Populism

Putting words into action?

Philip Wiggers

s2011360

Public Administration

Specialisation in Economics & Governance

Supervisor: Prof. dr. A.K. Yesilkagit

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Introduction

In recent years populism has gained in popularity in many parts of the world. Experts give many reasons for this increase in demand. Some academics use globalization as their main argument for a surge in populist support. Fast and disturbing changes followed globalization, paired with the mediazation of politics. Populists began to express their worries by political means other than the established parties, possibly resulting in more popularity for populism (Dalton, 2000; Kriesi et al, 2006; Elchardus and Spruyt, 2014). Others attributed the rise of populism as a response to the hollowing out of the accountable and representative democratic rule. This hollowing out suggests that the institutions in place to represent the people have weakened or even lost some functions over time (Mair, 2013). Another interesting perspective is that perhaps the arguments populists use are true. Maybe the elite have indeed become more corrupt and the gap between 'the people' and 'the elite' has possibly grown. It could be a reason for behind the popularity growth of populism (Mudde, 2004).

There are many different kinds and subsets of populism to distinguish. In fact, it is said that there is not even one policy area in which there are not two or more populists in strong disagreement (Aslanidis, 2015). At the same time, some experts contend that no matter the underlying ideology, populists do not significantly differ from each other in terms of their general message (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2015). In Hungary for instance, Viktor Orbán leads his party Fidesz. A populist right-wing party defending national sovereignty. In Poland, a similar populist party tries to protect national identity (Chandler, 2020). The United Kingdom has seen Brexit not too long ago, perceived by many as a populist pursuit to reclaim to national sovereignty (March, 2017). Austria elected a cabinet in 2017 consisting of two parties – the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) and Österreichische Volkspartei (OVP) – that are both regarded as populist parties (Norris, 2020a).

These are just a few of the numerous examples of European countries where populism has grown in recent years. Many studies have delved into why populism has risen and where it has gained popularity. Much less is written, however, about the effects of populism on a country. More specifically, about what effects populism has on social welfare expenditures. Populist rhetoric often speaks of standing up for 'the people'. It is about promising better provisions and more social security. This thesis addresses these topics. The research question is as follows:

"What is the effect of populism on social welfare expenditures?"

Relevance

Finding an answer to this question has both academic and societal relevance. Firstly, it has academic relevance. The definition of populism is very much subject to discussion. Although there seems to be general consensus, there is still no exact 'one-size-fits-all' definition. While the term populism can be challenging to define, its versatility means that it can be applied to various phenomena in world politics and policy. This way it offers insights into a range of situations and contexts. Answering the main question of this paper not only contributes to the ongoing academic discussion but also introduces a nuanced aspect to existing definitions. The concept of populism is used globally, in diverse studies. It offers a versatile framework for empirical research. Refining the definition of populism is therefore relevant to literature and academics.

In addition to that, there is little research that investigates a relationship between the effect of populism on social welfare expenditures. There is literature on what happens to populism when the social welfare situation in a country changes. But not so much on the reciprocal relationship. A comprehensive understanding of how populism could influence social welfare spending is essential for informed policymaking and effective public administration in the face of the ever evolving political dynamics. For that reason, it is interesting to add this research to the field of public administration.

Secondly, the societal relevance expresses itself in two ways. In the Netherlands for example, there are numerous political experts who have recently published books on populism. Most of these books address the concerns the authors have regarding populism. Lucardie and Voerman (2012) speak of 'the populist phantom haunting the Netherlands, who does not plan on leaving anytime soon'. Pels (2011) writes that 'populism remains to amaze and disturb' democracies. Te Velde (2010) ascertains that 'Democrats were perceived as the good, populists were the bad' and that 'the distinction between the two has become more and more faded'. Given these concerns, it is relevant to assess the impact that populism has on countries. This is especially interesting in a policy field such as social welfare provisions, because it forms an important part of the livelihood for many people. This dissertation attempts to provide insight into what happens to social welfare spending after populism has emerged. A substantial part within a population depends on social welfare for their well-being, which is why this thesis is relevant.

The societal relevance of this research extends to informing policymakers and the general public. It provides information about the consequences of populist governance on the well-being of the population. In doing so, this paper bridges the gap between academic inquiry and practical considerations. As a result, it contributes to a more informed public discourse on the role of populism in shaping social policies.

Outline

After the introduction, the theoretical framework will follow by defining populism and its key components. Subsequently, an exploration of existing literature on the relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures will be presented. Building upon that foundation, a set of expectations is formed. After the research design and the methodology has been delineated, those expectations will be tested. The data is collected from several established and well known datasets. The data will be tested by regression analysis. Those results will be presented after which an analysis of those results follows. In the last segment, a summary of the paper and an answer to the research question will be provided, complemented by a reflection.

Theoretical framework

Defining populism

As mentioned in the introduction, populism is a concept that is subject to debate. Many academics and experts on the subject of populism use different elements to describe populism. There seems to be one aspect however, that seems to be frequently recurring in definitions. It is the notion that populism always has two concepts bound to its definition, namely 'the people' and 'the elite'.

The people

In literature, populism is often described as an ideology that envisions societies comprised of two groups. There is 'the people' and 'the elite', or rather the people versus the elite. These two groups are frequently portrayed by experts as antagonistic, as two opposites. This Manichean perspective is shared by Mudde, a political scientist who specializes in populism (2004). This Manichean characteristic of populism is defined by Mudde (2007) as a worldview in which the world is divided in 'good' and 'bad'. The people in this view are associated with the 'good' and the elite are cast in the role of the 'bad' (Mudde, 2007).

Mudde asserts that many experts have discussed the abstract nature of the term 'the people'. Some claim that populists mean a certain type of class within society when they refer to 'the people'. Others argue that populists use this term solely as a rhetoric tool that does not in fact refer to any group of people. Most experts on populism have a slightly different approach to defining the people. The key take-away in most definitions holds at least that the people are a homogeneous group, characterized by good behaviour and being inherently virtuous. They are the common people in countries that form a silent majority within societies. The people have shared values and anti-elitist judgments. Populists try to appeal to the people by using anti-elitist rhetoric, among other strategies (Hawkins, 2009; Stanley, 2008; Jagers, 2006; Rooduijn, 2015; Canovan, 1999; Elchardus and Spruyt, 2014; Chandler, 2020; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Chryssogelos, 2017; Taggart, 2000 & 2003;).

The elite

Like in defining the people, defining 'the elite' is also subject to discussion in literature. Mudde describes it as populism's mirror-image. There is still a Manichean outlook on societies, but politics are to be dominated by the moral elite instead of the amoral people (Mudde, 2004).

The elite are the enemies of the people. They are the established power within societies. They have different concerns and wishes than the people. Through their well-established position in politics they are able to realize their wishes. They have the resources to alter policies in societies in their favour. The populist will try to prevent this and try to continuously limit their power (Schroeder, 2020).

According to experts, populists have a different perspective on the elite. They see them as a corrupt homogeneous group. They are against everything the people stand for and are actively trying to undermine them (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013b). They have seized the power from the people for their own benefit. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013b) note that the definition of the elite is perhaps better understood as a moral distinction. It is the corrupt forces labelled as the elite versus the good common people. They dominate politics, economics, the media and even culture (Rooduijn, 2014). Like Mudde, Rovira Kaltwasser and Rooduijn, there are numerous others that define the elite in similar ways (Hawkins, 2009; Stanley, 2008; Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2000; Elchardus and Spruyt, 2014; Jagers, 2006; Schroeder, 2020).

