, De Vries’ (2007) ‘Sleeping Giant’ theory

prescribes that popular attitudes towards the European Union can be ‘awoken’ by politicians who mobilise public support by advocating a certain stance towards the EU that resonates with the people (p. 366). To explain the aforementioned puzzle, it is theorised here that the populist government in Hungary does not mobilise all underlying dimensions of EU attitudes to the same extent. This is supported by Pirro & Van Kessel’s (2017) finding that the Hungarian government is not outright “Euroreject” but rather Eurosceptic as they do not oppose the European project in its entirety but rather are critical of specific policies (p. 407).

Consequently, this paper argues that the divergence between a pro-European public and a Eurosceptic government can be explained by the latter’s mobilisation of only certain aspects of European integration. As this study assumes that people are rational individuals who act according to their preferences, political trust can be understood as measuring the extent to which political officials perform in a way that is consistent with people’s preferences (Hetherington, 2005, p. 9; Hooghe et al., 2017, p. 217). Therefore, it is expected that a person with a certain attitude towards the EU will put their trust in a political party that corresponds to their individual preferences. As the populist government only mobilises certain EU attitude dimensions, this study theorises that the likelihood of trusting the government increases when the individual’s attitude along the different dimensions of Euroscepticism is represented by the Hungarian government. However, those EU attitude dimensions that are not mobilised by the government are expected to be the key to explaining the divergence between the pro-EU public and the Eurosceptic government. Thus, this study argues that public opinion along the different EU attitude dimensions differs in its effect on peoples’ trust in the national government, depending on the extent to which a particular EU attitude dimension is politicised by the Hungarian governing party.

Which dimensions populists mobilise when in government depends on the interests they traditionally advocate, such as national sovereignty (Helbling, 2010, p. 496). Furthermore, in the context of post-communist corruption in Eastern Europe, populism has proven to be successful based on its mobilisation of constituents’ pre-existing anti-

elite attitudes (Adamski, 2019, p. 633; Dawson & Hanley, 2016). The narrative of populists representing the will of the people against the elite has extended to the European Union (Batory, 2016, p. 289; Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 2). This Eurosceptic populism of the Hungarian government fosters an anti-imperialist narrative regarding the European Union, a rhetoric that resonates with the regions' constituents due to their shared communist past (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 4; Dawson & Hanley, 2016). Thus, regarding the *Negative Affection* dimension, it can be hypothesised that individuals who harbour more negative feelings towards the European Union will be more likely to put their trust in the national government.

*H1: The more negative a person feels about the EU, the more likely they are to trust the Hungarian government.*

According to the utilitarian approach, people evaluate the European Union based on a cost-benefit calculation of the economic gains they derive from the EU (Abts et al., 2009, p. 2; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 253). As Hungary has heavily benefited from European economic integration, the government does not oppose this aspect of the European Union (Krastev, 2018, p. 52). Constituents are expected to put their trust in a party that conforms to their individual preferences. Thus, it can be hypothesised that for the attitude dimension of *Utility*, winners of globalisation are more likely to trust the populist government because they gain from trade with the other EU member states.

*H2: The perception of personally deriving economic benefits from the EU increases the likelihood of trusting the Hungarian government.*

Furthermore, the Hungarian populist government specifically capitalised on the migration crisis (Ágh, 2015, p. 23; Csehi & Zgut, 2020; Krastev, 2016a, p. 91; Krastev, 2018, p. 50). As the European Union advocated for a common migration policy, Hungarian populists gained support by opposing this policy on the basis of defending national sovereignty against external domination (Grzymala-Busse, 2019). This narrative resonates with constituents who feel strongly about their national identity as

they tend to perceive integration as a cultural threat (Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 253; Winzen, 2020, p. 3). Thus, regarding the EU attitude dimension *Identity*, it can be hypothesised that individuals harbouring a strong attachment to their nationality are more likely to put their trust in the government.

