



# EUROPEAN POLICYBRIEF



**Varieties of Populism and Democratic Efficacy: Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations from DEMOS**

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## INTRODUCTION

The European Union and many EU democracies face a populist challenge: a complex policy problem stemming from a disconnect between how the polity operates and how citizens want the polity to cover their needs, address their aspirations, and understand their identities. Because of this divergence (among other reasons), citizens have resorted to political apathy or turned to populist parties. That reaped electoral benefits for populists, particularly in Hungary and Poland, whose influence on public policy has grown over time.

But populist political participation may not be a suitable cure for widespread apathy since populism thrives on demagoguery and feeds conspiracy theories. European populists in power exert influence over the judiciary, bringing about changes that harm minority rights and vulnerable groups, destabilising the balance of powers, and undermining European Union values. The populists' simplistic approach to policymaking ignores consultations with stakeholders, which are needed to address socio-economic problems. Effective, populist communication on social media receives more engagement from users and reaches more people, influencing their behaviour online. Populism also influences political news, which has picked up more often on polarising populist language. Independent journalism remains largely unsupported, especially where populism has built strongholds. Little is known about how to react to populist challenges that continue to threaten liberal democracy and EU values.

The DEMOS project aims to enhance the knowledge base on populism, developing frameworks and analyses on the impacts of populism on governance, law, parties, citizens, the media system and social media, and institutions of liberal democracy. This policy brief summarises key findings on these topics and proposes policy-relevant actions to mitigate negative impacts. DEMOS covers each topic in more depth in separate policy briefs.

## WHAT POPULISM IS

Populism is a multi-faceted, diverse, and dynamic phenomenon which adapts to the circumstances. A good example is that of Spain: with Podemos, the country gave a prime example of inclusionary, left-wing populism—however, growing political tensions and the split of the centrist-right People’s Party gave rise to a new, radical-right populist party, the Vox. Italy is another example where both right-wing and centrist, left-wing populism are present (the League and the 5 Stars Movement). In Hungary and Poland, right-wing forms of populism have risen and still govern, lending scientists an opportunity to investigate their governance style and consequences for democracy at local and EU levels. This diversity makes some analysts even question the relevance of the ‘populist’ label. But populism shows common features no matter how it manifests itself.

DEMOS adopted an eclectic conceptualisation of populism. It combines the ideational approach with the discourse approach to populism. Thus, populist parties and movements always include hostility towards the elites and an appeal to the people, considered morally superior to the elites. Another characteristic is populism’s focus on depicting enemies, be they real or imagined, domestic or foreign. Whether in power or looking for it in political campaigns, populist actors display a concomitant intolerance towards democratic checks and balances, political pluralism and/or cultural diversity. Often, populist communication resembles that of tabloid-style mass media that spreads on social media and has been shown to mobilise users. Populist leaders personify most of these features.

The DEMOS research found that populist actors do not necessarily oppose representative democracy. At times, it seems as though they want to enrich it, relying on electoral or plebiscitary legitimacy. Use of referenda to address complex policy issues is one way in which that happens. Referenda, however, raise serious practical problems: their frequent use contributes to societal division without addressing root causes of socio-economic problems. Populists understand democracy as the rule of the majority, disregarding basic features of liberal democracy. Neglected above all are pluralism and respect for the rights of minorities. After ascending to government, populist parties tend to blur the separation of powers by undermining the independence of the judiciary, transferring substantial law-making powers to the government and abolishing limits to presidential mandates, as illustrated by the examples of Venezuela, Turkey, Poland, and Hungary. Although populism is an essentially democratic phenomenon, as it relies on the people, its negative impacts on the judiciary and its exclusionary approach to policy pose a threat to liberal democracy.