The general will

An often overlooked aspect of the populism definition in literature is the concept of the 'general will' of the people. The concept entails that all members of a community should be able to unify their wills with the goal of asserting popular sovereignty as the exclusive legitimate source of political power (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013a). Populists advocate for politics to directly reflect the 'volonté générale' (general will) of the people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013a). According to populists, the corrupt elite opposes this general will, clinging to illegitimate power and undermining the people's voice (Castanho Silva, Vegetti and Littvay, 2017). Populists try to acknowledge the will of the people by repeatedly defending it (Hawkins, 2009; Canovan, 1999; Taggart, 2018).

The political ideology of Populism

Populism is often seen as an ideology. But like so many things within the subject of populism, the nature of the ideology is debatable. A distinction can be made between 'thin' and 'thick'. There seems to be general consensus about populism being a thin ideology. To understand the difference between thin and thick ideologies, Freeden (2003) is often mentioned in literature covering populism. He comprises a morphology of ideologies out of three sorts of concepts. Firstly, there are the core concepts. These concepts are present in all known cases of a certain ideology (Freeden, 2013). For instance, when a case is presented about liberalism with a core that lacks liberty. In that instance, serious doubt arises as to whether this is indeed a case of liberalism.

Secondly, there are the adjacent concepts. These concepts are not apparent in every instance of an ideology. They are however crucial in refining the essence of a concept (Freeden, 2013). An adjacent concept that surrounds a liberal core could be democracy or property.

Thirdly, there are peripheral concepts. These concepts can be understood in two ways. The first way refers to more temporary concepts. They evolve over time and have even sometimes become irrelevant to the core and adjacent concept. The second way relates to the border of connection between the conceptual framework of an ideology and the actual social practises, events and other unexpected occurrences that take place in its surroundings (Freeden, 2013). These externalities influence the ideology. The ideology responds to these factors which could lead to (small) adjustments in the core and the adjacent concepts of that ideology. Examples of peripheral concepts are climate change, financial crises or terrorism (Freeden, 2013).

All beliefs that come from an ideology follow a distinct path from core, to adjacent, to peripheral concepts. Along the way it gathers elements from conceptual nodes. In case of a 'thick' ideology that is. 'Thin' ideologies differ from this basic route (Freeden, 2013).

Thin Ideology

Thin-centered ideologies are described as temporary clusters of political thought with limited internal coherence. They have a limited core attached to an even narrower set of political ideas (Freeden, 1998). Thin ideologies do not include the full range of concepts and political positions that are regularly found within the mainstream ideological groups. A thin ideology

has a restricted core with a limited range of concepts which results in the inability to offer sufficient answers to political issues in societies (Freeden, 1998). Thick ideologies posit comprehensive ideas that are interconnected to each other with a unifying system to accommodate those ideas. Thin ideologies lack these essential attributes for answering political questions that societies generate. (Freeden, 1996).

It is generally accepted in literature that populism is not a thick ideology. The core concepts of populism offer limited potential in addressing central political questions, such as "who gets what, when, how" for instance (Freeden, 2003). Other authors, Jagers and Walgrave (2007), suggest that populism as a thin concept is a style of political communication of political actors that refers to the people. It is merely a means for populists to display closeness to the people by talking about the people (Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). Stanley (2008) states that populism is best understood as thin as well and argues that pure populism remains thin because it has never really existed in its pure form in practice. Various other academics agree that populism is a thin ideology, although the underlying arguments may vary (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Elachardus and Spruyt, 2014; Neuner and Wratil, 2020; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2019; Chryssogelos, 2017; Moffitt, 2020).

Thick aspects

Nevertheless, there is critique on marking populism as a thin ideology. An example of such criticism is directed at Freeden and his definition of thin and thick ideologies (Freeden, 1996, 1998). Freeden does not specify which range of concepts or how wide a scope must be for something to be categorized as a thick ideology. It is unclear what level of core restrictiveness qualifies for a thin ideology and at what point a system adequately unified is (Aslanidis, 2015).

Others argue that although populism itself should be seen as a thin ideology, in practice it is most often combined with thick aspects. Political parties seem to blend the thin populism ideology with various thick ideologies (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Populism has a chameleonic character and can be left-wing or right-wing, reliant on strong leadership or leaderless, organized top-down or bottom-up (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). There have been several thick ideological positions associated with populism, such as anti-immigration, pro-redistribution and Euroscepticism (Neuner and Wratil, 2020).

Populist parties and politicians mix thin and thick ideologies in an effort to appeal to voters. The voters are vastly different across the world. That is one of the reasons behind the wide variety of populism types (Neuner and Wratil, 2020). Aslanidis (2015) states that there is not one policy area where two populist actors are not at loggerheads. The sheer width of concepts belonging to populism makes it so difficult to find a 'one-fits-all' definition. The core concepts of the people, the elite and the general will, as well as the thin ideology of populism with thick aspects, have been outlined.

Existing literature

Populism and social welfare expenditures

This research investigates the possible relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures. As previously stated, populists seek to appeal to the people. One way of appealing to people is through improving social policy. Populists often promise the people better job security, pension benefits, unemployment benefits and many other social welfare provisions. So, the question arises as to whether they actually translate these promises to reality.

Many academics have investigated the relationship between the (social) economic climate of countries or continents and the popularity of populism. For instance, economic globalization is often linked to populism. Research has posited that countries with more job insecurity have seen a rise in support for populist parties. The populist parties blame established political actors and parties for certain problems in countries, such as high job insecurity. They then follow-through by promising the people more job security, once they get elected, that is. This example comes from Australia but is certainly not applicable to just Australia. The United Kingdom and France have showcased similar cases. This example of job security and populism is seen worldwide (Mughan, Bean and McAllister, 2003). A change in social welfare situation – or; a change in sense of social welfare security – resulted in an increase in populism. Does this then mean that populists appear to successfully appeal to an insecure part of the people?

Healthcare is another part of social welfare expenditures. A study in five European countries showed that the privatization of healthcare systems contributed to a rise in populism. The populists argued that big pharmaceutical firms are making unethical large profit, to the detriment of the common people. They are now financially struggling to obtain proper

healthcare. Populists point out this mistake by the established politicians and claim they want to improve healthcare again. More importantly; to make healthcare more accessible to everyone (Pavolini et al, 2018). So again, a change in an aspect of social welfare led to an increase in popularity of populist parties.

Rising economic inequality is an often used explanation of the populisms rise. In a simplified overview, globalization creates 'winners' and 'losers' on labour markets. Winners are those who gain from globalization, such as multinational companies that expand their business to new markets and skilled workers who experience extra demand for their expertise. The losers are those who experience disadvantages due to globalization, like low-skilled workers facing job displacement due to outsourcing to lower cost labour markets (de la Dehesa, 2008). This causes more inequality between low- and high-skilled workers. Populists take to this phenomenon by standing up for the losers of globalization. They plead for more income, redistributing wealth and expanding social security for the people (Fukuyama, 2019; Pastor and Veronesi, 2018).