*H3: Identifying primarily with one's nationality increases the likelihood of trusting the Hungarian government.*

The politicisation of national identity is related to Functionalist theory, which prescribes that the increased pooling of authority that comes with European integration leads to the increased mobilisation of the European Union in domestic politics (De Wilde, 2014). Nonetheless, as the EU is a complex issue, it tends to be conflated with other matters in national politics (Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 252; Hoeglinger, 2016, p. 48). Consequently, further pooling of policy responsibility is framed by the Hungarian government in terms of infringements upon national sovereignty (Grzymala-Busse, 2019). Thus, for the EU attitude dimension of *Strengthening*, it can be hypothesised that a person who prefers an increased speed of European integration is less likely to trust the government.

*H4: The faster a person thinks European integration should move forward, the less likely they are to trust the Hungarian government.*

Similar to the previous EU attitude dimension, the Hungarian government criticises the way democracy functions at EU-level on the basis of concerns related to national sovereignty (Orbán, 2018). Thus, for the EU attitude dimension *Performance*, it can be expected that citizens who have a similar assessment of the democratic performance of the European Union as the government are more likely to trust it.

*H5: The more negative a respondent evaluates the democratic performance of the EU, the greater the likelihood of trusting the populist government.*



The aforementioned hypotheses regarding the individual dimensions of EU attitudes are collectively based on the primary assumption that citizens put their trust in a government that advocates views that are in line with their own. Thus, the direction of each attitude dimension's effect on the likelihood of trust in government is based on the stance of the Hungarian government regarding the EU. As issues such as integration and democratic performance are framed in terms of national sovereignty, this study theorises that the 'Sleeping Giant' of EU attitudes has only been partially awoken (De Vries, 2007). This potential outcome may be the key to explaining the divergence between the EU attitudes of the government and the public.

## **V. Research Design: Case Selection, Data & Operationalisation**

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Previous studies of democratic backsliding have identified Hungary as well as Poland as the most extreme cases of illiberal government practices (Batory, 2016; Cianetti, et al. 2018; Dawson & Hanley, 2016; Enyedi, 2016; Krastev, 2018; Sitter et al., 2016). Both cases are exemplary as they can be used to benchmark other countries' illiberal development (Bogaards, 2018, p. 1482; Dawson & Hanley, 2016). Furthermore, "populism and Euroscepticism are dominant features" of the political system in Hungary as well as Poland (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 2). However, of these two cases, Hungary has been the most investigated as well as is considered having the most successful populist government with three consecutive terms in office (Adamski, 2019; Bíró-Nagy, 2017; Bogaards, 2018; Cianetti et al., 2018; Enyedi, 2016; Hanley & Vachudova, 2018). Thus, to be able to situate the findings of the present study in as broad a context as possible, the following analysis will be conducted as a case study of popular EU attitudes in Hungary.

In order to gauge the relationship between the individual attitude dimensions and populism's continued success, this study conducts a quantitative analysis. Given the exemplary case that this paper will investigate, this research method enables the results to be generalised to the wider context of Eastern Europe, adding to the study's external

validity. The present study employs the Standard Eurobarometer from June 2019 since the survey stems from a credible source, the European Union. Furthermore, it can be expected that the questionnaire has been administered appropriately, thus contributing to the internal validity of this study's results.

Previous research has primarily analysed EU attitudes of populist voters (Deegan-Krause, 2007; Rooduijn, 2018; Schumacher & Rooduijn, 2013). As populists form the government in Hungary, this is a unique opportunity to investigate the EU attitudes of supporters as well as non-supporters of the populist government. This enables the following study to present a comprehensive picture of multidimensional EU attitudes and their effect on the continued success of populism. Thus, instead of looking at voting behaviour, this study will employ the measure of trust in the government as the outcome variable. The dependent variable takes on two values, (1) 'tend to trust' and (0) 'tend not to trust'. Consequently, the following statistical analysis will be conducted by means of a binary logistic regression due to the dichotomous nature of the outcome variable (Field, 2013, p. 761). The regression analysis will assess the statistical likelihood of falling in the former category as predicted by the individual EU attitude dimensions.