## TYPES OF POPULISM

Beyond these commonalities, the DEMOS research on populist parties and populist discourses on social media identified several types of populisms, namely:

- **right-wing populist parties** are exclusionary, authoritarian, and have a strong nativist appeal. They tend to resort to conspiratorial explanations of domestic and international political developments. Examples include the French FN/RN, the League in Italy, the Danish People’s Party, the German AfD;
- **left-wing populist parties** are inclusionary, non-authoritarian and have a weak nativist appeal. These parties use a radical democratic approach. Examples are Podemos of Spain, the Greek SYRIZA, and the French LFI;
- **illiberal (typically post-communist) populist parties** are exclusionary with strong nativist appeal and use conspiratorial explanations of domestic and international political developments. Parties in this category include the Hungarian FIDESZ, the Polish PiS, the Turkish AKP, or the Bosnian SNSD;

- **anti-establishment populist parties** and **parties of political entrepreneurs** are non-authoritarian, show weak nativist appeal, and tend to employ a radical democratic appeal. Examples include the Italian 5Star Movement, the Czech ANO, and the Slovak SR.<sup>1</sup>

DEMOS studied the features of populist parties by analysing social media communications of these parties' leaders in the political campaign leading to the European Parliament elections of May 2019, and in a non-electoral period (summer of 2019), across Europe. The analysis was based on three indicators of populist discourse. Namely, references to the people, anti-elitism, and exclusion of others (e.g. migrants and refugees).

Findings confirm that, despite the varying political orientations, populist party leaders do indeed use the typical elements of populist communication. They make frequent statements concerning the people, their will, and their problems. These messages are oftentimes combined with attacks against the elite, mostly associated with the EU and big businesses. These features are apparent in each type of populism. Yet, only nativist and exclusionary populists use references to the exclusion of the others.

The research also found that the 'complete populist discourse', associated with all the above-mentioned elements, is used more often during the electoral period. This suggests that populist communication is a powerful tool for political mobilisation – particularly on social media platforms.

## **ROOT CAUSES AND POPULIST MOVEMENTS**

When citizens distrust politics, populism sees an opportunity. Apathy and political discontent inflame populist sentiments. The lack of socio-economic gains among citizens, such as employment, is another contributor. Democratic experience with technocracy that ignores societal demands and government communication that does not speak to society but just adds to the list. In such a cacophony of unfulfilled government pledges and ignored grievances, populism is more likely to rise to power.

The European political landscape suggests that populism is not on the rise. Nonetheless it remains powerfully endemic – with opportunities for future outbreaks – because widespread political distrust, unaddressed socio-economic problems, and the citizens' feeling that politics does not match up to their needs remains either unaddressed or unresolved.

To see why, consider the right-wing populist party VOX, which emerged from the December 2018 elections in Spain as a strong political party. Until its inception, VOX supporters had felt unrepresented in politics. But its presence in politics has neither changed their voters' distaste for politicians nor their beliefs that Spain's democratic system needs a corrective against what they deem 'criminals, unemployed, LGBTQI+ groups and immigrants' benefiting from governmental programmes.

According to VOX's supporters, minorities have been gaining power, a trend against which they feel the need to fight and one about which they believe that it has left Spain's society permissive, unjust, and unequal.<sup>2</sup> These perceptions reflect populist narratives. If anything, these narratives harm vulnerable groups and minorities. As DEMOS research in Greece, Hungary, Poland, the UK and Turkey shows, populist tactics forced minority groups to seek isolation, practise self-censorship, or migrate abroad.<sup>3</sup>

Seven years on from the migration crisis (2015), right-wing populist messages that peddle exclusionary fantasies about minorities and migrants being a threat to Europeans continue to find their mark. In Spain, left-wing populism fiercely opposes right-wing exclusionary populist views.

<sup>1</sup> See [Sotiropoulos et al. \(2020\)](#).

<sup>2</sup> See [Sahin, Ianosev, et al. \(2021\)](#).

<sup>3</sup> See [Sahin, Vegetti, et al. \(2021\)](#).

That example shows that, instead of debate, what remains is political fragmentation and societal divides.

Spain's supporters of right-wing populist forces share a common feeling with citizens from other European countries such as Turkey, Spain, France, Poland and the UK: distrust in politics. For these citizens (including populist voters in Poland, Turkey and Spain), politicians are dividing society with the purpose of advancing their own political agenda, as DEMOS research with over 80 citizens in these countries found. As the preliminary data suggest, the emergence of populist political participation does not provide a cure for apathy.

Despite the general disbelief in politics, French citizens who vote for the left-wing populist party LFI (La France Insoumise) believe that the LFI's populist agenda is worth defending in a vacuum of political representation, while citizens supporting the Polish populist party PIS see it, ironically, as a part of a political elite that is either unprepared or unwilling to attend their needs – but, still, the one elite that they judge as their best option.

