



Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

Working Paper

## **Impacts of Populism on the Party Systems**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the influence populist parties exert on other political parties and the party system. Undertaking a national qualitative case studies analysis, we tested four hypotheses: representation gap hypothesis (populist parties pursue a strategy that is designed to exploit gaps of representation by means of emphasizing new or re-vitalizing old conflicts); contagion hypothesis (the rise of populist parties is accompanied with an overall diffusion of populist ideas in the policy agenda of non-populist parties); polarization hypothesis (the rise of populist parties makes party systems more acutely polarised) and elective affinity coalition hypothesis (populist parties enter governing coalitions with other populist parties and also with non-populist parties if the latter also employ at least one of the typical themes of populist discourse, e.g., nationalist, nativist, anti-establishment, Eurosceptic themes). Results support the representation gap hypothesis: with the populists' electoral success, they represent new issues in parliament. Concerning the contagion hypothesis, case studies offered mixed results: in some countries contagion can be observed, while not in others. As for the polarization hypothesis, polarization was identified as a clear tendency.

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## 1. Introduction

To fully understand and assess importance of populist presence in Europe is important to focus on the impact of populism on party systems in selected European countries. The analysis seeks to test the following hypotheses: representation gap hypothesis (populist parties pursue a strategy that is designed to exploit gaps of representation by means of emphasizing new or revitalizing old conflicts); contagion hypothesis (the rise of populist parties is accompanied with an overall diffusion of populist ideas in the policy agenda of non-populist parties); polarization hypothesis (the rise of populist parties makes party systems more acutely polarized); elective affinity coalition hypothesis (populist parties enter governing coalitions with other populist parties and also with non-populist parties if the latter also employ at least one of the typical themes of populist discourse, e.g., nationalist, nativist, anti-establishment, Eurosceptic themes).

Our analysis begins with providing a theoretical starting point for our analysis of the influence of populist parties on the party systems of selected countries. The basic hypothesis is that parties and party systems have a direct influence on the form and function, and sometimes the disfunction, of a democracy. To address the issue, we must first devise an appropriate typology of party systems and define each type, with attention to the potential that each one has for contributing to better or worse conditions for democracy. We can then analyse the role of populist parties and assess the degree to which they can influence a party system and cause it to change from one type to another, based on case studies of selected countries.<sup>1</sup>

Our theoretical framework will be based on the typology of party systems devised by Giovanni Sartori and elaborated by Steven B. Wolinetz. Sartori's interest in political parties and party systems focused mainly on the practical context, that is, whether the democracies in which they operated functioned or failed to function. He was concerned mainly with his native Italy (Beyme 2019: 69; Pasquino 2009: 172), and his theory of parties and party systems to some extent is based on this national context (especially the polarized pluralism). Sartori (1987a; 1987b) was an important theoretician of competitive democracy, which cannot function without political parties: 'Sartori's ideal of democracy was a "democracy of parties", built on the awareness that parties are the essential to democracy (...)' (Pasquino 2019: 17).

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<sup>1</sup> Download the case studies from the DEMOS cloud system:  
<https://file.tk.mta.hu/index.php/s/toANiyAn8sYYGkM>

In the first part of this paper, we will present basic classifications and typologies of party systems and discuss the main approaches to classifying them that have been adopted. We will also review Giovanni Sartori's own classification and typology of party systems. Then we will present the newer typology of party systems devised by Steven B. Wolinetz, which takes Sartori's typology and develops it further. In the next part we focus on the party system known as polarized pluralism, which is the most interesting and most frequently analysed type of system in Sartori's typology — and which has the most influence on the functioning and survival of democracy. The key element of polarized pluralism is the phenomenon of anti-system parties, to which we will devote the next part of the paper. We will present Sartori's concept of the anti-system party, and also its modification by Giovanni Capoccia and Mattia Zulianello, followed by a short summary of the interrelationships between polarization, anti-systemness, and democracy.

In the second part, we will present the basic questions to be answered using our case studies. In the course of answering those questions, we will evaluate the influence of populist parties on party systems and on democratic regimes as such. We will conclude our analysis by presenting results from eight selected case studies (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Spain).