Another study on European countries investigated the relationship between labour market policy and populism. The research draws to two conclusions. The first being that higher levels of social spending are linked to less popularity for populist parties. A strong negative relation was found between social spending and populist voting. The second conclusion was that austerity leads to more support for populist parties. Governments that reduce unemployment benefits and other social programs stimulated populism. In particular, reductions in cash transfers and income maintenance (along with other passive labour market policies) fuelled populist voting (Foster and Frieden, 2022). This is an example of populists that exploit economic grievances of people. Grievances caused by the established power.

Retrenchment politics proves to be a recurring subject of critique by populists. Where populists once were instrumental in cutting the welfare state, they turned into avid defenders of it when the mainstream political parties tried to reduce social expenditures. It seems that the latter situation has been happening in Europe for the past fifteen years (Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016). Populist embraced a pro-welfare stance to turn the people against the elites, who cut the welfare benefits in the first place. This has led to a dynamic in politics where populists take an establishment-opposing position, with varying electoral successes. Mainstream parties adjust their policy stances to accommodate the populist parties as a result (Schumacher and van Kersbergen, 2016).

The same happened in Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). Populists began to thicken their agenda after the global financial crisis in 2008. They started to include economic nationalism into their political programs. This was a reaction to the established parties in CEECs. Those parties pushed for EU membership which meant adopting more neoliberal reforms. The populist parties offered opposition by supporting welfare programs benefiting the people (Orenstein and Bugaric, 2020).

All these studies are examples of what happens to populism within countries when a social welfare situation changes. Whether that change concerns healthcare benefits, unemployment benefits or social spending as a whole; it influences support for populism. Populists seek popularity by making use of these situations. Central to this populist conduct is that people always stand to gain from electing a populist in terms of social welfare benefits. However, little research has gone into the opposite relationship. What happens to social welfare provisions when populists actually come to power in countries? Literature has many examples of a change leading to either more or less support for populism. This research aims to add to the limited literature on the effect of populism on social welfare expenditures.

Conceptual framework

In this research, a model will be studied to further explore the effect populism has on social welfare expenditures. This model consists of a dependent variable and several independent variables. The dependent variable is social welfare expenditures. The OECD kept data on these expenditures in their Social Expenditure Database (SOCX henceforth). The independent variables are (1) whether a cabinet has a populist party in it, (2), what the share of populist parties is within cabinets, (3) whether a cabinet has a majority in their parliament and (4) what the share of populist parties are within a national parliament. The data for these variables comes from 26 European countries that are all part of the OECD. The model with all variables will be explored more in-depth later in the research design chapter.

Various expectations can be formulated based on the discussed literature earlier in this research. Several studies tested the effect of socio-economic changes on the popularity of populism. This paper focusses rather on the effect of populism has on socio-economic policy. It explores a possible relationship between populism and social welfare provisions. This results in the research question:

"What is the effect of populism on social welfare expenditures?"

Expectations

To answer this question, a number of expectations will first be tested. These expectations are formed based on the literature section. The first expectation is based on the fact populists have opposed existing politics retrenchment policies. It was a means for them to win voters in the past. They did so by expressing pro-welfare state sentiments. The first expectation is:

H_1: Countries that have at least 1 populist party in the cabinet, have higher social welfare expenditures than countries that do not have populist parties in their cabinet.

The second and third expectation build upon the first one.

H_2: A higher share of populist parties in the cabinet, pairs with higher social welfare expenditures.

H_3: Countries with a higher share of populist parties in the cabinet and a majority in the parliament, have higher social welfare expenditures.

It is expected that the hypotheses predict a gradual, progressive strengthening of relationships among the variables. The third hypothesis anticipates the strongest relationship. The second would have a slightly less robust positive relationship. The first would be expected to have an even less strong relationship. The fourth expectation is expected to have the weakest relationship:

H_4: Countries with a higher share of populist parties in parliament, have higher social welfare expenditures than countries with a lower share of populist parties in parliament.

The expectations regarding the relationships are based on the policy amending power a populist can exert within a country. This is strongest when the populist is in a majority cabinet consisting of only populist parties. If there is a cabinet relatively populist but without a majority in their parliament, changing policy is expected to be more difficult. Even more so when the share of populism within a cabinet is limited. Regarding the last expectation, when a parliament has a relative high number of populist seats, one could expect that they would still have some influence on decision-making within that country. If they are not in the cabinet, but are still much represented in parliament, they could still have an impact on policies because they are strongly represented in parliament. An answer to the research question can be formed by testing all mentioned expectations.

Research Design and methods

In this chapter of the research, the research design will be presented. First, the choice of the research method will be justified. The concepts discussed so far will be further operationalized. Then, the method of data collection and method of analysis will be illustrated. All the variables will be operationalized and explained in that part too. After that that, all descriptive statistics are laid out. These are followed by a section on correlation and multicollinearity of the dependent variables. The chapter is concluded by a reflection on the validity and reliability of this research.

Research method

In this research, the chosen method to analyse the relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures is regression analysis, executed through Microsoft Excel. This method facilitates a comprehensive exploration of the included variables. Regression analysis is an excellent means for exposing and analysing possible relationships between variables (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2018). In regression analysis, there are dependent variables and independent variables. The analysis is able to calculate whether an independent variable has a significant relationship with a dependent variable. It also estimates the relative strength of the effect that the independent variable has on the dependent variable. In this study, social welfare expenditures is the dependent variable. Populism is the independent variable, of which there are four distinct variations. To be able to apply regression analysis, the variables need to be operationalised.

Timeframe

The selected timeframe spans from 2014 to 2022, driven by the fact that the most recent year for SOCX is 2022, specifically concerning SOCX as a percentage of GDP. For SOCX as a percentage of total government expenditures, the period considered is from 2014 to 2019, as 2019 represents the latest available data for this metric. There are two ways of expressing SOCX in this research. These will be further explained in the next paragraph. The election year is the year used by the Global Party Survey 2020 (GPS henceforth). Election years range from 2014 to 2018.

Variables

Social welfare expenditures as a variable

The dependent variable in this research is social welfare expenditures. A multitude of elements are encompassed by social welfare expenditures, including various measures, policies and regulations. There are several different kinds of welfare states in Europe. Van Kersbergen (2016) assigns two dimensions to welfare states. One dimension is to what extent the welfare state modifies, reproduces, or sometimes even strengthens social and economic stratification. The other dimension involves assessing the extent to which individuals and families can maintain a decent quality of life in case of illness, unemployment or old age, irrespective of their performance on the labour market. Based on those factors, one can determine the broadness of social welfare policies of countries (Van Kersbergen, 2016).

The OECD developed a Social Expenditure Database (SOCX) based on those factors. This database offers reliable and internationally comparable statistics on public (and private) social expenditures. It also includes indicators for net social spending. SOCX is a tool for monitoring overall social expenditures through time. The data covers 38 OECD countries from 1980 to 2019. Several included indicators are pension benefits, disability benefits, health benefits, family allowances, active labour market programmes, unemployment benefits, housing assistance and many other expenditures (OECD, n.d.-b).

From all OECD members, 26 countries will be further examined. These are: Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United Kingdom. The readily available OECD-data on social welfare spending, is one reason to choose these specific countries for this research. They are all part of the OECD, which means that these countries can be grouped together for a number of reasons. Perhaps the most important reason being that in all these countries the economic infrastructure is fundamentally more extensive compared to countries outside of the OECD (OECD, n.d.-a). A different reason is the comparability within these countries in terms of certain political and social characteristics. There are wide-ranging interconnected social policies within Europe (Van Kersbergen, 2016).

