

13 United in diversity?

The preferences of populist parties in the European Parliament

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Introduction

Nationalists, populists and anti-European parties entered the European Parliament in 2014 and since then have gained important electoral results in almost all European states. These parties emerged as new political actors since they were able to capitalise on citizens' discontent toward the economic crisis, distrust towards political institutions and to take advantage of the 'window of opportunity' provided by the redefinition of Western political and party systems.¹

Their increased relevance on the political scene has attracted the attention of several scholars; nevertheless, while research about electoral campaigns, voter motivations and party families abound, very little is known about the attitude of populists towards European policies. The chapter aims to fill this gap by looking at how populist parties voted on some dossiers during the VIII Parliamentary term (2014–2019) in order to assess what their attitude was towards European issues, whether they were able to influence ballots, and whether they have been cohesive in contesting the European Union (EU).

Defining populism

Notwithstanding the fact that populism has been attracting academic attention for years, there is still no commonly accepted definition. In one of the most influential publications on populism, Mudde defines populism as

a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.²

In line with this definition, populist messages would be characterised by: 1) a sharp criticism of the elites and the establishment; 2) the importance attached to the concept of popular sovereignty; 3) the belief that people are misrepresented in politics.³

Caiani and Graziano⁴ proposed that populism represents a multifaceted concept. It can, in fact, designate:

- 1 An ideology that contrasts the virtues of the ‘people’ against the ‘establishment’ or the ‘ruling elite’.
- 2 A rhetoric which de-legitimises old mainstream parties and their proposals and supports new political actors.
- 3 An informal communication style that proposes easy solutions to complex problems.
- 4 A political organisation characterised by a concentration of power in the hands of a leader and by a personalisation of the relationship between a party leader and party members.

Yet populism is far from being a homogeneous political concept. In the academic literature, authors distinguish between right-wing and left-wing populist movements. For Abts and Rummens,⁵ right-wing populism refers to the ethnic nation, whereas left-wing populism identifies the ‘people’ in socio-economic terms, such as the working class exploited by the bourgeois elite. Within right-wing populists, Zulianello⁶ identifies populist radical right parties, Mudde⁷ neoliberal populists, and Pankowski and Kormak⁸ national-conservative populists. More specifically, for Falkner and Plattner⁹ populist radical right parties are ‘populist’ because they represent themselves as the unique legitimate representatives of the people or, in Kriesi’s words: they ‘mobilize in the name of “the people”’.¹⁰ They are radical because they oppose some principles of liberal democracy such as ‘pluralism and the constitutional protection of minorities’,¹¹ and they can be placed on the right side of the political spectrum because they believe ‘the main inequalities between people to be natural and outside the purview of the state’.¹²

Left-wing populists, on the other side, merge populism with variously defined forms of socialism and, therefore, they can be classified as social populists and national-social populists¹³ as they combine left-wing populist claims with nationalism.

This dual categorisation of populism, nevertheless, is still not exhaustive as it is incapable of grasping more nuanced types of populism such as that expressed by the Italian Five Star Movement (FSM). Caiani and Graziano, for instance, define it as a form of ‘hybrid populism’,¹⁴ since FSM ‘adopts an ideologically eclectic mix of policy positions and does not clearly locate itself on either the left or the right flank of the party system’.¹⁵ Similarly, Zulianello refers to FSM as a form of ‘valence populism’ since it ‘predominantly, if not exclusively, compete[s] by focusing on non-positional issues such as the fight against corruption, increased transparency, democratic reform and moral integrity, while emphasising anti-establishment motives’.¹⁶ To cope with this theoretical challenge, we decide to follow Caiani and Graziano’s approach,¹⁷ which moves beyond the traditional left-wing/ right-wing political

continuum and distinguishes between inclusionary and exclusionary populism.¹⁸ Inclusionary and exclusionary populism identifies a different way of defining the ‘other(s)’; it refers to a different idea about how resources should be distributed among social groups; and it appeals to forms of political mobilisation that go beyond representative democratic channels. In inclusionary European populism, the ‘other’ is represented by the economic oligarchy, the media, the judiciary and foreign capital. In exclusionary European populism, the ‘other’ is mostly formed of immigrants and people who are ‘culturally different’.