The operationalisation of the first EU attitude dimension is based on Boomgaarden et al.'s (2011) framework as well as on the political approach outlined by Krouwel & Abts (2007) that deflates Eurosceptic attitudes with institutional trust. This dimension is specifically attuned to people's emotional perceptions of the EU (Boomgaarden et al., 2011, p. 247). Therefore, the dimension of *Negative Affection* is operationalised by means of the variable 'positive/negative image of the EU'. This variable employs a six-point scale ranging from (1) 'very positive' to (5) 'very negative'. The sixth category denotes the option 'do not know' which has been coded as system-missing for this analysis to be able to interpret the variable more accurately in terms of a one-unit increase on the scale.

Utilitarian theory regarding popular Euroscepticism describes a person's cost-benefit calculation regarding EU membership, primarily in terms of winners and losers of

**Table 1: Variable Measurement and Descriptive Statistics**

EU Attitude Dimension	EB Item	Min.	Max.	Mean (Std. Error)	Standard Deviation	N
Negative Affection	QA7: “Does the EU conjure up for you a [option] image?”	1 very positive	5 very negative	2.56 (.026)	.831	1038
Utility	QA9_2: “What does the EU mean to you personally?”  [Economic prosperity]	0	1	.20 (.012)	.398	1038
Identity	QD3: “Do you see yourself as ...”					
	Hungarian only			.25 (.013)	.433	
	Hungarian and European	0	1	.64 (.015)	.088	1031
	European and Hungarian			.10 (.009)	.480	
	European only			.01 (.003)	.301	
Strengthening	QD10b: “Which corresponds best to the speed of integration you would like?”	1 Standstill	7 As fast as possible	5.14 (.036)	1.140	997
Performance	QA10.2: “How well does the word ‘democratic’ describe the EU?”	1 describes very well	4 describes very badly	2.10 (0.27)	.848	1006

Source: European Commission (2019), Standard Eurobarometer ZA7576.

globalisation (Abts et al., 2009, p. 2; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 253). Therefore, the second EU attitude dimension, *Utility*, is being operationalised using a variable denoting an individual’s evaluation of whether the European Union has contributed to their economic prosperity. The variable is one of several answer options a respondent can choose, and thus will be treated as a dummy variable that either assumes (1) if the individual has gained economic benefits from EU membership, or (0) if the respondent gives prevalence to another factor that the EU signifies to them.

The third dimension denotes the extent of an individual's identification with Europe or their own nationality (Boomgaarden et al., 2011). According to the national identity approach to popular EU attitudes, Euroscepticism is based on an attachment to the national identity (Abts et al., 2009, p. 3; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 253). To integrate both theory and framework into this study, the survey question 'Do you see yourself as ...?' has been selected to assess respondents' identification with Hungary or Europe, as well as both of these combined. The variable is categorical and has been transformed into individual dummy variables with 'Hungarian only' as the reference category. The category 'Don't Know' has been excluded due to an abnormally large standard error which indicates an insufficient amount of data for this category that would introduce bias into the model (Field, 2013, p. 770).

In line with Boomgaarden et al.'s (2011) framework, the EU attitude dimension *Strengthening* which assesses an individual's preferred speed of integration through the item 'Desired Speed of Integration'. This variable can assume eight values, (1) being 'standstill' and (7) being 'as fast as possible', while (8) denotes 'don't know'. The last variable concerns the dimension of *Performance* which is operationalised by individuals' evaluation of the EU's democratic quality. The variable assumes a 5-point scale, ranging from (1) 'describes very well' to (4) 'describes very badly', and (5) 'don't know'. For either of these final dimensions, the value of the category 'don't know' has been coded as system-missing for interpretation purposes of the scale variables.

## **VI. Analysis: Quantifying Public Opinion**

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At first glance, the results of the binary logistic regression exhibit a statistically significant effect in three out of five of the EU attitude dimensions. The following section will conduct an in-depth analysis of the regression's results as well as present their interpretation concerning the outcome variable they aim to predict.