Comparison between welfare expenditures

To compare absolute numbers of welfare expenditure among countries would lead to less reliable outcomes. Countries with larger economies tend to have higher absolute spending, larger population, different standard costs of living, varying inflation rates and numerous other differences that would make an absolute comparison skewed. To compare the countries' social expenditures as a percentage of their total government spending might produce better results. It directly reflects the share of the government's budget allocated to social welfare. That offers insight into the prioritization of these expenditures relative to other spending areas.

Another viable option is to compare countries based on social welfare spending as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP henceforth). This approach provides a scale of welfare spending in relation to the country's total economic output. When done through time, it can reveal long-term trends and changes in terms of commitment to social welfare relative to economic growth of a country. Moreover, changes in social welfare policies sometimes influence economic performance. Analysing expenditures as a percentage of GDP helps to understand the potential effects of these policies on the broader economy. Lastly, the data for social welfare expenditures as percentage of the GDP extends to more recent years than the percentage of total expenditures. This way, all cabinets have a measuring period of four years.

Social welfare expenditures is measured in two different ways in this research. It is measured as a percentage of total government expenditures and as a percentage of GDP. This study also used two different ways to calculate the change in social expenditures over time. The first method is measured as a net change over the entire period of a specific cabinet. The expenditures of four years after the election minus those of the election year are divided by the expenditures of the election year. This method provides the overall change throughout the entire period. The second method measures the cumulative differences per year. This is done via the same formula as the first method but calculated per year instead of the entire period. These annual differences were added together to find the overall change in expenditures. By calculating the cumulative differences per year, the directions and magnitude of the changes from one year to the next become clear. The difference in outcome between both methods was almost negligible. Both methods were used for regression analysis to see whether different results would emerge. The outcomes can be found in the results section and in appendix 2.

Measuring Populism

Populism will be used for the independent variables in this research. To do so, it needs to be converted to data. It is interesting to see how other researchers have quantified populism. As mentioned earlier, the definition of populism is subject to debate. Many definitions with a plethora of aspects exist for populism today. Operationalizing those definitions would allow for empirical measurement, quantitative scaling, regression analysis and in the end for comparisons. Comparisons between countries and through time. Multiple scales have been developed in previous studies to measure how populist a certain party is, how populist their representatives are, whether populist rhetoric is used and numerous other topics.

A study by Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) presented a multitude of survey items that capture populist attitudes from two earlier studies (Hibing and Theiss-Morse, 2002; Hawkins, Riding and Mudde, 2012). These studies used respondents. They were asked to answer questions like "Politicians in parliament need to follow the will of the people" and "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions" (Akkerman et al, 2014). The researchers used questions like these to create indices to measure each latent variable. A similar route has been taken in this research.

Yet two other studies, by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) and Pauwels (2011), are more committed to populist discourse. They made lists of words they associated with populism. Examples of these words include "citizens", "direct democracy", "the rich" and "the business elite". When politicians and public representatives used one of these words, they would flag it as populist discourse. Through their populist discourse, these researchers were able to identify the degree of populism of politicians (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Pauwels, 2011). Another viable option in measuring populism. Again, this research has included a similar approach to determining the degree of populism of public actors.

Rooduijn investigated populism from another angle, together with de Lange and van der Brug in 2014. They investigated manifestos in five Western European countries. The goal was to see whether populism is contagious. They wanted to see if mainstream parties had adopted populist aspects from populist parties. To do so, trained coders were employed. They assessed whether aspects of manifestos were populist or not. The coders were asked certain questions, like "do the authors of the manifesto refer to the people" or "do they criticize the elite". As a result, they were able to classify parties as more or less populist (Rooduijn, de Lange and van

der Brug, 2014). The data used in this research also draws upon experts and their assessment of political parties.

Populism as a variable

Based on earlier research, it is possible to quantify populism. There are several ways of measuring the degree of populism as is illustrated in the previous section. This research will operationalise populism through the Global Party Survey 2020. The GPS is an international expert survey, drawing on 1861 political party and elections experts from all over the world. The GPS estimates key ideological values, such as whether parties are left- or right-wing and populist or non-populist, for 1043 parties in 163 countries (Norris, 2020b).

The GPS operationalised populism through populist rhetoric. Concerns about the source of legitimate power, emphasizing that the people should be in power and critiques on the establishment are examples of populist rhetoric. Experts were asked to identify populist remarks of parties in leadership speeches, press releases, campaign communications, rallies and party platforms. Then, they ranked the parties on a scale of zero to ten. A score of ten means a party strongly favours populist rhetoric. A score of zero on the other hand, means a party strongly favours pluralist rhetoric. This type of rhetoric is often seen as the antonym of populist rhetoric. It rejects all populist ideas. It stands for governing by elected leaders, constrained minority rights, checks and balances on executive power and bargaining and compromise (Norris, 2020c).

Nevertheless, the concept of populism remains debatable in literature. So, this is not the only measure the GPS relies on asserting populism in a party. Each party is placed on a similar ten point scale for several other indicators. These are:

- How important populist rhetoric currently is for a party (0 equals no importance, 10 equals great importance).
- Where a party currently stands on liberal democratic principles, norms and practises (0 equals strong respect for democratic liberalism, 10 equals strong undermining of democratic liberalism).
- Whether a party should follow the will of the people (0 equals strongly agree, 10 equals strong emphasis that politicians should lead public opinion).

- Whether ordinary people should decide important issues (0 equals strongly agree, 10 equals strong emphasis that leaders should decide important issues).
- Whether most politicians are honest and trustworthy (0 equals strongly agree, 10 equals strong emphasis that most politicians are dishonest and corrupt)
- Where a party stands on checks and balances on executive power (0 equals strongly in favour, 10 equals strongly opposed).

A scale of zero to ten is used for more fine-grained estimates. Political parties lend themselves seldomly to binary categories. By rating parties on all these subjects, the experts are able to use the variables closest to their own preferred conceptual framework of populism (Norris, 2020c). The result of this combination is also put into an ordinal scale, for users preferring stricter categories, of one to four. A score of one means a party has a strongly pluralist overall score. A score of two means a party is moderately pluralist, three means a party is moderately populist. A score of four classifies a party as strongly populist (Norris, 2020b). The GPS uses similar approaches to measure populism as several earlier researchers did. It has however done so in a more extensive and thorough manner.

Populist party in cabinet

All parties included were given a score from one to four to determine their level of populism. Some parties were excluded from a GPS score. For those parties either a score of five, six or zero was given. A five means that the PopuList rated the party as populist, a six means the PopuList regards the party non-populist (Rooduijn et al, 2023). A zero was given to parties that were missing from both the GPS and the Populist. All parties with a score of three, four or five were marked as populist for the regression. So, for this populism as a variable scale, the eventual scores for political parties range from zero to six.

As mentioned earlier, for all 26 countries the election year was chosen by the GPS. That resulted in a cabinet period for each country. Some countries had a cabinet that lasted for less than four years. For those countries, multiple cabinets were included to add up to a period of at least four years. A dummy variable was then made. All cabinets with at least one party classified as populist, was marked with a one. All cabinets without a populist party were given a zero.