Populists and the European Union

All European populist parties promote a form of Euroscepticism that ranges between hard and soft positions. This attitude stems from the underlying idea that the EU has produced economic inequalities and a cultural clash due to its subjugation by neoliberal globalisation, the promotion of progressive social values – among which are racial and gender equality – and multiculturalism.¹⁹

Following their ‘anti-elite rhetoric’, populist parties usually support ‘the Europe of peoples’ vs ‘the Europe of institutions’, the latter being a project run by European political elites and big member states against masses and small and less powerful member states²⁰. Thus, in general terms, they express a disagreement with European policies, political elites and values²¹.

More precisely, exclusionary populists are usually hard Eurosceptic as they heavily oppose European integration and the euro. They are typically nationalists, xenophobic and anti-immigration, and they also adopt a clear anti-establishment stance since EU institutions and leaders are considered responsible for inaction, or ‘wrong’ actions under austerity.²² On the other side, inclusionary populists tend to be soft Eurosceptics. They oppose European integration and are critics of the European Commission, the European Central Bank and lobbies; they also deplore the EU’s lack of transparency and its corruption. But they are in favour of immigration and of a stronger role for the EU in security.

With reference to Italian parties, the Northern League (NL) and FSM adopt a populist anti-European attitude while Forza Italia (FI) is in favour of EU membership.²³ For the NL, the European people are inherently uncorrupted against European institutions – particularly the European Commission (EC) and the European Central Bank (ECB). ‘The EU process as a whole is represented very negatively (a ‘deception’) as the product of an anti-democratic global ideology, aiming at the dismantling of the European system of social rights’.²⁴ FSM is against the European oligarchy as well (‘American-English-German finance’) while FI represents the EU as ‘an instrument to support and reinvigorate freedom’.²⁵

An important aspect of the position adopted by populist parties towards the European Union emerges during European electoral campaigns. Populist

parties, in fact, usually attack the EU and claim they would change its policies from the inside during their mandate. Remarkably, whilst there is a tremendous body of literature on populist electoral campaigns and messages about the European Union,²⁶ literature on the behaviour of these parties inside the European Parliament (EP) is still scarce (for an exception to this rule see De Lange et al.).²⁷ Our contribution aims at analysing this aspect by assessing whether populist parties elected to the EP have adopted a critical attitude towards European issues, whether they were able to influence the adoption or rejection of dossiers through their voting behaviour, and whether they were cohesive in contesting the EU as populist groups.

Methodology and data

In order to answer to our research questions, we analysed how populist parties elected to the EP voted during the VIII Parliamentary term (2014–2019) on some specific issues – *privatisation of water, reduction of car emissions, gender equality, and immigration*. We selected these four dossiers because they represent critical cases²⁸ of contentious issues voted on in the EP plenary for which we found data on ballots available on the VoteWatch database (see end-note 30). Furthermore, these are cases where a ‘populist’ (i.e. against the élite) position can easily be hypothesised, and where the nuances between the two types of populism (inclusionary vs. exclusionary) could also be hypothesised (as in the case of gender equality and immigration). For each dossier we analyse: 1) if each MEP of populist parties cast a roll-call vote in favour or against the legislative act under discussion in the EP plenary; and 2) whether the national party was loyal to the European political group, i.e. whether the national party voted following the indication expressed by the European political group it belonged to or if it was a ‘rebel’, i.e. it did not follow the voting indication.

European populist parties were classified according to the inclusionary/exclusionary criterion.²⁹

For each dossier we counted the number of votes expressed by each MEP in each national populist party and we classified them along four categories: for, against, abstention, no vote. We assigned the party to the category according to votes expressed by the majority of MEPs. If a majority was not identifiable, we did not assign a party to any specific category, but we mention it in the comments attached to the tables.

The votes cast by each party in the EP were collected from the VoteWatch Europe database,³⁰ while explanations of MEPs’ votes were extracted from documents available on the EP website.

Due to its exploratory nature and the use of mere descriptive statistics, our research clearly suffers from the limitation of external validity. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it proves useful in order to initiate a discussion on voting behaviour inside the EP as a proxy of the *real* attitude of populist parties towards European policies outside of the rhetoric they espouse.