## **2. Party Systems and Their Classification and Typology**

Political parties and party systems are the keys to understanding what modern democratic regimes are and how they function – or in some cases, do not function. That is the premise on which the classic studies of political parties of Maurice Duverger are based. Duverger identified certain types of party systems while distinguishing between various types of political regimes. (Duverger 1951: 388). He was the first modern author who created a complex theory of parties and party systems that included an extensive and sophisticated typology of party systems (1951; 1960; 1966). Unfortunately, Duverger's typology is not well known. (Some of his most important texts on the subject remain untranslated from their original French.) Only his simple classification of party systems, which is based on one criterion, number of parties, is generally recognized. This classification reflected the commonly accepted simple distinction between single-party system, two-party system, and multi-party system, and when limited to democracies, between two-party system and multi-party system only (Mair 1997: 200–202). Nevertheless, this very basic classification has gained a central role in the study of party

systems because it provides a starting point for other typologies that take into account other criteria than simply the number of parties.

Simply put, the other typologies of party systems have advanced in two directions. In the first case, the criterion of the number of parties was supplemented by the criteria of their strength (electoral or parliamentary), and their position on the spectrum of the party system. The classic example of this approach was Jean Blondel (1968: 184–189) who distinguished between 1) two-party system 2) two-and-a-half-party system, 3) multi-party system with a dominant party, and 4) multi-party system without a dominant party. ‘Modern’ authors who followed Blondel’s lead include Gordon Smith (1986), Alan J. Ware (1996), and especially, Alan Siaroff (2000; 2003; 2006).

The second approach to creating a typology of party systems adds the element of polarization, that is, the ideological distance between parties, to that of the number of parties. This is the direction taken by the second most important modern theoretician of parties and party systems after Duverger – Giovanni Sartori (1976) – who was later followed by Steven B. Wolinetz (2004; 2006). While Duverger’s sophisticated typology of party systems is not, as we have mentioned above, very well-known today, ‘Sartori’s imposing construction’ (*l’imposant édifice de Sartori* (Duverger 1981: 8)) has become the most celebrated typology of party systems ever. To this day it has not been surpassed and according to some authors, it never will be (Pasquino 2005; 2009). Therefore, we pay Sartori’s typology the most attention, in part because it is so closely connected with the question of the functioning or non-functioning of the democratic regimes in which populist parties are playing an important role today.

## **2.1 Classes and Types of Party Systems According to Giovanni Sartori**

Sartori’s theory of party systems is one of the most well-known and most influential of any that he wrote. The classification and typology of party systems occupies a central position in it. They are not the same: ‘A classification is an ordering based on mutually exclusive classes that are established by the principle, or criterion, chosen for that classification. A typology is a more complex matter: it is an ordering of “attribute compounds,” i.e., an ordering resulting from more than one criterion’ (Sartori 2005: 110).

What does that mean when applied to the classification and typology of party systems? The key thing is distinguishing between ‘format’ and ‘mechanics’. A format is a static variable or snapshot of the number of parties in a system: how many are there? Mechanics is a dynamic

variable (how the system works) that expresses the influence of ideology. Here it is necessary to differentiate between democracies and dictatorships. In a dictatorship it is the *intensity* of an ideology that is important, while in a democracy, it is *polarization*, that is, the ideological distance between parties. The classification of party systems is based only on format, that is, the number of parties, and leads to the identification of *classes*. By contrast, the typology of a party system is based on a combination of format (the number of parties) and mechanism (the intensity of ideology, or polarization) and leads to the identification of *types*. Sartori (2005: 110) identified seven classes of party systems: 1) one party, 2) hegemonic party, 3) predominant party, 4) two party, 5) limited pluralism, 6) extreme pluralism and 7) atomized. While the first two classes are non-competitive (monocentric), the others are competitive (pluralistic) party systems.

The two classes of non-competitive party systems can be differentiated as follows, based on the intensity of ideology. Depending on the intensity of ideology (from the greatest to the least), the one-party system presents as a) a type with one totalitarian party, b) a type with one authoritarian party, or c) a type with one pragmatic party. Again, depending on the intensity of ideology, a hegemonic-party system presents as one of two types: a) a type with a hegemonic ideological party or b) a type with a hegemonic pragmatic party (Sartori 2005: 254).

As far as competitive (pluralistic) party systems are concerned, Sartori expressly differentiates between class and type only in the cases of limited and extreme pluralism, as shown in the following schematic diagram:

**Schematic Diagram 1: Classes and Types of Pluralism According to Sartori**

Format	Class		Mechanics		Type
few parties	limited pluralism	+	low polarization		moderate pluralism
many parties	extreme pluralism	+	high polarization		polarized pluralism

Source: the authors.