Majority in cabinet

A cabinet can significantly influence decision-making when supported by a parliamentary majority. The 26 countries all have a certain number of seats within their parliament. Whenever a cabinet has at least half those seats plus one, it has a majority. Another dummy variable was made with a score of one given to cabinets with a majority and a score of zero for those without.

Populist share in cabinet

Populists can exert more pressure if they are better represented in a cabinet. So, all populist seats were counted for each cabinet. The scores three, four and five on the populism as a variable scale, all populist parties' seats within cabinets were counted. The amount of seats that were held by populist parties was then divided by the total number of seats in that cabinet. The result was a new variable; the populist share in a cabinet.

Populist share in parliament

Lastly, the populist share in a national parliament was determined. Similarly to assessing the share of populist seats in cabinets, the populist seats in the entire parliament were counted. These seats added together were then divided by total number of seats. It resulted in the populist share within parliaments.

Special cases

There are a couple of particularities within the dataset. For instance, some countries have had more than one election in the chosen timeframe, resulting in a different distribution of seats. For some parties the data on how many seats they held after elections, was missing. All these exceptions were kept track of and put in a file. This file is included in appendix 1.

Descriptive statistics

All variables used in this research have now been discussed. They led to the descriptive statistics in the table below.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics.

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Populist_party_in_cabinet	26	0.654	0.485	0	1
Majority_in_parliament	26	0.692	0.471	0	1
Percentage_populist_party_in_cabinet	26	43.885	41.844	0	100
Percentage_populist_seats_in_parliament	26	42.333	27.460	0.004	91.850
SOCX_method1_govt_percentage	26	1.436	4.274	-8.607	10.133
SOCX_method2_govt_percentage	26	1.452	4.275	-8.733	10.100
SOCX_method1_GDP_percentage	26	6.330	9.877	-7.639	28.620
SOCX_method2_GDP_percentage	26	6.612	9.645	-7.516	28.209

In this table, the variables and an indication of the values of variables are shown. Some interesting insights can be pointed out as a result. The observations for all variables are 26. These represent the countries of interest to this research. The first variable, 'Populist_party_in_cabinet', is a binary variable. Its mean value exceeds a score of 0.5. This indicates that, on average, a populist party is more often than not present in the researched cabinets. On average, about 70% of all cabinets had a majority in their respective parliaments. About 44% of all cabinet parties was comprised of populist parties. A slightly lower percentage

of populist seats were found in all parliaments with 42%. The descriptive statistics of 'SOCX_method1_govt_percentage' and 'SOCX_method2_govt_percentage' reveal that there is little difference between the two methods. This also applies to the social welfare expenditures measured as a percentage of GDP; both methods produce relatively similar statistics.

Correlation

In the table below, the correlation between all independent variables is measured. To be able to explore the relationship between variables in the dataset, a correlation matrix was generated using Microsoft Excel. It is a statistical tool that enables the investigation of the strength and direction of relationships between variables (Andrews University, 2005). A positive relationship indicates that as one variable increases or decreases, another variable tends to move in the same direction. A negative correlation suggests that as one variable increases or decreases, the other tends to move in the opposite direction (Andrew University, 2005). The following outcomes emerged.

Table 2

Correlation statistics.

Variable	*(1)*	*(2)*	*(3)*	*(4)*
Populist_party_in_cabinet	1			
Majority_in_parliament	-0.135	1		
Percentage_populist_party_in_cabinet	0.778	0.118	1	
Percentage_populist_seats_in_parliament	0.723	-0.057	0.862	1

The table above shows the correlation coefficients between all independent variables. The results vary from high correlations to low correlations. Find in table 3 on the next page an overview with correlation coefficients (denoted as '*r*') and their corresponding levels of correlation (Andrews University, 2005).

Table 3

Correlation coefficients and corresponding levels of correlation.

Correlation coefficient (*r)*	Level of correlation
$0.9 < \mid r \mid < 1.0$	Very high correlation
$0.7 < \mid r \mid < 0.9$	High correlation
$0.5 < \mid r \mid < 0.7$	Moderate correlation
$0.3 < \mid r \mid < 0.5$	Low correlation
$0.0 < \mid r \mid < 0.3$	Little (if any) correlation

From: Andrews University

For example, the variable 'Populist_party_in_cabinet' has little negative correlation with the variable 'Majority_in_parliament', with the coefficient being -0.135. The same goes for the relationship between 'Majority_in_parliament' and the variables representing the percentages of populist parties in cabinets and populist seats in parliament. All these weak relationships suggest that a majority in parliament has little correlation with the other variables.

When the correlation between the remaining variables is further examined however, a rather strong relationship can be observed. A populist party in the cabinet has a high correlation coefficient with the percentage of populist parties in cabinets and also with the percentage of populist seats in parliament. Both correlation coefficients are around 0.75, which indicates a strong relationship. This observation is unsurprising, as the involvement of a populist party in a cabinet inherently leads to a higher percentage of populist parties in cabinets. In essence, the absence of a populist party in a cabinet results in a percentage of zero populist parties in cabinets. Therefore, the inclusion of a populist party in the cabinet is associated with a positive effect on the overall percentage of populist parties within the cabinet.

The strongest observed relationship is the one between the percentage of populist parties in a cabinet and the percentage of seats held by populist parties in parliament. With a correlation coefficient of 0.862 the relationship is rather strong. This suggests that when there is a high

percentage of populist parties in a cabinet, one could expect to see a relatively high percentage of populist seats in parliament too. Much like the other high correlation coefficients, this relationship is unsurprising. A cabinet predominantly composed of populist parties would naturally lead to a higher percentage of overall seats held by populists in parliament.

Multicollinearity

To prevent multicollinearity, the regression models must be cautiously constructed. Multicollinearity occurs when two or more variables with relatively high correlation are included in one regression model. This can cause issues in estimating the regression coefficients, resulting in inaccuracies and unstable results (Pennsylvania State University, 2018). The regression models will therefore not hold any combination of highly correlated independent variables. In total there are three combinations of highly correlated variables. Those have previously been discussed in the correlation chapter.

Reliability

When conducting a regression analysis, it is important to reflect on the validity of this research. This is done in order to check the accuracy of the inferences drawn later on from the analysis. It is a way of ensuring that this paper measures what it claims to measure with meaningful findings. Regression analysis itself is an exceptionally reliable means of testing relationships between variables. In this instance, a sample size of 26 was used. What the least amount of observations should be for a reliable regression, is subject to debate. Some say it should be at least ten per independent variable used. Others say that eight is sufficient, but only when variances are very little. Otherwise, it is recommended to have at least 25 observations (Jenkins & Quintana-Ascencio, 2020). The fact remains that the higher the amount of observations is, the more precise the estimates become. So, although the sample size should be large enough for reliable outcomes, a large sample size could result in more accurate results.

Due to the nature of policy making, there had to be a variable included to control for the time delay. It takes time for a cabinet to implement new policy. Once new policy is implemented, it takes more time for its effects to become apparent. So, mitigating the potential delay is contributing to higher reliability of this study. It is however essential to acknowledge that social welfare expenditures are influenced by many variables. Variables beyond the

populist nature of countries, beyond just time delay. Economic conditions, public opinion, institutional frameworks, and numerous other factors can significantly impact social welfare expenditures. Although there has been controlled for the implementation delays of policy, it needs to be recognized that the amount of variables potentially influencing social expenditures besides the used variables could be vast.