Populist parties in the European Parliament

The 2019 European parliamentary elections raised concerns among several observers about the possible wins by Eurosceptic, nationalist and populist parties.³¹ Remarkably, even though the elections testified to a dramatic increase in electoral participation after almost 20 years of decline,³² anti-European parties did not perform any better than five years previously, and mainstream parties performed relatively well.³³ While ‘mainstream’ parties gained 75% of the EP seats in 2014 (= n. 566), in 2019 they lost only 4% of seats (= n. 33). Exclusionary populist parties gained 148 seats out of 749 in 2014 (= 19.75%) and 178 out of 751 in 2019 (= 23.7%) while inclusionary populists gained 35 seats in 2014 (= 4.65%) and 40 seats in 2019 (= 5.02%). Hence, in total, populists gained 4.6% of seats with reference to 2014 (see Tables 13.1 and 13.2).

If we look at the composition of European party groups (see Table 13.3), we can observe that four exclusionary populist parties which were members of the group Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF) in 2014 moved to the new group Identity and Democracy (ID), three from the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ERC) moved to ID, one party moved to the European Popular Party (EPP) while one party belonging to the group Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD) moved to the non-attached members (NI). Finally, the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) was transformed into the Renew Europe group. Interestingly, whilst the total net gain in terms of seats of populists was limited, some national parties performed quite well in the 2019 elections, such as the Italian NL that increased from 5 to 28 seats, the Polish Law and Justice (PiS) that increased from 19 to 26 seats, and Alternative for Germany that increased from 7 to 11 seats. Among the inclusionary populist parties, Syriza did not increase its

Table 13.1 Populist parties’ seats in the EP (VIII and IX legislatures)

<i>Seats</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>Var.%</i>
Exclusionary	148	178	+3.95
Inclusionary	35	40	+0.65
Total	183	218	+4.60

Table 13.2 Number of populist parties in the EP (VIII and IX legislatures)

<i>Parties</i>	<i>2014</i>	<i>2019</i>
Exclusionary	24	23
Inclusionary	5	8
Total	29	31

Table 13.3 Populist parties in the EP (VIII and IX legislatures)

<i>Country</i>	<i>Populist Party</i>	<i>Abbr.</i>	<i>Type of populism (inclusionary/ exclusionary)</i>	<i>EP group 2014</i>	<i>N. seats</i>	<i>EP group 2019</i>	<i>N. seats</i>
Austria	Freedom Party of Austria	FPÖ	Exclusionary	ENF	4	ID	3
Belgium	Flemish Interest - Vlaams Belang	VB	Exclusionary	ENF	1	ID	3
Bulgaria	Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria	GERB	Exclusionary	EPP	6	EPP	6
Bulgaria	Bulgaria Without Censorship/ Reload Bulgaria	BBT-BBZ	Exclusionary	ECR	2	-	0
Croatia	Human Shield	ZZ	Inclusionary	-	0	NI	1
Czech Republic	ANO 2011	ANO 2011	Exclusionary	ALDE	4	RENEW EUROPE	6
Czech Republic	Dawn of direct democracy/ National Coalition	USVIT	Exclusionary	-	0	NI	2
Denmark	Danish People's Party	DF	Exclusionary	ECR	4	ID	1
Estonia	Estonian Reform Party/ Conservative People's Party	EKRE	Exclusionary	-	0	ID	1
Finland	Finns Party/ /True Finns	PS	Exclusionary	ECR	2	ID	2
France	National Front	FN	Exclusionary	ENF	24	ID	22
France	Unbowed France	LFI	Inclusionary	-	0	GUE/NGL	6
Germany	Alternative for Germany	AfD	Exclusionary	ECR	7	ID	11
Germany	Left Party	LINKE	Inclusionary	GUE/NGL	7	GUE/NGL	5
Germany	National Democratic Party of Germany	NPD	Exclusionary	NI	1	-	0
Greece	Greek Solution	EL	Exclusionary	-	0	ECR	1
Greece	Coalition of the Radical Left	SYRIZA	Inclusionary	GUE/NGL	6	GUE/NGL	6
Greece	Independent Greeks	ANEL	Exclusionary	ERC	1	-	0
Greece	Golden Dawn	GD	Exclusionary	NI	3	NI	2