The rise of populism in the past two decades has been acknowledged, but its ascension is neither unilinear nor inevitable. Although the 2019 European elections brought about a further progress of populist parties, their landslide victory expected by some analysts did not materialise. Since then, several populist parties, such as the Austrian Freedom Party or Salvini's League lost their power positions or faced a severe crisis. In 2019, repeating the Istanbul-model, a multi-party coalition in Budapest defeated Viktor Orbán's party at the municipal election. Recently, an anti-populist grassroots movement in Italy Le Sardine stood up successfully against populism.

Salvini's League setbacks in January and September 2020 are associated with more autonomous political leaders in regional governments, a trajectory accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. These leaders' primary objective throughout 2020 was to counter the health crisis. In trying to "nationalise" regional elections amid an unexpected, deadly pandemic, Salvini's party ended up losing political ground.<sup>4</sup>

This analysis aligns well with DEMOS's preliminary results on the links between populism and governmental responses to the COVID-19 outbreak. The pandemic, at least in its first wave between March and June 2020, put the efficacy of populist tactics in question. A virus caused the pandemic, not a (political) enemy that populists could target and blame. The usual populist strategy of exploiting a crisis to garner political support, as populists successfully did during the financial crisis of 2008 and the migration crisis of 2015, found no echo in Spain, Italy, France, Germany, Czechia, Poland, the UK, nor, to some extent, in Hungary.<sup>5</sup>

These examples show that populism can be contained. But maintaining distrust in political elites and experts, associated with populists' capacities to adapt to political circumstances, provides evidence that it will remain strong in the political landscape, particularly where it has grown stronger. Hungary is an example. In a recent national multi-party coalition, opposition parties failed to oust Orbán's Fidesz party from power in the 2022 Parliamentary elections, held in April, despite the long-lasting enforcement of unpopular pandemic-related restrictions.

Fidesz's campaigning strategy was text-book populist, heavily targeting the EU, LGBTQI+ groups, and politically exploiting the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine to its advantage. Orbán's victory shows that populist messages based on fear and attacks continue to resonate to Hungarian citizens. Fidesz's victory, which renewed Orbán's supermajority in Parliament, will probably deepen Hungary's populist entrenchment. The decade-long right-wing populist turn has already had

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<sup>4</sup> See [Vampa \(2021\)](#).

<sup>5</sup> See [Bobbà and Hubé \(2021\)](#).

severe negative impacts on civil society, minority rights, and the rule of law, as DEMOS studies have found.<sup>6</sup>

### **POPULIST COMMUNICATION: MEDIA CONTAGION AND SOCIAL MEDIA EFFECTS**

Empirical evidence from DEMOS, stemming from expert interview analyses and case studies in Czechia, France, Italy, Poland, Spain and Slovakia, suggests that populism has had an influence on political journalism.

The Internet and the media market crisis have forced media outlets to keep reinventing themselves to find new audiences. In this context, political journalism has become more spectacular, fast, and reliant on politicians' day-to-day activities. Populism seems to have pushed that trend further, with political journalism not only covering populists more often, but also incorporating populism's divisive tone into political news at the cost of objectivity and investigation.<sup>7</sup>

Social media has also been shown to benefit populist actors: groups, parties, and supporters help populist views circulate widely on Facebook. This is a key takeaway from a DEMOS analysis on social media data from France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK.<sup>8</sup> These networks of populist supporters attack competing political parties or mainstream politicians with higher frequency and engage more often with populist content. Populist supporters also propagate populist language more often than supporters of mainstream politicians do in their comments to posts on social media.

### **POPULISM AND POLICY**

Using data from 27 European countries, DEMOS analysed public policies that have contributed to the ascension of populism. It explored linkages between policies implemented prior to the rise of populism and the electoral performance of populist parties.<sup>9</sup> Results show that most of the policy variables only weakly relate to the voting share of populist parties. The levels of expenditure in education and healthcare are not good predictors of populism. Expenditure in social protection does not show a significant connection with the tendency of citizens to vote for populists.