The other classes (predominant-party systems, two-party systems, and atomized systems) can also be types as well. Sartori never states this directly, but it can be inferred from his ‘typology of party polities’ (Sartori 2005: 252–254), and it is also implicit in the characteristics of those party systems. This is especially true of two-party systems (twopartism). Twopartism, as Sartori conceives of it, presumes the existence not only of a two-party format, but also a bipolar

mechanics. If twopartism results in the regular alternation of two parties in power, then we can assume there is a centripetal tendency in politics, that is, a low degree of polarization. In every case, twopartism is both a class and a type of party system. One can also consider systems with a predominant party and atomized systems in the same way, although of course with different formats and mechanics.

## 2.2 Steven B. Wolinetz' Typology of Party Systems

Steven B. Wolinetz (2004; 2006) built upon Sartori's typology of party systems by adding a new criterium to the criteria of fragmentation and polarization, which is a form of competition. He also distinguished degrees of polarization according to its intensity. The form of competition can be 1) unimodal, 2) bipolar, or 3) multipolar. The degree of polarization can be 1) minimal, 2) moderate, 3) greater, or 4) extreme.

If we combine the criteria of fragmentation and degree of polarization (see Table 1 below), we derive three basic types of party systems: 1) two party systems, 2) limited multipartyism, and 3) extended multipartyism. A limited multipartyism can demonstrate minimal or greater polarization (but not extreme polarization, for which Wolinetz presents no examples). Extended multipartyism can demonstrate all the degrees of polarization, although minimal polarization would be a rather exceptional phenomenon. Like the two-party system, an extended multipartyism would only rarely exhibit extreme polarization.

**Table 1: Fragmentation and Degree of Polarization**

		Two party system	Limited multipartyism	Extended multipartyism
Degree of polarization	Minimal	x	x	x
	Moderate	x	x	x
	Greater	x	x	x
	Extreme	x	–	x

Source: Derived from Wolinetz 2004: 21–22.

If we add the form of competition to the fragmentation and degree of polarization, we can distinguish five subtypes of limited multipartyism and extended multipartyism (see Table 2). Limited multipartyism can appear in two variants with either unimodal or bipolar competition, and extended multipartyism in three variants, with unimodal, bipolar, or multipolar competition. In other words, limited multipartyism does not exhibit multipolar competition (in no case). Likewise, Wolinetz assumes that none of the five subtypes of limited and extended multipartyism will exhibit a minimal degree of polarization (and he gives no examples of that).



A moderate degree of polarization is possible for all five subtypes, as is a greater degree of polarization with the exception of a multipartyism with unimodal competition. An extreme degree of polarization will be found only in a multipartyism with multipolar competition.

**Table 2: Fragmentation, Degree of Polarization and Form of Competition**

Form of Competition		Two party System	Limited Multipartyism		Extended Multipartyism		
			Unimodal	Bipolar	Unimodal	Bipolar	Multipolar
Degree of Polarization	Minimal	x	–	–	–	–	–
	Moderate	x	x	x	x	x	x
	Greater	x	x	x	–	x	x
	Extreme	x	–	–	–	–	x

Source: Derived from Wolinetz 2004: 21–22.

### 2.3 Polarized Pluralism

Many authors consider the type of polarized pluralism to be the most interesting and most original of all the system types proposed by Sartori's theory of party systems. (Daalder 1983; Hanning 1984; Sani 2005; Ventura 2016; Vitiello 1981). According to Wolinetz's typology of party systems, extended multipartyism with an extreme degree of polarization and a multipolar form of competition best correlates with Sartori's polarized pluralism.

In its earliest conception, polarized pluralism was characterized by three main elements: 1) a multipolar (specifically, tripolar) arrangement of parties, 2) centrifugal party competition, and 3) polarized (as opposed to moderate) politics (Sartori 1966). In later versions of his work, Sartori outlined eight main characteristics of polarized pluralism: 1) presence of relevant anti-system parties, 2) existence of opposition parties at each end of the ideological spectrum (bilateral oppositions), 3) a central ideological position occupied by one party or a group of parties, 4) high polarization (ideological distance between parties), 5) prevalence of centrifugal drivers over centripetal ones, 6) ideological patterning, 7) presence of irresponsible oppositions, 8) a politics in which parties attempt to outbid each other in pursuit of voters' favour (Sartori 2005: 117–123).

Polarized pluralism is thus a type of party system that is characterized by a large number of relevant political parties (more than 5 or 6; 6–8 according to Wolinetz) and a high degree of polarization (ideological distance between parties). A centrifugal tendency in politics can be presumed in that case. That arises from the presence of anti-system parties and bilateral oppositions, while pro-system parties occupy the centre of the left-right spectrum. Therefore,

alternation of pro-system leftist and pro-system rightist parties cannot happen. The bipolarity of the party system is disrupted, and it becomes multipolar.