This study however set out to investigate a possible relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures. It is relevant to discuss external validity to see whether the results of this research could be applicable to situations beyond this specific sample. The countries used in this research are subject to certain political and cultural landscapes. The combination of all those aspects could possibly be unique to this set of countries. While the study could offer valuable insights into the relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures, it needs to be addressed that it may not very well extend to other contexts.

The reliability of this paper is however furthered by not using variables in one model that are highly correlated to one another. By doing so, any possible multicollinearity gets prevented. The correlation matrix (table 2) shows the strength of all relationships between variables. No model was used with variables that were strongly correlated. In fact, all models employed variables that had little if any correlation with each other. This enhances the results of the regression models.

Results

In this chapter the results of the regression tests will be presented. All four expectations will be reviewed. The discussed literature will then be compared to the outcomes and an analysis follows.

Regression outcomes

The first hypothesis

Starting with the first expectation: H_1: Countries that have at least 1 populist party in the cabinet, have higher social welfare expenditures than countries that do not have populist parties in their cabinet. Of all 26 countries, there were 17 countries that had a populist party in their cabinet. This dummy variable was used as independent variable. The dependent variable was the SOCX (calculated with method 1, measured across the entire period). The results are in the table below:

Table 4

Regression results using countries with at least 1 populist party in the cabinet as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	1.99	1.45	.18	
Populist party in cabinet	-.85	1.79	.64	
				$R^2 = .009$

Despite initial expectations, the regression outcomes seem to provide no substantive evidence in support of the set out hypothesized relationship. The intercept, representing the baseline of SOCX when no additional factors are considered, has an estimate of 1.99, albeit with a standard error of 1.45. The corresponding p-value is 0.18. When the independent variable is looked upon more closely, a negative relationship can be observed. This would suggest that the presence of a populist party in a cabinet would lead to less social welfare expenditures. The p-value invalidates this suggestion however. A value of 0.64 surpasses the significance threshold of 0.05.

The overarching model, as indicated by the nominal R-squared value of 0.009, displays a lack of explanatory power. The very low R-square means that a mere 0.9% of the variance in social welfare expenditures is explained by cabinets having at least one populist party in it. The overall model does not seem to be a good fit for the data. Furthermore, all p-values associated with the coefficients and the F-statistic surpass the significance threshold of 0.05. This indicates that none of the coefficients are statistically significant. In light of these findings, it becomes clear that the first hypothesis has to be rejected. A positive correlation between the presence of a populist party in a cabinet and higher social welfare expenditures are not displayed by the regression model outcomes.

The second hypothesis

The second expectation is that a higher share of populist parties in the cabinet, pairs with higher social welfare expenditures. Again, a regression analysis was performed:

Table 5

Regression results using the percentages of populist parties in cabinets as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	2.06	1.24	.11	
Percentage of populist parties in cabinet	-.01	.02	.49	
				$R^2 = .020$

Table 2 shows similar results to those of table 1. The intercept has an estimate of 2.06 with a standard error of 1.24 and a p-value of 0.11. The interesting part of this model is the estimate of the independent variable. It indicates a negative relationship, once more, between the percentage of populist parties in a cabinet and the social welfare expenditures. The effect is ever so small, with a coefficient of -.01. Nonetheless, it indicates that a higher percentage of populist parties in cabinets leads to a (small) decrease in social welfare expenditures. When a closer look is taken at the p-value of this variable, it becomes evident that this indication cannot be accepted as a real possibility. With 0.49 it exceeds the threshold of 0.05 to be statistically significant.

The R-squared value of 0.02 indicates the statistical insignificance of this model in general. This value illustrates that 2% of the variance in social welfare expenditures can be explained by the percentage of populist parties in cabinets. The model is therefore a bad fit for the data. The expectation was that the percentage of populist parties in cabinets would have a positive effect on social welfare expenditures. This hypothesis has to be rejected based on the regression model outcomes of table 5. There is no evidence to suggest any positive relationship between these two variables.

The third hypothesis

The third expectation was that countries with a higher share of populist parties in the cabinet and a majority in the parliament, have higher social welfare expenditures. The results from the regression analysis are presented below:

Table 6

Regression results using percentage of populist parties in cabinets and a majority in parliament as the criteria.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	.60	1.68	.73	
Percentage of populist parties in cabinet	-.02	.02	.40	
Majority in parliament	2.32	1.82	.22	
				$\Delta R^2 = .005$

The coefficient of the dependent variable is 0.6, with a standard error of 1.68 and p-value of 0.73. The percentage of populist parties in cabinets shows, once again, a negative relationship with SOCX in this model. It exhibits roughly double the magnitude in effect on SOCX when compared to the model displayed in table 5. The effect itself nonetheless, remains small with a coefficient of -0.02. The effect of having a majority in parliament on social welfare

expenditures is much bigger in comparison. A majority seems to have a positive effect on SOCX, with a coefficient of 2.32. Yet, the significance of both coefficients tells a different story. Both exceed the value of 0.05, rendering them statistically insignificant.

Instead of one independent variable, two independent variables were used in this model. For that reason, the adjusted R-square serves as the indicator for assessing how well the regression model fits the data. The adjusted R-square suggests that the percentage of populist parties in cabinets combined with a majority in parliament are able to explain the variance in social welfare expenditures for 0.5%. The estimates are all statistically insignificant once more. This inevitably leads to the conclusion that there is no evidence supporting the hypothesis. The third hypothesis must be rejected as a result.

The fourth hypothesis

The last regression analysis investigates a relationship between the percentage of populist parties in parliament and social welfare expenditures. The results are presented in the table below:

Table 7

Regression results using percentage of populist parties in parliaments as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	2.67	1.57	.10	
Percentage of populist parties in parliament	-.03	.03	.36	
				$R^2 = .035$

What stands out, is that the percentage of populist parties in parliament has a negative effect on the social welfare expenditures. This is the opposite of the expectation. The effect is small, with a coefficient of -0.03. The p-value is 0.36, meaning that the coefficient is statistically insignificant. The observed effect does thus not correspond with reality.

With a single independent variable, the R-squared value is the statistic that represents the overall fit of the data for the model. It is the highest value observed of all models.

Nonetheless, it is still a mere 0.035. This means that the model is a poor fit for the data, as the percentage of populist parties in parliament is only able to explain 3.5% of the variance in SOCX. The hypothesis that a higher percentage of populist parties in a parliament has a positive effect on social welfare expenditures must be rejected, according to this model.

Alternative calculation method

As discussed earlier in the methods, the dependent variable of social welfare expenditures is operationalised in different ways. There are the two methods used for calculating the change in expenditures. It can be measured across the entire period or measured with the cumulative differences per year. The results obtained through the first method are presented in the tables in the above section. The results from measuring the cumulative differences each year can be found in appendix 2. Upon comparing the tables in Appendix 2 with those in the section above (tables four to seven), it becomes clear that the difference in outcomes is minimal. This is unsurprising, as the SOCX values obtained from both methods show little discrepancy.

GDP as dependent variable

In the methods section, social welfare expenditures are expressed and measured in two different ways. The first way to express SOCX is depicted in the section above this one. The second way is to express social welfare expenditures as a percentage of a country's GDP. All regression models using social welfare expenditures as a percentage of GDP are displayed in appendix 3. Each model uses the same independent variables as the previous four regression models (found in tables four to seven). The only difference is thus the dependent variable. The results are different too, but the difference is small.