**Table 2: Binary Logistic Regression**

(Constant)	.679 (.450)
Negative Image of the EU	-.221* (.093)
What does the EU mean to you personally? (Ref. = else)	
Economic Prosperity	-.435* (.170)
Do you see yourself as... (Ref. = Hungarian only)	
Hungarian and European	.057 (.161)
European and Hungarian	-.764** (.266)
European only	-.921 (.854)
Desired speed of integration	.012 (.059)
EU is democratic	-.037 (.094)
-2LL	1283.123
Cox and Snell's R <sup>2</sup>	.029
Nagelkerke's R <sup>2</sup>	.039
N	946

*Note: Binary logistic regression coefficients with standard errors in brackets.*

*\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$*

*Dependent Variable 'Trust in Government' (QA6A8) assumes categories 'tend to trust government' (1) and 'tend not to trust government' (0).*

*Assumptions of Linearity and Non-Multicollinearity have been met.*

The following model correctly predicts 57.1% of cases which is an improvement, albeit a small one, compared to the Null model with an overall classification accuracy of

50.7%. Furthermore, the test of model-fit indicates that this model fits the data significantly better than the Null model without any of the predictors present ( $\chi^2 = 28.104$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This is supported by the insignificance of the Hosmer-Lemeshow Test ( $p = .340$ ). Looking at the extremely small Pseudo- $R^2$  measures, however, it becomes evident that the model is far from perfect in predicting the data as Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  can assume a maximum of 1 (N.'s  $R^2 = .039$ ). Given the small prediction accuracy of the model, it can be further deduced that the likelihood of falling into either category of the outcome variable is heavily attributable to chance.

The regression coefficient (B) of the variable assessing EU attitude dimension *Negative Affection* exhibits a decrease in the odds of trusting the government with every 1 unit increase in the predictor. As this variable is measured on a 5-point scale, with (5) indicating a very negative image of the EU, the coefficient indicates that as the respondent's attitude towards the European Union becomes more negative, the odds of trusting the national government decline as well. This relationship is further confirmed by the odds ratio, which illustrates the negative relationship between the predictor and outcome variable as it is smaller than 1 ( $\text{Exp}(B) = .802$ ). The effect of this EU attitude dimension on trust in government is statically significant, therefore the null hypothesis can be rejected ( $B = -.221$ ,  $p = .018$ , CI [.668; .963]).

The categorical variable measuring the attitude dimension *Utility* has a negative regression coefficient, indicating that perceived economic prosperity derived from EU membership decreases the odds of trusting the national government ( $B = -.435$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = .647$ ). In line with this observation, it can be deduced that when a respondent does not primarily perceive the European Union as adding to his or her economic prosperity, they are more likely to trust the national government. The effect of this predictor on the dependent variable is statistically significant, meaning that there is a relationship ( $p = 0.11$ , CI [.464; .904]).

The effect of a respondents' *Identity* on the odds of trusting the government is evaluated by categorical variables denoting identification as only or primarily European as well as

only or primarily Hungarian. The results are interpreted in reference to identifying only as a Hungarian. The regression coefficient shows a positive relationship between a respondent identifying as primarily Hungarian and then European, and the outcome variable ( $B = .057$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.058$ ). This would indicate that feeling as both Hungarian and European citizen increases the odds of trusting the government as compared to only identifying as Hungarian. However, this effect is not statistically significant and the null hypothesis for this category can be accepted, meaning that there is no relationship ( $p = .726$ ,  $\text{CI} [.771; 1.452]$ ).

Considering an individual's identification as primarily European and only secondarily as Hungarian, the coefficient indicates a decrease in the odds of trusting the government as compared to a respondent identifying as a Hungarian national only ( $B = -.764$ ). This means that a person identifying only as Hungarian will be more likely to trust the government than someone primarily seeing themselves as European. The relationship between predictor and outcome variable for this category is significant as well as further confirmed by the odds ratio which is smaller than 1 ( $p = .004$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = .466$ ). Thus, we can reject the null hypothesis for the effect of identifying as a European and Hungarian citizen on trust in government ( $\text{CI} [.277; .785]$ ). On the other hand, identifying as only European seems to have a negative effect on trust in government as compared to only identifying as Hungarian ( $B = -.921$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = .398$ ). However, the predictor's effect is not statistically significant and the null hypothesis can be accepted ( $p = .281$ ,  $\text{CI} [.075; 2.123]$ ).