In contrast, moderate pluralism is characterized by 1) lower number of relevant parties (less than 5 or 6; 3–5 according Wolinetz), 2) relatively small ideological distance between relevant parties, that is, a low degree of polarization, 3) bipolar coalition governments, and 4) centripetal competition (Sartori 2005: 159).

## **2.4 Anti-System Parties**

The key to understanding polarized pluralism is the concept of the anti-system party. This is the concept that has drawn the most criticism (see Beyme 1987; Keren 2000; Smith 1987) and that has been little defended or reconceptualized (see Capoccia 2002; Zulianello 2018).

Giovanni Sartori distinguishes between broad and strict (narrow) definitions of antisystem parties. In the broader conception, he views them as parties that are characterized by a wide spectrum of dissenting political positions: from ‘alienation’ from and total refusal of the system to ‘protest’ (Sartori 2005: 117). On the other hand, in the narrow conception, the definition of an antisystem party is founded on ideological factors. This means that an antisystem party upholds a dissident or alienated ideology, ‘a belief system that does not share the values of the political order in which it operates’ (Sartori 2005: 118). The objective of a party so conceived is not a change of government, but the change of the entire political system in accord with its own alienated ideology. This is therefore a much more steady and intensive rejection of the existing system than in the first case. Without regard to this distinction, anti-system parties, whether in the broader or narrower sense, have one thing in common: a delegitimizing influence. That means that they question the legitimacy of the political system to which they are opposed and undermine its foundations. The tactics adopted by an anti-system party are not particularly important. It does not have to be a revolutionary party, at least not in the strict sense of that word. An anti-system party can be truly revolutionary, in that it is actually preparing a revolution or some kind of coup against the state with the goal of overthrowing the existing regime, or it can be ‘revolutionary’ only in its rhetoric, meaning that it talks about a revolution, but that is all. Sartori of course equates this revolutionary rhetoric with a delegitimizing influence. A difference between anti-system parties and truly revolutionary parties flows from that. A truly revolutionary party ‘is surely anti-system, but the obverse is not true’ (Sartori 2005: 118). It is not important whether the party’s goal (which can be a

revolution) is realizable or not, because the existence of its goal and the difficulty or absolute impossibility of attaining it are two different things. It is enough that the party's goal with regard to the system is delegitimizing it: if so, it is an anti-system party.

Two authors who have tried to develop the concept of the antisystem party are linked to Sartori. Giovanni Capoccia (2002) differentiated between relational anti-systemness and ideological anti-systemness. Ideological anti-systemness more or less corresponds to Sartori's strict definition of an anti-system party. Relational anti-systemness heightens polarization, carries with it little potential for forming coalitions, and employs populist and delegitimizing tactics in electoral contests. Capoccia (2002: 24) states that the 'typical anti-system party' is characterized by both of the two types of anti-systemness, while a party that exhibits only relational and not ideological anti-systemness is said to be 'polarizing'.

Mattio Zulianello (2018) applies two criteria for identifying antisystem parties, as does Capoccia, but somewhat different ones. The first is ideological orientation towards established metapolicies and the second is systemic integration. The former concept more or less corresponds to Sartori's strict definition of anti-system party and Capoccia's ideological anti-systemness. The second criterion very generally corresponds to Capoccia's relational anti-systemness, but it is conceived of less in terms of ideology and more in terms of institutions. Simply put, this means that a party that is integrated into the system has coalition potential in the sense that Sartori uses the term (see footnote 2), which means that it is not isolated and has various relationships with pro-system parties. An anti-system party, according to Zulianello, is one that rejects established metapolicies and also is not integrated into the system. A party that rejects established metapolicies and is integrated into the system is a 'halfway house party'.

If we compare Capocci's and Zulianello's concepts with those of Sartori's, we do not see any movement away from Sartori's original conception. If Capoccia says that relational anti-systemness reduces a party's coalition potential and increases polarization, that does not differ in any way from Sartori. In the same way, the absence of systemic integration of Zulianello's anti-system parties corresponds in principle to Sartori's presumption that anti-system parties do not have coalitional, but only blackmail potential (see footnote 2). That is, they are isolated from the pro-system parties even if, as he also said, an anti-system party can operate within the system. To be 'within the system', however, does not imply cooperation with pro-system parties, rather that anti-system parties 'are currently playing their games within the system, and

according to most of its rules' (Sartori 2005: 118). That is, they are not necessarily revolutionary or violent.