Once more, all hypotheses are rejected. According to the regression models in appendix 3, there is no evidence to suggest that populism has an effect on social welfare expenditures. Not when it is measured as a percentage of total government expenditures, nor when it is measured as a percentage of GDP. All models had insignificant outcomes, indicated by statistically insignificant coefficients and with overall models that did not appear to be a good fit for the data. In conclusion, the outcomes are very similar to those from the models with social welfare expenditures as a percentage of total government spending as dependent variable.

Analysis

The results of the regression analyses will be compared to the expectations. The expectations were based on the literature. What stands out, is that all of the preconceived expectations were rejected. This is an interesting finding, considering the existing literature suggests a positive relationship between populism and increased social welfare spending. Every model used turned out to be statistically insignificant, with all independent variables having very little effect on social welfare expenditures. For these regressions, social welfare expenditures were calculated in different ways, using two different methods. It made no difference to the outcome, however. Whether social welfare expenditures were measured as percentage of total government expenditure or as percentage of a country's GDP, the results remained insignificant. This unexpected outcome leads to an exploration of the potential factors that contribute to this difference between theoretical expectations and reality.

Economic constraints

In literature populists are often depicted as leaders promising social welfare improvements. They blame the mainstream politics for cutting social welfare expenditures and claim to up these expenses once again when installed in a position of power. The results of this paper suggest otherwise, namely that populist parties do not necessarily translate their rhetoric into the improvement of social welfare provisions. Perhaps it is possible that populist leaders face constraints by economic realities. Their country might not have the resources to spend more on these expenditures (Parlevliet, Giuliodori and Rooduijn, 2021; Crosby, 1996). When the financial resources are not sufficient, there are several options for generating enough money. One way of doing that is by increasing tax rates. That is however a very unpopular decision. Populists tend to oppose tax increasements. Another possibility is by decreasing other expenditures. Yet that could generate a lot of opposition from other parties and it can be time consuming (Parlevliet et al, 2021; Crosby, 1996). All this limits the ability to implement the promised expenditures.

Coalition building

It was touched upon briefly already in the previous section. But populist parties often need to form coalitions or work with other political actors to gain a majority. A majority is needed to govern effectively. This may result in compromises that dilute the populist agenda, as coalition partners sometimes have other promises to commit to (Crosby, 1996).

Commitments to increased social welfare expenditures might therefore be diluted. The need to build alliances and maintain political stability might influence policy decisions (Crosby, 1996).

Globalization

External factors, such as global economic trends, could impact the ability of populist governments to increase social welfare expenditures. Economic globalization may limit the autonomy of governments in making independent decisions on social welfare spending (Guitián, 2007; Akyüz, 2007). Most countries in this research are part of the European Union for instance. An example is the European Pillar of Social Rights that the EU declared in 2017. It resulted in an action plan to promote social equality amongst people in the EU-member states. Although this was not a strict condition for the member states, it provides an example of how some autonomy of governments is transferred to the EU (European Commission, 2017). Developments such as this European Pillar may make it more difficult for national governments to implement their own policies.

Policy implementing delay

There might be a delay between the appointment of populist parties in cabinets and the actual implementation of social welfare policies. It is possible that the impact of populism on social welfare expenditures takes longer to materialize (Bayraktar and Egami, 2007). To control for that, a timeframe of four years after elections was used. This might mitigate the problem of time delay of policy implementation, but this delay is not the only factor influencing the speed of executing new policy. The complexity of implementation may vary across countries because legislative approval might extend beyond the duration of a single cabinet's term, it could take longer than four years to actually be able to measure the effects of new policy and numerous other factors potentially influencing the process (Bayraktar and Egami, 2007).

The populist amplifier

These problems could very well arise during populist cabinets. However, non-populist cabinets can be confronted with these very problems as well. But it is perhaps the nature of populism that amplifies these problems for populist governments.

Heightened expectations

Populist leaders often make bold promises during campaigns. They try to mobilize certain issues to gain electoral advantage over their competitors (De Vries and Hobolt, 2020). This could raise the expectations among their potential voters. The larger the gap between promises and the delivery, the more pronounced the disappointment may be. But in order for populists to gain popularity, they have been known to not hold back with these kinds of promises. If promises become too big, it will be all the more difficult to convert them to reality. Faced by this challenge, populists may resort to so called policy reversals. In short, that means that initial commitments get watered down. That could be a reason populists specifically are not able to increase social welfare expenditures.

Anti-Establishment rhetoric

Populist parties are known to position themselves as anti-establishment and claim to voice the will of the people against that of the entrenched elites (see theoretical framework). This rhetoric can create a more polarized political environment. A potential result of that polarization is the intensifying of opposition and resistance. That makes for more difficulty in implementing changes in policy for populists.

International relations

Populist governments might face unique challenges in international relations, especially if their policies deviate significantly from the established norms. This can impact economic cooperation, trade relations, and how the nation is perceived on a global stage. Populist anti-establishment stances are sometimes paired with anti-globalization views too. The PopuList (Rooduijn et al, 2023) has labelled about three-quarters of all populist parties in Europe as Eurosceptic. This scepticism may be perceived by trade-partners as unwanted, resulting in a worse relationship. Populists need to manage this with delicacy in order for them, for example, to not lose too much trade. This is yet another factor that populists have to deal with when making new policy.

Further research recommendations

It is important to acknowledge that these possible factors influencing the outcomes of this research remain just that: possible factors. Nevertheless, there are indications within literature that suggest these explanations hold merit. More research is needed into these subjects

and their possible relationship to social welfare expenditures and populism. The reason for not including them in this research is that the focus was on investigating whether there exists a sole effect of populism on social welfare expenditures. This research was specifically designed to examine the singular impact populism has on social welfare expenditures. The results of this study provide no evidence to support the notion that populism affects social welfare expenditures.

It is recommended that further research to build upon this study is instigated, by including factors such as economic constraints, coalition forming and international factors. Investigating the effect of populism on social welfare expenditures, whilst accounting for these factors too, may yield different outcomes than those observed in this study. Therefore, a recommendation for future research is to include these factors to see whether the results found in this study are influenced. Perhaps, when these factors are considered, populism could indeed have an impact on social welfare expenditures. To be able to substantiate this claim however, further research is necessary. Additionally, a qualitative exploration could provide insights into the intricacies of populist decision-making processes. That way the reasons behind the observed discrepancy between populist rhetoric and action could be better understood.

Conclusion

This research tried to explore the relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures in 26 European countries from 2014 to 2022. The contribution to the field of public administration is that this thesis adds a nuance to the concept of populism and it investigates a relationship on which little literature exists. The societal relevance comes from the insight it offers into what could possibly happen to social welfare expenditures after a country becomes more populist. This insight on populist governance is useful to not only the people depending on social welfare for their livelihood and well-being, but also for policymakers and the general public. After the subject and the relevance were presented, the key concepts of populism were explained in the theoretical framework. Subsequently, theories of how populism could possibly influence social welfare expenditures followed. The observation that populists are known to promise social welfare improvements during elections, globalization and several case examples led to four hypotheses.