On the other hand, policy outputs of activation policies matter more: when the ratio of inactive people (neither in employment nor in education and training) is higher in the overall age cohort of 15-34 years, populist parties gain a higher share of the votes. The economic crisis had an impact through provoking an increase in poverty, social exclusion, and unemployment. In countries more socially vulnerable to the crisis, citizens supported left-wing populist parties significantly more than in the pre-crisis period. Finally, political party polarisation and technocratic governance have also contributed to the rise of populism in the past years.

These findings aggregate statistical and case studies analyses from all over Europe. Greece is an example illustrating each of the points mentioned above.

### **POPULIST EMOTIONS**

The country level findings previously discussed complement research results at the individual level of the citizens. DEMOS conducted an online survey in 15 European countries and found that negative emotions such as anger, contempt, and anxiety relate closely to populist attitudes.<sup>10</sup>

Compared to their emotions, individuals' socio-economic factors, such as their income, whether they are employed, and their level of education have no significant association with the development

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of Fidesz's use of law to promote a populist regime, see [Andreu et al. \(2020\)](#); [Hoffmann and Gárdos-Orosz \(2022\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> See [Bobba et al. \(2022\)](#).

<sup>8</sup> See [Sahin, Ianoşev, et al. \(2021\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> See [Bartha et al. \(2020\)](#).

<sup>10</sup> See [Abadi et al. \(2020\)](#).



of populist attitudes. The complementary results from the macro- and the micro-level analysis show the different factors behind the populist phenomenon.

### **FACING THE POPULIST CHALLENGE: DEMOCRATIC EFFICACY**

The idea that populism is especially strong in mobilising people is a part of the conceptual innovation of DEMOS. The project created the idea of democratic efficacy to analyse the interactions between some democratic skills and citizens' attitudes towards the political system expressed as a measure of political efficacy.<sup>11</sup>

Political efficacy is a well-known concept in political science and expresses two kinds of beliefs. One is about a person's own capacities to express his political interests (internal political efficacy). Another is about how open the political system is to the person's inputs (external political efficacy). Measures of political efficacy have been found to significantly relate to actual political participation. DEMOS assumed that democratic action needs both a quantitative element (that is, the political participation of many citizens) and a 'qualitative' element (rooted in political knowledge, skills, and commitment to democratic habits).

Democratic efficacy combines the attitudinal dimension of political efficacy with the measurable, 'objective' variables of democratic capacities. DEMOS tested the idea with data from international surveys and an online representative survey in 15 European countries. This is the first large-scale cross-national study in which these different sources of populism at both individual and country levels were measured.

Our research identified five types of skills and capacities that are important for improving democratic efficacy:

- 1) Factual political knowledge of citizens.
- 2) Habits of political news consumption.
- 3) Citizen's political reflexivity.
- 4) Support for core values of democracy (equality of interests, political autonomy, and reciprocity).
- 5) Political or civic skills.

According to European Social Survey data, only one fifth of respondents have all five democratic capacities, while the large majority of respondents have incomplete capacities. The share of people having incomplete democratic capacities constitutes 80% of the sample, with considerable variations across countries. Data also show that 41.8% of respondents in investigated countries have low levels of political efficacy, while 24.7% of them can be considered efficacious.<sup>12</sup>

It is very important to increase especially external political efficacy, as it is negatively correlated with populist attitudes. That is, externally politically efficacious people are less likely to develop populist views and attitudes. Low levels of political efficacy are widespread in Central and Eastern European countries. Interestingly, high internal political efficacy predicts stronger populist attitudes, which is logical (people believing in themselves tend to be critical of the elites), but democratic capacities counter this effect. That is, people with high democratic capacities have weaker populist attitudes even if they have high internal political efficacy feelings. However, democratic capacities do not reduce the populism-increasing effect of low external efficacy, which is, again, plausible. Dissatisfaction with the political opportunities offered by the system will not simply be reversed by strong democratic capacities.

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<sup>11</sup> See [Bene & Boda \(2020\)](#).

<sup>12</sup> For more, see [Morkevičius et al. \(2020\)](#).

Therefore fighting populism requires increasing both external political efficacy and democratic capacities.