The EU attitude dimension regarding *Strengthening* of European integration assesses the speed at which a respondent would prefer the process to continue. For this predictor, the regression coefficient indicates a positive relationship between the preferred speed of integration and the likelihood of trusting the government ( $B = .012$ ,  $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.012$ ). Thus, a respondent preferring integration to proceed faster would be more likely to trust the government. Nonetheless, this relationship is not statistically significant and the null hypothesis has to be accepted ( $p = .841$ ,  $\text{CI} [.901; 1.136]$ ).

For last the EU attitude dimension, *Performance*, respondents are asked to rate the European Union's democratic performance. The regression coefficient describes a decrease in the odds of trusting the government for every 1-unit increase in the predictor ( $B = -.037$ ). This indicates a negative relationship between democratic performance and trust in the national government ( $\text{Exp}(B) = .963$ ). More specifically, this would mean that as a respondent evaluates the European Union's democratic performance more positively, their likelihood of trusting the government decreases. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between these variables ( $p = .692$ , CI [.801; 1.159]). Although this analysis shows that three out of five EU attitude dimensions' effect on the likelihood of trusting the government is statistically significant, the effects' direction can likely be attributed to chance due to the prediction inaccuracy of the model.

## VII. Discussion

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The foregoing analysis has shown that the EU attitude dimensions that have a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of trusting the Hungarian government are *Negative Affection*, *Utility*, and *Identity*. For the dimension *Negative Affection*, this means the more negative a respondent perceives the European Union, the lower are the odds of trusting the national government in Hungary. This result contradicts the initial hypothesis that the more Eurosceptic an individual is, the more likely they are to trust the Hungarian government. Hence, *H1* has to be rejected. The previous analysis has further shown that membership in the outcome variable trust in government is heavily attributable to chance. This means that EU attitudes do not have a decisive effect on whether a person trusts or distrusts the populist government.

This outcome can be explained by the circumstance that people are too far removed from the European Union to have an emotional attachment to it that can determine their attitude to the national government (Hobolt, 2015). This is illustrated by the fact that 37% of Eurobarometer respondents feel neutral about the EU, while 45% have only a fairly positive image of the supranational institution (European Commission, 2019).



Furthermore, since the government conflates the European Union with other issues, as the topic in itself is too complex, the statistical result indicates that EU attitudes are not the determining factor for trust in the government (Boomgaarden et al, 2011, p. 251; Hoeglinger, 2016, p. 48; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 252). These interpretations are lent weight by the following results of the statistical analysis.

Regarding the EU attitude dimension *Utility*, this research has been based on the hypothesis that the more a citizen benefits economically from the EU, the more likely they are to trust the government due to its positive stance towards economic integration. However, the result of the regression analysis shows that the more economic prosperity a person perceives to have gained from EU membership, the lower are the odds of them trusting the government. As this statical outcome does not coincide with the theoretical expectations, *H2* has to be rejected.

This result can be explained by Adamski's (2019) theory of a 'social contract' between the public and the Hungarian populist government. The author finds that the populists supply "social benefits, [such as] higher wages and lower unemployment", when in power (Adamski, 2019, p. 628). As the losers of globalisation gain the most from these benefits, they are more likely to support an illiberal populist government (Adamski, 2019, p. 627). On the contrary, those who have already benefited from economic integration have a lower incentive to put their trust in the populist government as they do not gain as much. This interpretation suggests that domestic economic considerations are a stronger determinant of trust in the government than individual economic gains from European integration. However, as economic integration into the European Union makes it easier for the Hungarian government to supply theses social benefits, the EU is indirectly contributing to the continued success of populism in Hungary, and thereby to democratic backsliding (Adamski, 2019, p. 629).

Populist parties tend to frame the European Union in elitist terms, thereby appealing to citizens feelings of national sovereignty (Batory, 2016, p. 289; Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 1; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 253). This circumstance is illustrated by the regression

analysis, showing that a respondent who identifies primarily as European is less likely to trust the government than a person who identifies only as a Hungarian national. As it has been initially hypothesised that identifying primarily as Hungarian increases the likelihood of trusting the government, the results fail to reject *H3*. This outcome is attributable to the unique opportunity structure for populism in the post-communist region (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 4).