Hungary	Hungarian Civic Union	Fidesz	Exclusionary	EPP	11	EPP	13
Hungary	The Movement for a Better Hungary	JOBBIK	Exclusionary	NI	3	NI	1
Ireland	Sinn Féin	SF	Inclusionary	GUE/NGL	3	GUE/NGL	1
Italy	Brothers of Italy	FdI	Exclusionary	-	0	ECR	5
Italy	Five Star Movement	M5S	Inclusionary	EFDD	17	NI	14
Italy	Go Italy/People of Freedom	FI	Exclusionary	EPP	13	EPP	6
Italy	League (formerly Northern League)	LN	Exclusionary	ENF	5	ID	28
Latvia	For Fatherland and Freedom	LNNK	Exclusionary	ECR	1	-	0
Lithuania	Order and Justice	TT	Exclusionary	EFDD	2	-	0
Netherlands	Forum for Democracy	FvD	Exclusionary	-	0	ECR	3
Netherlands	Party for Freedom	PVV	Exclusionary	ENF	4	-	0
Netherlands	Socialist Party	SP	Inclusionary	GUE/NGL	2	-	0
Poland	Law and Justice	PiS	Exclusionary	ECR	19	ECR	26
Poland	Congress of the New Right	KNP	Exclusionary	NI	4	-	0
Slovakia	Ordinary People and Independent Personalities	OLANO	Exclusionary	ECR	1	EPP	1
Slovenia	List of Marjan Šarec	LMS	Inclusionary	-	0	RENEW EUROPE	2
Spain	We can	Podemos	Inclusionary	-	0	GUE/NGL	5
Spain	Vox	Vox	Exclusionary	-	0	ECR	3
Sweden	Sweden Democrats	SD	Exclusionary	EFDD	2	ECR	3
United Kingdom	United Kingdom Independent Party	UKIP	Exclusionary	EFDD	24	-	0
United Kingdom	Brexit Party	BP	Exclusionary	-	0	NI	29
TOTAL					183		218

Sources: Adapted from Caiani & Graziano (2019) and Zulianello (2019).

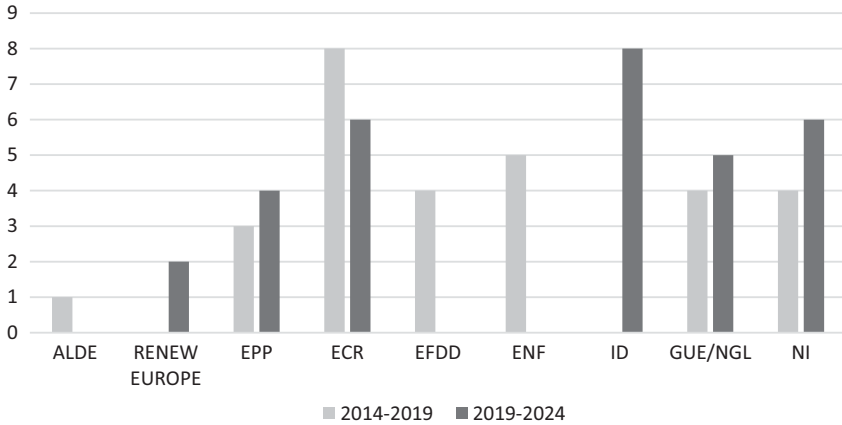


Figure 13.1 Number of populist parties in each European political group (VIII and IX legislatures).

seats, FSM lost three seats but Podemos won five extra seats. The number of populist parties represented in the EP rose from 29 to 31 in 2019 but, interestingly, this was mainly due to the fact that the number of inclusionary populist parties increased by three units while the number of exclusionary parties decreased by one unit.

If we look at Figure 13.1 we can see that in the VIII Legislature the majority of inclusionary populist parties (= 4 out of 5) were members of the radical left group GUE/NGL while FSM was a member of the EFDD group. Exclusionary populist parties were split among different right-wing groups with a slight majority of them concentrated into the ECR group (= n. 8). In the current legislature, the majority of inclusionary groups are members of GUE/NGL (5 out of 8) but two parties are now in the NI group (ZZ and FSM) and one is a member of Renew Europe (LMS). Exclusionary populists are still split among right-wing groups, but they are now more concentrated in the ID new group (8 out of 23), ECR (6 out of 23), EPP (4 out of 23), NI (4 out of 23) and Renew Europe (1 out of 23).