## **THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS IN BOOSTING DEMOCRATIC EFFICACY**

Schools and civil society may also play an important role in increasing democratic efficacy.<sup>13</sup> School environment, DEMOS research finds, is key to enable future generations from developing populist mindsets. Bullying attitudes, for instance, have been found to foster bullies' exclusionary views which populist actors exploit; bullies are more likely to develop populist attitudes.<sup>14</sup>

Conversely, schools that provide students with civic engagement programmes and foster a school environment committed to a 'we-mentality' (that is, the idea that teachers and students can solve issues together like they are part of a community) are more likely to form students willing to engage with civic issues and avoiding a populist mentality.<sup>15</sup> Education policy largely depends on local settings. The level at which civic education courses and democratic schools are endorsed locally and consistently across the bloc, however, needs further research.

## **THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS (CSOs)**

Regarding CSOs, DEMOS research identified an existing portfolio of EU-funded NGO projects whose work might effectively address populism.<sup>16</sup> These organisations work with capacity building, awareness raising, narrative change, citizenship engagement, or deployment of training programmes. However, findings point to a lack of both resources and/or missed opportunities with building synergies with the EU and awareness of each other's work and objectives. In the absence of coordination and administrative support, these projects on democratic enhancement miss an opportunity to share best practices, expertise, and collaborate, practices that would otherwise improve reactions to exclusionary or anti-democratic populist actions. Challenges associated with this trend include lack of adequate funding and expertise allocation, timing and context-specific work, complexity of EU's funding structures, administrative requirements, and options and venues for synergy, as well as alignment of indicators of success.

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The several identified manifestations of populism and their implications for democracy demand streamlined policy responses. Thus, DEMOS formulates policy recommendations at five levels: institutional, public policy, political competition, citizen's political efficacy, the media and social media and research. However, any serious efforts to counter populism should start with identifying the very nature and patterns of the populism in question. These types have core commonalities, as discussed, but the phenomenon itself is highly malleable and varies across countries and cultures. Nonetheless, DEMOS policy recommendations align with policy-targeted messages formulated by its sister projects [POPREBEL](#) and [PaCE](#), which also analysed causes and consequences of populism in Europe.

## **GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES**

Regarding how institutions are set up and function, elected populist presidents or prime ministers tend to overuse their power and influence over other branches such as the legislature and the judiciary. That requires that political actors introduce more counterweights to the balance of powers in a given democracy. The best option is for national governments to introduce legislation with the following aims:

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<sup>13</sup> For details, see [Boda et al. \(2022\)](#).

<sup>14</sup> See [Keller et al. \(2022\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> See [Hüning \(2022\)](#).

<sup>16</sup> See [Lironi et al. \(2021\)](#).

- Limit the number of presidential mandates in presidential or semi-presidential systems.
- Limit or reduce the use of referendum as a day-to-day policy instrument. Referenda should be used only in special circumstances.
- Make it hard for constitutions to be easily amended. Some existing options include:
  - Establishing eternity (i.e. non-amendable) clauses (such as clauses on human rights and others).
  - Stronger scrutiny by constitutional courts on the observance of the constitutional reform procedure.
  - Laying down the requirement of a super-majority in parliament for the executive power to reform a country's constitution.
- Political reforms should provide legislatures with the appropriate institutional means and resources to check government actions (e.g. via stronger, better funded, and more specialised parliamentary committees).

## **POLICY CHOICES**

Regarding policy choices triggering populism, while there is no clear predictor of the rise of populism but a combination of several circumstances, DEMOS suggests that policy address three aspects:

- Strengthen active labour market policy measures to integrate youth into the labour market and/or into the educational and training system to weaken the populist appeal.
- Avoid crisis management in technocratic governments as much as possible, as the lack of democratic mandates tends to strengthen populism.
- Legitimise policy reforms via democratic procedures and appropriate communication rather than through technocratic arguments.

## **ELECTIONS**

Regarding political and electoral competition, it is advisable that:

- Electoral rules should be fair, stable, and overseen by established electoral missions while access to campaign resources should be equitable and transparent.
- Political parties should seek to avoid polarisation. Further, political parties should converge on policy choices, particularly with reference to social development.
- Political parties should develop effective communication means to counter populist communication, avoiding further polarisation of the political debate and considering the specificities of the given type of populism.