## **2.5 Polarization, Anti-Systemness and Democracy**

Polarized and moderate pluralism, like other types of party systems identified by Sartori, are Weberian 'ideal types' (Sartori 2005: 128). Therefore, we cannot assume that actual party systems will correspond exactly to a given type. They will be more or less close to it. The important thing is, however, that the degree to which a party system approximates polarized or moderate pluralism will have an influence on its functioning and moreover on the functioning of the entire democracy. The deciding factor in this case is polarization, that is, the ideological distance between parties: "[t]he single best explanatory variable for stable versus unstable, functioning versus non-functioning, successful versus immobile, and easy versus difficult democracy is polarization" (Sani and Sartori 1982: 337).

Polarization (and its degree) is closely associated with anti-systemness, and with whether the political opposition is pro-system or anti-system (or a halfway house party according to Zulianello) and in what sense. Polarization and anti-systemness are basic criteria of the Sartorian typology of political systems. The type of party system, whether moderate or polarized pluralism (or in Wolinetz's terms limited or extended multipartyism) will have a basic influence on the shape and functioning of a democracy. It is evident that the foundation of a well-functioning democracy is the existence of moderate pluralism (limited multipartyism), and that polarized pluralism (extended multipartyism) hampers its functioning. In extreme instances, strong bilateral and antisystem oppositions can pose a mortal danger to democracy, as the most famous case, that of the Weimar Republic, shows. We turn therefore to the subjects we raised at the beginning of this analysis: a close connection between typology of party systems and the shape and functioning of democracy.

To analyse the influence of populist parties on party systems, there are one main and two subordinate questions. The main question is this: can populist parties in the countries we examine become actors that will transform a system of moderate pluralism (limited multipartyism) into a system of polarized pluralism (extended multipartyism)? Considering the typology of party systems presented above, this question can be broken into two subordinate questions: 1) to what extent do populist parties increase the polarization of a party system, and 2) can we identify a populist party as an anti-system party (or halfway house party) and if so,

in what way and to what extent? The answers to these questions will be sought in our case studies of selected countries.

### **3. The Case Studies of Party Systems**

Here we summarize our results – for the detailed analysis please consult the case studies<sup>2</sup>. The methodological approach characterising studies reflected in this analysis is an example of qualitative case study research based on the tradition of the ‘new’ institutionalism. This broad approach has already been applied in the analysis of political parties in previous DEMOS research and it has been chosen also for the analysis of party systems in selected countries in which political parties, including populist subjects, are actors playing a decisive influence.

A collection of case studies, set of detailed descriptive analysis of the party systems which were chosen as a subject of research, served as an empirical basis for this analytical paper and aimed at providing a better understanding of relationship between populism and development of party system. It considers the overall framework of party systems – political context, classification of party system following the typology of Giovanni Sartori, and the role of populist parties in the party system. Those interpretative case studies, owing to a more profound interest in the cases examined, introduce theoretical notions or constructs to the analysis. While referring to existing hypotheses or theories, they can also be regarded as applied science studies, because they are concerned with interpreting or applying a generalisation to a specific case in order to analyse it better (Morlino 2018, 51–52).

This research is based on a threefold criterion of increase, relative stability or decline of support for populist parties between two time points, 2000 and 2020 (based on the ‘Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index’). We thus discern four clusters of European democracies in which the support for populists varied as follows (case selection based on typical examples):

a) Democracies in which the support for populist parties increased dramatically between 2000 and 2020 resulting in the rise of populist parties to government: Hungary, Greece, Poland.

b) Democracies in which the support for populist parties increased between 2000 and 2020 (but not as dramatically as in the above case): the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain.

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<sup>2</sup> Download at: <https://file.tk.mta.hu/index.php/s/fsFdrkGQo4jjEDT>

- c) Democracies in which the support for populist parties was stable in 2020 compared to 2000 (and such support was far from trivial): France.
- d) Democracies in which the support for populist parties was smaller in 2020 than in 2000 (but was not trivial): Slovakia.

The authors of the party systems studies were tasked to maintain a specific research structure based on the theory of party systems. First, they introduced political context of the country in question, focusing on the relevance of populist parties within the political field and their performance (electoral results and seats in parliaments, presence in governments / coalitions / or in opposition), thus analysing what role populists play in the political life of the country, to what extent they are successful and for how long populists' elements are present in the political arena. Second, they tackled four hypotheses:

**H1: Representation gap hypothesis** – If populist parties pursue a strategy that is designed to exploit gaps of representation by means of emphasizing new or re-vitalizing old conflicts.