As we will see in the final section of this contribution, the decision to adhere to a political group in the EP is extremely relevant in terms of political weight inside party coalitions and voting strategy.

Populist parties and voting behaviour in the European Parliament: four case studies

The literature on the EP highlighted that party behaviour is mainly influenced by left-right ideology and that conflicts usually arise on economic issues due to the nature of the competence of the EP on the Internal Market.³⁴ Moreover,

Hix and Noury³⁵ found that the majority of MEPs vote increasingly along transnational party lines, while MEPs from Central and Eastern Europe tend to vote slightly more along national lines and that cohesion of European political groups has increased.

Previous research on right-wing populist parties pinpointed that they are not a unitary group and that their voting behaviour is less coherent than other transnational parties.³⁶ Exclusionary populist parties have, in fact, different ideological orientations that can be hard to reconcile; therefore, during the VIII legislature, these parties were not able to form a unitary group.

Moreover, exclusionary populists manifested a low degree of cohesion when voting.³⁷

Right2Water

On 8 September 2015 a Motion for Resolution that called on the Commission to come forward with legislative proposals that would recognise universal access and the human right to water and that pushed for the exclusion of water services from trade agreements was voted on. The Motion followed the Right2Water European citizens' initiative (ECI). The text regretted that the Communication from the Commission did not meet the specific demands made in the initiative and that the response given by the Commission to the Right2Water ECI was insufficient.

The majority of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) voted for its adoption (363 votes, 53%), 96 MEPs voted against (14%), and 231 abstained (33%). The majority was formed by S&D, GUE and Greens and EFDD (among which was FSM). MEPs from inclusionary populist parties all voted for the motion to support public water while MEPs from exclusionary populist parted adopted different positions (see Table 13.4). They mainly voted against the resolution, following the voting indication made by ERC and ENF but PiS abstained, BBT-BZZ didn't vote, while VB, FPO, ANEL OLANO and NL voted for. One MEP from AFD abstained and the other one didn't vote. Yet the EFDD group, indicated that it would vote for the Motion, but UKIP voted against. Exclusionary populists supported it because they were against privatisation, like NL. MEPs who abstained or voted against complained that the text was too superficial and did not sufficiently explain the EP's position on water privatisation.

Table 13.4 Populist parties' positions (Right2Water)

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstentions</i>	<i>No Vote</i>
Inclusionary	5	0	0	0
Exclusionary	9	8	5	1
Total	14	8	6	0

Table 13.5 Loyalty/rebellion of populist parties (Right2Water)

	<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Rebel</i>
ALDE	1	0
EPP	3	0
ECR	3	5
GUE	4	0
EFDD	3	1
ENF	2	3
Total	16	9

Hence the majority of populist parties were loyal to their political groups, like all parties belonging to ALDE, GUE/NGL and the EPP, and the majority of parties belonging to the EFDD. Among the exclusionary populists, nevertheless, there were some rebel parties like those within ECR and ENF (see Table 13.5).

Car emissions

On 3 January 2016, MEPs voted on the Parliamentary objection pursuant to Rule 106 on emissions from light passenger and commercial vehicles (Euro 6) on a draft Commission regulation amending Regulation (EC) No 692/2008 as regards emissions from light passenger and commercial vehicles (Euro 6). The Commission proposed raising diesel car emission limits by up to 110% as part of a package to introduce the Real Driving Emissions (RDE) test procedure³⁸ but the Parliament issued an objection supported by a coalition made up of the Socialists, Greens/EFA, GUE-NGL and ALDE, who argued that the plans to relax the limits would weaken the enforcement of existing EU standards. The objection was rejected with 323 votes (46%) from the EPP and ENF against 317 (45%) votes for and 61 abstentions. Exclusionary populists, in fact, rebuffed the Objection since they considered it exceeded EU competences and supported the Commission's proposal. Inclusionary populists who proposed the Objection considered the text of the Regulation to be the result of a strong lobbying action mounted by the car industry.

Remarkably, while inclusionary populists voted as a whole for the Objection, exclusionary populists expressed different positions. The majority of them were against it but BBT-BZZ, PS, AFD, ANEL, FSM and FPÖ voted for, while LNNK didn't vote (see Table 13.6).