These expectations were portrayed in the conceptual framework. By answering them, the answer to the main question – which was: what is the effect of populism on social welfare expenditures? – would become apparent. How the hypotheses were tested, was laid out in the chapter of research design and methods. Through regression analysis, operationalized concepts and the collected data from mainly the Social Expenditure Database and the Global Party Survey in the period from 2014 to 2022, the results came about.

The key finding from the results was that all regressions produced statistically insignificant results. There was no evidence found in support of any of the four hypotheses. Therefore, all four hypotheses were rejected, which is interesting given that literature would suggest otherwise. Possible factors contributing to these results were economic constraints, coalitions, globalization and policy implementation delay. Populism could be expected to experience these factors amplified by populist tendencies such as the heightening of expectations, anti-establishment rhetoric and a worsening of international relations. To conclude, a positive relationship between populism and social welfare spending, as hypothesized in the literature, failed to manifest in the empirical findings of this research. This study found no effect of populism on social welfare expenditures.

Reflection

This conclusion highlights the complexity of policy-making processes, particularly in the context of populist governance. A need for a theoretical framework that accounts for many factors is underscored by this study. Factors such as economic constraints, coalition dynamics, global influences and perhaps many more present formidable challenges. This broadening of qualitative research is one of the aforementioned recommendations for further research.

Another implication of this study is that populist parties and leaders promise increased welfare spending to gain more electoral success. The outcomes of this research gave no evidence to support this claim. So perhaps these promises may not always lead to tangible policy outcomes. This calls for critical examination of populist rhetoric and its implications for policy implementation. It is important to distinguish between campaign promises and actual changes in policy.

The empirical analysis exposed the nuanced nature of political decision-making, influenced not only by the degree of populism but also by pragmatic considerations, coalition dynamics and international factors. Overall, the reliability and with that the generalizability to other contexts as well of this research may be somewhat restricted.

These theoretical implications lead to the insight that the theoretical framework in this study, while providing an initial lens, may have oversimplified the multifaceted nature of policy-making processes. Although the research was about exploring the relationship between populism and social welfare expenditures, the inclusion of more variables could result in a different outcome. This limitation provides the main recommendation for further research.

The research enriched our understanding of the limitations of theoretical expectations, by displaying the constraints faced by populist leaders and parties in realizing their promises. The used datasets are renowned and regression analysis is a highly reliable way of testing relationships. The thesis is underpinned by a robust methodological approach. The regression models were no subject to multicollinearity, enhancing the accuracy of the outcomes. This combination ensures a systematic and valid way of exploring the hypotheses.

Despite the unexpected findings, this study makes a contribution to literature by challenging existing assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The expectations based on literature were not supported by any findings in this study. The highlighting of the complexity

of policy-making processes with populism, in this case, not being a driver of social welfare expenditures. The multifaceted aspect of populism, such as the disconnection between populist rhetoric and change in social welfare policy. These strengths of this paper advance theoretical understanding and open up new opportunities for further research.

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Appendix 1

This is an overview of the aforementioned special cases.

- For **Belgium**, the last month of 2018 was left out. On 2018-12-09 Belgium appointed a new government. These last 22 days of the year were probably not very influential for SOCX. So, this new government was left out of the regression.
- For **Italy**, the last 3 month of 2019 were left out. 2019-09-05 Italy formed a new government. These last 3 months of the year were probably not very influential for SOCX. So, this new government was left out of the regression.
- For **Norway**, they had different governments for 2018 and 2019. In 2018 the percentage of populist seats in the government was 33.75%, in 2019 it was 30.68%. A difference that is negligible. The mean of the two numbers, which was 32.22%, is used.
- For **Slovakia**, they had a 75.29% populist government for 6 months in 2016. Then, the following 27 months, they had a populist government of 85.33%. So, 83.51% populist government over this entire period. Calculated as follows; (75.29 * 6 + 85.33 * 27) / 33 = 83.51%
- For **Finland**, there was a discrepancy in percentage of populist seats in parliament. It had 38 populist seats for 24 months. It then had 18 populist seats left for 18 months. Same calculation gives about 29.43 populist 'seats' out of 200 in that period. So, 14.71%
- **Greece** has the same story. For 9 months, 194 populist seats were held in parliament. Then 39 months for 188 seats. It gives an average populist seat held in that period for 187.9 out of 300 = 63.04%
- **Sweden** too. For 50 months, 65 seats were held populist parties. Then for 12 months it were 84 seats. That makes an average of 68.68 seats out of 349, which is 19.68%.
- **Turkey** had 357 populist seats in government for 31 months, and then 344 for 6 months. The average is 354.89 seats out of 550, which is 64.53%
- For **Percentage_populist_seats_in_Parliament**, they are the cumulative percentages of populist seats, based on a score of '3', '4', or '5' from column "**Type_Populism**".
- For "**Populism_value**" a score of 0 means that CHES, GPS and PopuList did not score the party. A 5 means that Populist scored it as a populist party. A 6 means that the PopuList scored it as a not-populist party. 5 and 6 are therefore scores derived only from the PopuList, because they were absent on both GPS and CHES.

Appendix 2

These tables show the regression models with social welfare expenditures expressed as a percentage of a country's total government spending calculated with the cumulative differences per year as the dependent variable. In short, that means that the difference between year 1 (election year) and year 2 are added together, followed by the difference between year 2 and year 3, and so on until the differences in a span of four years are all added together.

Table 8

Regression results using countries with at least 1 populist party in the cabinet as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	1.99	1.45	.18	
Populist party in cabinet	-.83	1.79	.65	
				$R^2 = .009$

Table 9

Regression results using the percentages of populist parties in cabinets as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	2.06	1.24	.11	
Percentage of populist parties in cabinet	-.01	.02	.51	
				$R^2 = .019$

Table 10

Regression results using percentage of populist parties in cabinets and a majority in parliament as the criteria.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	.58	1.69	.73	
Percentage of populist parties in cabinet	-.02	.02	.42	
Majority in parliament	2.33	1.83	.21	
				$\Delta R^2 = .004$

Table 11

Regression results using percentage of populist parties in parliaments as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	2.68	1.57	.10	
Percentage of populist parties in parliament	-.03	.03	.36	
				$R^2 = .035$

Appendix 3

These tables show the regression models with social welfare expenditures expressed as a percentage of a country's GDP as the dependent variable. Once more, the difference between calculating the SOCX using the two different methods was negligible.

Table 12

Regression results using countries with at least 1 populist party in the cabinet as the criterion

	Estimate	SE	p	Fit
(Intercept)	8.80	3.30	.01	
Populist party in cabinet	-3.77	4.08	.36	
				R² = .034

Table 13

Regression results using the percentages of populist parties in cabinets as the criterion.

	Estimate	SE	p	Fit
(Intercept)	6.04	2.89	.05	
Percentage of populist parties in cabinet	.01	.05	.89	
				R² = .001

Table 14

Regression results using percentage of populist parties in cabinets and a majority in parliament as the criteria.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	6.34	4.07	.13	
Percentage of populist parties in cabinet	.01	.05	.88	
Majority in parliament	-.48	4.40	.91	
				$\Delta R^2 = -.086$

Table 15

Regression results using percentage of populist parties in parliaments as the criterion.

	Estimate	*SE*	*p*	Fit
(Intercept)	3.69	3.63	.32	
Percentage of populist party in parliament	.06	.07	.40	
				$R^2 = .030$