The framing of the European Union as an imperialist power by the Hungarian government recalls memories of external domination during the communist period (Adamski, 2019, p. 626; Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 2). In addition, Eastern Europe is constituted by “ethnically homogenous societies” which makes people perceptive to the narrative of a cultural threat through immigration (Krastev, 2018, pp. 52-54). Thus, the Hungarian populist government’s success is based to a large extent on appeals to nationalism (Adamski, 2019, p. 633; Dawson & Hanley, 2016, p. 21; Kopeček, 2018, pp. 75-76; Krouwel & Abts, 2007, p. 253). This circumstance, in turn, enables Orbán’s populist government to infringe upon liberal democratic principles in the name of ‘the will of the people’ (Hanley & Vachudova, 2018, p. 276). This narrative is further evident in the next EU attitude dimension.

Further pooling of policy control at the EU-level is framed by the Hungarian government as infringing upon national sovereignty (Grzymala-Busse, 2019, p. 707). Therefore, the EU attitude dimension *Strengthening* is expected to display a negative relationship between the preferred speed of integration and the likelihood of trusting the government. As the results of the regression analysis indicate that an individual’s preference regarding the speed of integration does not have a statistically significant effect on whether they will trust the government, *H4* has to be rejected. This result may occur because the Hungarian government is not a hard Eurosceptic but rather only opposes certain EU policies (Csehi & Zgut, 2020, p. 4; Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017, p. 407).

While the populist government argues against further centralisation of policy control by framing it as a threat to national sovereignty, they are rather inclined towards economic integration (Krastev, 2018, p. 52). This ambiguity in their stance on integration may signify that the EU attitude dimension *Strengthening* has been conflated with the other issues such as economic gains and national identity. As the Eurobarometer measures the average preferred speed of integration among constituents at 5.1, this confirms that the public indeed has an opinion on the topic of integration (European Commission, 2019). Thus, De Vries' (2007) 'Sleeping Giant' of EU attitudes has only been partially awoken as citizens' attitudes regarding further integration are not mobilised by the government but rather are moderated by nationalist sentiments and domestic economic considerations. The fact that constituents have positive attitudes towards the EU in this dimension while these do not contribute to trust in the government is a partial explanation for the populace's pro-EU sentiments and the Eurosceptic government's continued success. This circumstance is further illustrated by the next EU attitude dimension.

The initial hypothesis regarding the dimension *Performance* states that the lower a respondent evaluates the democratic performance of the EU, the more likely they will be to trust the Hungarian populist government. However, the regression analysis shows that there is no statistically significant relationship between these variables, which leads to *H5* being rejected. Similar to the previous dimension, this result indicates that the attitude dimension of *Performance* has not been 'awoken' by the government as it does not have a statistically significant effect on political trust. As 69% of Eurobarometer respondents evaluate the EU's democratic performance as good, it is evident that the people have an opinion about democracy's functioning at the EU-level but the government does not mobilise support based on democratic evaluations (European Commission, 2019). This circumstance can be explained by the fact that the Hungarian government criticises the EU's democratic performance on the basis of considerations of national sovereignty, thereby conflating these dimensions (Orbán, 2018). Thus, the positive attitudes regarding EU performance further explains the divergence between EU attitudes of the public and the government. The aforementioned results collectively

illustrate that the primary determinant for the Hungarian government's continued success are domestic considerations such as strength of national identity and social benefits supplied by the populist government.

## **VIII. Conclusion**

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The increasing salience of the European Union in the national political context has made public opinion towards the EU an important factor for the future development of the European project (Boomgaarden et al., 2011; De Wilde, 2014; Green-Pedersen, 2012). Scholars have found that the democratic deficit in several Eastern EU member states has been facilitated by populist governments (Adamski, 2019; Ágh, 2015; Batory, 2016; Grzymala-Busse, 2019; Krastev, 2016a). This development threatens the legitimacy of the European Union by undermining the principle of liberal democracy (Adamski, 2019, p. 626). Hence, investigating the underlying factors that have contributed to the rise of populist governments is essential for understanding democratic backsliding (Enyedi, 2016, p. 216; Taggart & Kaltwasser, 2016, p. 346). Populists tend to be Eurosceptic, while the Eastern European public's stance towards the EU is rather positive. This puzzle of EU attitudes has been investigated by analysing the extent to which the underlying dimensions of EU attitudes contribute to citizens' trust in the Hungarian government. Thus, the present study has expanded upon the topic of democratic backsliding by looking at the ways in which popular EU attitudes may contribute to the continued success of populism in the case of Hungary.