**H2: Contagion hypothesis** – If a rise of populist parties is accompanied with an overall diffusion of populist ideas in the policy agenda of non-populist parties.

**H3: Polarization hypothesis** – If a rise of populist parties makes party systems more acutely polarized.

**H4: Elective affinity coalition hypothesis** – If populist parties enter governing coalitions with other populist parties and also with non-populist parties and if the latter also employ at least one of the typical themes of populist discourse, e.g., nationalist, nativist, anti-establishment, Eurosceptic themes.

Third, the authors concentrated on the impact of populist parties on changes in the political system. They identified types of party systems following the typology of Giovanni Sartori (2005) and Steven B. Wolinetz (2004, 2006), which has been described in detail in the first part of this analysis. The authors also analysed how the rise of populist parties changed those party systems and how they changed their functioning.

As a time framework for the party systems studies we chose the rather long time period from 2000 to 2020. It allowed us to focus on the long-term development and changes in analysed party systems without being too reductive – thus we could avoid short term changes caused by

the economic crisis in 2008 or the migrant situation in 2015. However, we have decided not to include recent political developments in analysed countries (thus framing it by spring 2020) for the very same reason – one election could skew the results not to mention the current pandemic situation (an example of this distortion could be changes in the political map after the recent elections in Slovakia in 2020, but we do not know yet what impact they will have on the party system in a long-term perspective).

Regarding the case selection, as mentioned above, we used the ‘Timbro Authoritarian Populism Index’ to identify **four clusters of European democracies** – 1) As cases of countries with dramatically increased populist support we selected Hungary (as an example of radical right-wing ‘illiberal’ populism which has been present in government already for one decade); Poland (where social conservative populists also decisively influenced the party system in recent years); and Greece (as a country with the strongest left-wing populist and the only case in Europe where left-wing populists were a leading governmental party). 2) As cases of countries in which the support for populist parties also increased but not as dramatically, we selected Germany (as an example of traditionally ‘populist proof’ countries which has, however, experienced a steady rise in populism in the examined years); Spain (as a country in which populist parties are not playing the pivotal role in the political system, but the economic crises caused the rise of left-wing populism, which in turn led to the emergence of radical right-wing populism); and the Czech Republic (it is a borderline case between the first two clusters – populist parties did not get the same level of electoral support as in Hungary or Poland, however, the technocratic ‘entrepreneurial’ populism of Andrej Babiš has proved to be effective in maintaining a strong governmental presence). 3) Countries in which the support for populist parties has been similar during the investigated period – we found one case for this category and that is France (National Front has been an important actor in the French political system since the early 2000s, the same is valid also for the left-wing populist actors in France). 4) As a country in which the support for populist parties was less in 2020 than before we indicated Slovakia in which the influence and electoral support of Robert Fico and his allies was in constant decline.

In the first chapter, Gábor Dobos identifies Hungary as a country with a certain form of a predominant party system, in which the dominant governing party (Fidesz) is a populist party, as is one of the strongest opposition parties (Jobbik). The two parties together have held around 80 percent of the parliamentary mandates in the last decade. The author pointed out the 2010

general elections as a crucial event regarding the rise of populism in Hungarian politics: Fidesz gained two-thirds of the mandates and Jobbik entered parliament. The chapter also shows that Hungarian populist parties have an undeniable impact on the party system: 1) They are bringing new themes into the political agenda, creating new and re-vitalizing old conflicts, primarily by feeding the ignorance and xenophobia of the Hungarian society; 2) with the rise of populist parties, polarization of the Hungarian political system has clearly increased – this change can be traced both in the voters' and the parties' ideological positions. Dobos concludes that despite the fact that populism has no direct impact on the policy agenda of non-populist parties, an idea transfer can be observed between the two parties, more precisely, Fidesz does not shy away from importing radical elements of Jobbik's politics.

The next chapter written by Artur Lipiński focuses on the impact of populism on the party system in Poland. According to the author, the Polish party system exhibits features of limited pluralism with strong polarization between the Law and Justice (resorting to populism at the discourse and agenda level) and the oppositional liberal Civic Platform. It is the competition between these parties that has determined the structure and content of the political competition already since 2005. Law and Justice was then able to impose the new division between social and liberal Poland which replaced the post-communist cleavage. It also proved its skilfulness in using the media (including social media) to disseminate the agenda of radical polity reform, necessity of elite replacement and perform a crisis. Lipiński concludes that PiS contributed strongly to the high level of polarization, introducing reforms which limit, if not destroy, the system of checks and balances and curtail civic freedoms.