Inclusionary populists from GUE/NGL were loyal to their group but FSM was not, since the EFDD had directed members to abstain. Populist parties belonging to ALDE, ERC, ENFF and ENF voted in a less cohesive way (see Table 13.7).

Table 13.6 Populist parties' positions (car emissions)

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstentions</i>	<i>No Vote</i>
Inclusionary	5	0	0	0
Exclusionary	8	11	3	1
Total	13	11	3	1

Table 13.7 Loyalty/rebellion of populist parties (car emissions)

	<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Rebel</i>
ALDE	0	1
EPP	3	0
ECR	3	5
GUE	4	0
EFDD	2	2
ENF	3	2
Total	15	10

Gender equality

On 3 March 2015, the EP voted on the Motion of a Resolution based on the Report prepared by the Women's Rights Committee on progress on equality between women and men in the European Union in 2013. The report called on member states and the European Commission to mainstream gender in all policies, to fight against female poverty, social exclusion and gender violence, to promote the equal participation of men and women in the labour market and within decision-making institutions, to reduce the gender pay gap and pension gap, and finally to combat gender stereotypes. A controversial issue was the legalisation of abortion and the improvement of women's access to sexual and reproductive health services. In Recital 44, in fact, the Report maintained that 'women must have control over their sexual and reproductive health and rights, not least by having ready access to contraception and abortion'.

The Motion was supported by a left coalition made up of S&D, Greens, GUE/NGL, ALDE, half of the EPP and FSM and passed with 441 votes for (63%), 205 against (29%), and 52 abstentions (7%).

Inclusionary populists were all in favour of the Motion, apart from Sinn Fein which abstained. Exclusionary populists voted against the Motion as they did not approve the mention of quota systems to increase representation in institutions or abortion legalisation. But GERB, ANEL, and SD voted for it, while ANO 2011 abstained. Within the EPP, half of MEPs from FI

Table 13.8 Number of votes expressed by populist parties (gender equality)

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstentions</i>	<i>No Vote</i>
Inclusionary	4	0	1	0
Exclusionary	3	16	3	0
Total	7	16	4	0

Table 13.9 Loyalty/rebellion of populist parties (gender equality)

	<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Rebel</i>
ALDE	0	1
EPP	1	2
ECR	7	1
GUE	4	0
EFDD	1	3
ENF	5	0
Total	18	7

voted for the Motion and half against. Within EFDD, one MEP from TT voted against the Motion and one abstained. Of the three MEPs from Jobbik (NI) one voted against the Motion, one abstained and one did not vote (see Table 13.8).

Once again, inclusionary populists voted compactly while exclusionary populists, apart from groups in ENF, were split among different positions. Rebels were present in the EPP that indicated they would vote against the Motion, and in the EFDD that called for abstention (see Table 13.9).

Immigration

On 9 September 2015, MEPs voted on the Joint Motion for a Resolution on Migration and Refugees in Europe, on refugee relocation and resettlement, calling on the Commission to amend the Dublin Regulation to include a permanently binding system for the distribution of asylum seekers among the 28 member states. The resolution asked member states and the EU to prevent refugees' deaths, to show solidarity and to share responsibilities in managing the refugee crisis.

The text was adopted with 432 votes in favour, 132 against and 57 abstentions. The Motion was supported by S&D, GUE/NGL, the Greens together with EPP, and ALDE. All of the inclusionary parties voted for the Motion, apart from SD, which did not vote on it. Almost all of the exclusionary populist parties voted against it (see Table 13.10) since they did not accept the relocation mechanisms proposed by the Commission.

Table 13.10 Number of votes expressed by populist parties (immigration)

	<i>For</i>	<i>Against</i>	<i>Abstentions</i>	<i>No Vote</i>
Inclusionary	4	0	0	1
Exclusionary	3	19	1	1
Total	7	19	1	2

Table 13.11 Loyalty/rebellion of populist parties (immigration)

	<i>Loyal</i>	<i>Rebel</i>
ALDE	0	1
EPP	2	1
ECR	7	1
GUE	3	1
EFDD	2	2
ENF	5	0
Total	19	6

Populist parties were basically loyal toward their political groups, but some defections occurred. ALDE and the EPP supported the Commission's proposal so they indicated that they were going to vote for the Motion but ANO 2011 and Fidesz voted against; EFDD and ECR indicated to vote against the Motion because they did not accept the relocation mechanism, but ANEL and FSM voted for it while TT abstained (see Table 13.11).