## **POPULIST COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA LITERACY**

Regarding the links between populist communication and professional media as well as social media, it is advisable that:

- Modern news literacy, critical thinking, fact-checking (through curricula, tools, games, platforms, community institutions, and the media themselves) should be offered and scaled up as to help European citizens understand, discern, and effectively counter fake news.
- National policymakers should be encouraged to work more closely with social media platforms to conform to legal requirements and strengthen responses to hate speech. A current bloc-wide approach to tackling hate speech is missing.
- Policies should incentivise independent journalism and/or the public service media model, particularly through public service journalism. While respecting freedom of the press, there is a need to legislate and enforce stricter standards of journalistic integrity for organisations that provide and/or reproduce news content.
- Mainstream politicians should focus on citizen-oriented message. Instead of adopting populist communication, democratic politicians should consider social fears, anxieties, and adequately respond to these, preferably with citizens via forums and assemblies. Mechanisms to define baselines of journalistic independence and raise awareness of acts of pressure and unethical behaviour should be created to empower informed decisions on investments, journalistic quality, and status of a given media landscape.

## **CITIZENS, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS, AND THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS**



Concerning citizens' political efficacy there is a need to enhance democratic capacities in all European countries. Promoting social integration as well as quality journalism would help boost democratic efficacy: a vaccine against populist support and attitudes.

- Policymakers should support and encourage civic education and anti-bullying programmes at schools (thus enabling democratic values and practices), media literacy campaigns, and more quality, independent journalism to help citizens, and youth in particular, develop political knowledge, reflexive political news consumption, and democratic habits to mitigate the likelihood of exclusionary populist attitudes.
- Policies should help prepare schoolteachers to respond to highly politicized topics which students pick up on day-to-day class discussions as to avoid polarisation and discrimination against minorities. New methods and tools that put students into leading positions against threats to democratic norms are effective educational materials.<sup>17</sup>
- Citizens should be provided with more opportunities to participate in local decision making structures and politics at all levels, with the aid of media campaigns that are consistent, targeted, and easy to understand.

Concerning civil society organisations, evidence suggests that:

- Civil society organisations working on projects that can effectively address core populist challenges should be provided with opportunity structures to work collaboratively (among themselves but also with the EU) and mitigate administrative burdens. Policy efforts in that direction include:
  - Establishing/refining public funding for innovative practices addressing populist impacts as well as launching targeted communication strategies that reach projects working on these topics.
  - Proactively using projects' results for legislation and decision making in greater cooperation with funded projects across Europe.
  - Facilitating synergies between projects addressing populism by establishing or supporting existing channels.

## **ENHANCING RESEARCH**

To refine future policy and academic analyses of populist manifestations and impacts, DEMOS recommends that:

- International social surveys (especially the ESS and Eurobarometer) should include more systematic measures of political knowledge, political news consumption, political reflexivity, and political or civic skills into their questionnaires on a regular basis across all countries. These items and scales are important indicators of the health of contemporary democracies and should enable future research to enhance the idea of democratic efficacy, which can be measured with these indicators.
- More attention should be devoted to citizen's emotional expressions across the media and society at large. In particular, the mutual influence of news media (journalists) and political speeches (politicians) in evoking emotional reactions by citizens through social media (the public), and vice versa, should be analysed by governmental institutions, think tanks and academia.

## **RESEARCH PARAMETERS**

DEMOS – Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe is a three-year collaborative research project with 15 consortium members across Europe. DEMOS is funded by the European Commission under the Horizon 2020 framework programme. It started in December 2018 with two general objectives:

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<sup>17</sup> For information on DEMOS-generated educational materials against fake news and dividing populist views, see the policy brief on democratic capacities.

1. DEMOS aims at better understanding of the populist phenomenon by identifying and filling existing lacunas in the literature. More specifically, the project will study the conditions and contexts of populism with an emphasis on its socio-psychological roots, while concurrently analysing the varieties of populism across Europe – building on the assumption that populism has both generalisable socio-psychological foundations and many context-bound manifestations rooted in history, culture and specific socio-economic conditions. The project has devoted attention to ‘populism in action’, that is, exploring the impact and consequences of populist governance and policymaking across several levels – from the individual to the supranational – acknowledging that recently the influence of populism has increased dramatically and gained power in several countries. Last, but not least, the project will shed light on the responses and reactions of social actors to the challenge of populism, identifying coping strategies, good practices, successes and failures, as well as forecast probable scenarios.
2. DEMOS aims at addressing the challenge of populism through the operationalisation of the concept of ‘democratic efficacy’. The project will study the potential of democratic efficacy to counter populism through experiments and action research, devoting special attention to the youth, studying schools and educational measures, and developing educational tools as well as policy recommendations on how to boost civic awareness and reflective engagement through increasing democratic efficacy.