The case study by Manos Tsatsanis and Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos deals with the Greek party system. According to them, the Greek party system changed dramatically because of the rise of populist parties of the Right and the Left. While populists were important also in the recent past (in 1981-1989, when Pasok had first ruled), it was particularly after the eruption of the Greek economic crisis that they held centre stage in the party system. The performance of the populist government coalition in power (the Syriza/ANEL coalition in 2015-2019) at times bordered on intolerance and hostility towards critical media and the justice system but checks and balances against the populist government did not reach a breaking point. The authors conclude that Greek democracy was affected by the rise of populism, although it did not succumb to pressures emerging from different sides of the political spectrum. Despite the grave economic crisis of 2010 and the rise of populist parties in Greek politics, Greek democracy



survived and withstood all economic and political blows, even though, admittedly, the social cost in terms of unemployment and poverty rates was very extensive.

The following chapter, written by Hendrik Hüning, is devoted to the specific case of the German party system. The author focuses primarily on the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and its impact on the party system – since the AfD is the only relevant populist player in Germany. The AfD was able to fill two gaps of presentation, namely by representing Eurosceptic voters and voters with xenophobic and nativist positions, that explain its rapid success. Both the widening cultural dimension of policy issues as well as the AfD's wilfully provoking communication and social media strategy led to an increase in polarization in the German party system. However, the AfD's influence on the party system is, at least for the moment, somewhat limited because of the strict exclusion by other parties to form coalitions, inner tensions, and scandals within the AfD that weakens its current standing in the system of parties, and competition for voters that only elected the AfD temporarily for protest reasons.

The case study by Jaume Magre, Lluís Medir, and Esther Pano focuses on the party system in Spain and its changes after the recent emergence of two main populist parties – Vox and Unidas Podemos. Two Spanish populist formations emerged in 2014 due to the severe and protracted economic crisis endured by broad layers of Spanish society and to the observation that the traditional parties were incapable of channelling the indignation of the citizens. The appearance of the two populist parties has entailed a greater fragmentation of the party system, an increase in electoral volatility and, above all, a very notable increase in political polarization. The polarization has been channelled, especially by VOX, through the reintroduction of classic issues which have divided Spanish society. They are unresolved issues, many of which are popular among the most radical right wing. The authors conclude that although it is true the Spanish populist parties have been able to reintroduce issues onto the agenda which have polarized political debate, the perception that the citizens have of the position of the parties on the left-right axis has not become polarized. In this respect, they fail in modifying the position of the parties in the system in a centrifugal sense.

The following chapter by Michal Kubát analyses the Czech party system and its shift from quasi-polarized to true polarized pluralism. In the analysed period, populism significantly increased party polarization and the centrifugal tendencies of party competition in the country. This mainly concerns the ANO movement of Andrej Babiš, which represents a specific variant of 'technocratic' or 'managerial' populism. Accompanied by other types of populism,

represented by the Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) and the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), ANO managed to impose some degree of populism on other parties, considered as ‘traditional’. The rise of the SPD and the relative electoral stability of the KSČM brought the country closer to the existence of a dangerous bilateral anti-system opposition. The Czech party system, which even before was close to polarized pluralism, has now become a true polarized pluralism. In other words, it has transformed from extended multipartyism with a bipolar degree of competition to extended multipartyism with a multipolar degree of competition. The author pointed out the decisive factor in the Czech case is precisely the polarization or ideological distance between the parties, which populism has increased in an unprecedented way.

Martin Baloge and Nicolas Hubé deal with the populist parties in the French party system and their structural effect on the Fifth French Republic. They pointed out that the party system in France is characterized by the force of inertia that the National Rally exerts on other political organizations. As a result of presidentialism, the French party system is very polarized between an extreme left and an extreme right whose only point of convergence is the criticism of the elites. But these parties, although polarized, do not have the same force of attraction, nor the same electoral dynamics. By making the National Rally its designated enemy, while adopting similar positions on certain issues, Emmanuel Macron has contributed to shifting and attenuating political lines of division. In a sense, populist rhetoric is becoming an electoral tool for catch-all parties, especially in France, where the Front National has been an important political actor in the political arena since the 1990s. Its role in the structure of the field contributes to a reshaping of the common political agenda. The French partisan system therefore faces many challenges. The very high level of political mistrust encountered by political parties is evidence of a deep institutional crisis. Political parties are largely in the last place in polls on confidence in political institutions and organizations. Neither the rise of populism nor the strategies of mainstream parties seem to have limited this mistrust.