The results of the foregoing study show that popular attitudes towards the European Union are not a decisive predictor for individuals' trust in the populist government. Nonetheless, it is found that attachment to the national identity, as opposed to identification as European, is a determinant of support for the Hungarian government. This outcome underlines Rooduijn's (2018) finding that the populist support basis is not necessarily opposed to the European Union, by illustrating that it is rather the attachment to the nation that determines support. This result is in line with the findings

of previous studies of populist support that have elaborated on the significance of nationalism (Batory, 2016; Dawson & Hanley, 2016). Although this study finds that popular EU attitudes can not be said to enable democratic backsliding, the European Union indirectly contributes to the Hungarian government's success. This is due to the fact that the economic gains from EU membership provide the means for the Hungarian government to supply social benefits in return for popular support (Adamski, 2019, p. 629).

Moreover, this study is able to point out the importance attached to the specific framing of the EU in domestic politics. As previous research has found that the Hungarian government employs a soft Euroscepticism and does not oppose the European project in its entirety, this study has argued that the different dimensions underlying popular EU attitudes are politicised to varying extents (Pirro & Van Kessel, 2017, p. 407). Accordingly, this study finds that public opinion regarding the EU's democratic performance and the speed of further integration does not contribute to citizens' trust in the government. This circumstance is explained by the fact that integration is primarily framed as a threat to national identity and sovereignty; a narrative that resonates with constituents due to their attachment to the nation, as elaborated on above.

Since not all EU attitude dimensions play an equal roll in the continued success of populism in Hungary, it can be said that De Vries' (2007) 'Sleeping Giant' of EU attitudes has only been partially awoken. This circumstance explains the puzzle of a pro-EU public and a Eurosceptic government as people have a positive EU attitude in the dimensions that do not contribute to people's trust in the government. Hence, the focus of the government on employing a nationalist narrative regarding the European Union leads to some aspects of EU attitudes not being politicised.

This nationalist framing will have consequences for the ways in which the European Union can respond to democratic backsliding. The EU has previously tried to pressure the Hungarian government to adhere to democratic standards by threatening to invoke Article 7 of the Treaty of the European Union. As this measure would suspend

Hungary's voting rights in selected EU institutions, the populist government has framed this action as undemocratic and infringing upon national sovereignty (Grzymala-Busse, 2019; Orbán, 2018). This circumstance illustrates how populists are able to use the nationalist and anti-elitist narrative to turn criticism by the European Union into their advantage (Adamski, 2019, p. 633). Thus, possible ways in which the EU can effectively respond to infringements of its liberal democratic standards have to be further researched to prevent further violations of the European Union's founding principles.

The present study has expanded upon previous research of populist support by applying a multidimensional framework to the study of popular EU attitudes. In addition, instead of simply analysing voting behaviour, the foregoing paper has considered constituents' trust in the government as a measure of populism's success. Hence, this study was able to present a comprehensive picture of EU attitudes' effect, or rather the lack thereof, on trust in the populist government. The discussion of the results has pointed to previous research's findings to explain this circumstance, thereby situating the study's findings in a broader context. Furthermore, this study was able to solve the puzzle of a Europhile public that continues to put their trust in a Eurosceptic government. Nonetheless, the outcome regarding popular EU attitudes may have painted too positive an image. The Eurobarometer has been criticised for phrasing questions in a certain manner that steers respondents towards answering more positively regarding their sentiments of the European Union (Höpner & Jurczyk, 2015). This shortcoming can only be circumvented by relying on independently gathered large-scale data, which lies beyond the scope of this research paper.

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