Interestingly, VoteWatch reported that in the EPP, MEPs from Fidesz voted against the motion and MEPs from the Poland delegation abstained.³⁹

Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the roll-call votes expressed by populist parties in the EP on the Motions for resolutions concerning the privatisation of water, reduction of car emissions, gender equality, and immigration highlight some similar patterns. Motions were usually aimed at promoting citizen and consumer rights and at protecting the environment and were supported by the centre-left coalitions made up of S&D, the Greens, EPP and ALDE. In all the ballots, inclusionary populists participated in the above-mentioned coalition, voted consistently for the proposals and were able to have them adopted. Exclusionary populists, in contrast, were able to gain a positive result only in the case of the objection to car emissions thanks to an alliance between the EPP and ENF.

Interestingly, inclusionary populists usually voted together while exclusionary populist were less cohesive. In two ballots they were split among in

favour, against and abstained, with a slight majority voting against the three motions. They were cohesive only when they voted against the gender equality report and the refugee relocation mechanism, but they were unable to block the motions.

As already highlighted in the literature, exclusionary populists tend not to have a common ideological orientation since, albeit placeable on the right-wing side of the political spectrum, they have very different ideological backgrounds and opinions toward privatisation, liberalisation and the free market, and environmental protection.⁴⁰ On economic issues, they are usually divided between liberal and socialist orientations. On environmental issues they are usually against European intervention because they perceive it as expensive, imposing unfair regulation, undermining national sovereignty, and a threat to the national economy and employment. Yet parties like Fidesz and PiS are favourable towards such a common policy.

In contrast, gender inequalities and migration represent unifying issues around which they were capable of aggregating some degree of consensus. Gender equality mobilises anti-progressive and confessional positions while anti-immigration brings together xenophobes and nationalists, all pooled together by the idea that ‘different people’, whether women or migrants, should be excluded.

If we look at the internal cohesion⁴¹ of European political groups, ENF and EFDD are the European political groups with more ‘rebel’ parties (see Table 13.12). On specific issues, MEPs voted along national lines rather than ideological ones. For instance, in the case of Right2water and gender equality, the majority of parties from Central and Eastern Europe were against a European policy. In relation to immigration, Italy (League) and Central and Eastern Europe were all against the quota mechanism.

The low rate of cohesion has an impact on the capacity of populist parties to influence ballots and, in fact, the least cohesive parties also have the lowest winning rate. Moreover, they had a low capacity to collaborate with centrist parties that influence ballots. Grand coalitions between S&D and EPP, which decided roughly 74% of votes in the VIII legislature and EP procedures, push parties to engage in inter-group collaboration. But internal divisions and a lack of capacity to collaborate makes populists (especially exclusionary ones)

Table 13.12 Degree of cohesion and winning rate of European political groups

<i>Political Groups</i>	<i>Cohesion</i>	<i>Winning Rate</i>
GUE	86%	50%
ECR	81%	56%
EFDD	59%	24%
ENF	76%	44%

Source: VoteWatch (www.votewatch.eu).

unable to influence the adoption or rejection of dossiers through their voting behaviour.

To cope with this problem, in the IX Parliamentary term the political groups ENF and EFDD merged to create the ID group, and was also joined by parties from ECR.

To conclude, what our exploratory research tells us is that: first, there are substantial policy differences between inclusionary and exclusionary populist parties, as particularly noticed in the *gender equality* and *immigration* policy votes; second, the populist parties are not very cohesive (especially the exclusionary ones); third, the inclusionary populist parties are more capable of ‘winning a deal’ in terms of having decisions passed within the European Parliament. These exploratory findings are very promising, although they need to be further corroborated by future research.

In fact, further research on the current legislature (2019–2024) should be done to investigate the impact of the new political group on ballots and to assess whether exclusionary and inclusionary populists are influencing the content of legislative acts.

Notes

- 1 Manuela Caiani and Paolo R Graziano, ‘Varieties of Populism: Insights from the Italian Case’, (2016), 46, *Italian Political Science Review*, 2, 243–267; Manuela Caiani and Paolo Graziano, ‘Understanding varieties of populism in times of crises’, (2019), 42, *West European Politics*, 6, 1141–1158.
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