## **THE DEMOS RESEARCH**

The results and policy formulation presented in this policy brief stem from research done within the DEMOS project. Each work package works in synergy with the aims of the project. We briefly summarize key topics in each work packages as follows:

- WP2 (conceptualising varieties of populism) included five different tasks that jointly aimed to detect and explain types of populism in Europe today.
  - First, a critical survey of the conceptualizations of populism and the variety of populisms based on academic literature;
  - Second, a comparative expert survey of populist parties in today’s Europe, in order to construct a typology of populist political parties;
  - Third, a comparative survey of different populist discourses in today’s Europe using the Facebook communication of populist parties and leaders;
  - Fourth, a comparative expert survey on the institutional contexts (primarily, constitutions) facilitating or constraining the rise of populism; and
  - Fifth, an analysis of public policies in selected EU countries, triggering the rise of populism.
- WP3 (conceptualising and measuring democratic efficacy) analysed the ideas of political efficacy and democratic capacities using data of international surveys (ESS and ISSP) as well as a representative online survey conducted in 15 European countries.
- WP4 (social and psychological roots of populism) studied the role of emotions in grounding populist attitudes. The work referred to above relies on the analysis of the data of DEMOS’s online survey.
- WP5 (populist policymaking and populism in governance) created the idea of populist governance, which ignores policy expertise, tends to enforce reforms, and legitimise policy choice by resorting to appealing communicative style.
- WP6 (impacts of populism: law, politics, and people) assessed populist trends and influence over judicial practice and norms. It found that populists usually resort to deep constitutional changes to increase their power, destabilising the balance of powers.
- WP7 (Responding to populism – democratic efficacy at work) analysed citizens reactions to populism, the role of civil society stakeholders in addressing populist challenges, and legal analysis. The work referred to in this policy brief stems from comparative analysis of EU-based civil society practices, focus groups with citizens in five European countries, and data analysis of Facebook data from populist and followers’ interactions across nine European countries (France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey and the UK).

- WP8 (Improving democratic efficacy: action research and pilot projects) used previous DEMOS research, particularly on democratic efficacy, to create a game, tools, and educational materials that have been tested to have a positive impact in boosting civic engagement among youth. Civic engagement and school environment play a key role in helping students develop skills, values, and political knowledge needed to counter populist tendencies and attitudes.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

<b>PROJECT NAME</b>	'Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe' — 'DEMOS'
<b>COORDINATOR</b>	Centre for Social Sciences (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Centre of Excellence), Budapest, Hungary. Contact email address: Zsolt BODA, Principal Investigator. Email: <a href="mailto:Boda.Zsolt@tk.mta.hu">Boda.Zsolt@tk.mta.hu</a>
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<b>FUNDING SCHEME</b>	Horizon 2020 Framework Programme for Research and Innovation (2014-2020), Societal Challenge 6 – 'Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies', topic GOVERNANCE-03-2018 'Addressing populism and boosting civic and democratic engagement'.

<b>DURATION</b>	December 2018 – May 2022 (42 months).
<b>BUDGET</b>	EU contribution: € 3,037,781.25
<b>WEBSITE</b>	<a href="https://demos-h2020.eu/">https://demos-h2020.eu/</a>
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<b>FURTHER MATERIALS</b>	<a href="http://www.demos-h2020.eu/">www.demos-h2020.eu/</a> <a href="https://www.twitter.com/DEMOS_H2020">www.twitter.com/DEMOS_H2020</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/DEMOSH2020">www.facebook.com/DEMOSH2020</a> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/DEMOSH2020">www.youtube.com/DEMOSH2020</a> <a href="https://www.anchor.fm/demos-h2020">www.anchor.fm/demos-h2020</a>

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