The final case study, written by Andrej Školckay, focuses on the Slovak party system and its fundamental changes. The author shows a constant support for populist parties with the only change showing the number of voters who supported parties with identifiable ideology and using populist rhetoric has doubled, while support for borderline cases has decreased. In that sense ideologically backed polarisation in Slovakia has increased. In all cases, periods, or blocks, as put by Deegan-Krause and Haughton (2009), Slovakia exhibits a long-term ‘clean–

corrupt' issue divide. This is, in essence, the typical substance of populism. Concurrently, it also indicates problems with country governance at different levels that as a boomerang lead back to the re-emergence of new populist saviours. However, at the political party level, the electoral system seems to be a major obstacle in the development of a more ideologically and less leader-based party system. New party challengers often exploit some niche and salient issues, of which the most durable was grand corruption or, more precisely, the partially captured state.

### **3.1 Populist Parties and Party Systems**

The analyses of selected European party systems show similar pattern in which populist move in political arena. This has been proved by testing above-mentioned four hypotheses in different clusters.

Testing of the Representation gap hypothesis, populist parties in all democracy clusters clearly pursue a strategy exploiting gaps of representation by bringing up new issues or re-inventing old ones. In Hungary, for example, Jobbik thematizes the Roma question and Fidesz exploits the migrant issue in a similar way. Polish Law and Justice aims to use socioeconomic differences in Poland and seek to represent so-called Poland B (the more traditional, more religious eastern part of the country). In Greece, Syriza appealed to social groups dissatisfied with economic austerity policies. In Spain, Vox is exploiting gap in nativist topics (migration, territorial unity) and Podemos is seeking to use socioeconomical consequences from the economic crisis (however, their populist content is gradually decreasing). German AfD is filling the representation gap by attracting voters with Eurosceptic and nativist and extremist rhetoric. In Slovakia, populists exploited gaps of representation on poor measures against grand corruption and the partially captured state in the case of Ordinary People and on migration in the case of We Are Family.

Concerning the second hypothesis (contagion), the results showed more differences between countries. The cluster of party system with the strongest populist presence shows that their position is so strong and polarizing that it basically impedes further contagion to non-populist actors. In Hungary, the diffusion of populist ideas can be described rather as a process between populist parties but not with non-populist actors. Polish case studies demonstrate similar conclusions – PiS is competing with more radical fringe parties but not with their non-populist adversaries. In Greece, defenders of austerity policy were not on speaking terms, literally, with

those who rejected such a policy. Parties of either side thus did not borrow ideas in the policy agenda from the opposite side, so contagion and diffusion of populist ideas was hard to come by.

In the second, less populist dominant cluster, the situation is different. In Spain – Vox has notable contact points with other conservative forces regarding topics such as the concept of family, freedom of choice concerning education, liberal positions concerning fiscal policy or the approach towards historical memory. Podemos, on the other hand, did not succeed in spreading their original criticism of Europe as the cause of the neoliberal shift leading to the economic degradation of Spain (Podemos has since gradually discarded its populist content with the passing of the years). In Germany, the AfD forced almost all established parties to shift to the right regarding their cultural left-right dimension. In the Czech case, the two former largest establishment parties even partially adopted populist rhetoric – the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) mimics populist attitudes in topics such as Euroscepticism or the refusal of not clearly defined ‘liberal progressivism’; the Czech Social Democratic Party, on the other side of the political spectrum, combines anti-immigration attitudes and social populism.

In France, there is a long history of adopting populist styles and rhetoric in the political mainstream. Currently, it could be noticeable in the anti-media discourse or in the rejection of the elites which seems to be common to all French political parties and can be considered as a sign of the ideological impact that the LFI and the FN/RN have had on the French party system. In Slovakia, there has been a clear distinction between populist and ‘programme’ parties (ideologically and more clearly profiled parties, which mostly belong to European party groups of various ideological orientations and are therefore the opposite of populist parties). The political agenda of the program parties was mostly firmly profiled and anchored, and populism usually did not occur in it and therefore could not have a significant positive effect on the strengthening of populist parties.

As for polarization hypotheses, all party systems manifest an increase in polarization. In all selected cases studies, the polarization level of the parliament has increased, in some case like in Hungary, quite significantly (from 9.6 to 25.0 between 2002 and 2018). In Poland, the strong polarization has been caused by so called ‘post-communist cleavage’ – PiS skilfully reframed the cleavage into the division between social and liberal Poland not only maintaining but even strengthening the existing polarization. In Spain, the main cause for an acute increase in polarization were the appearance of the new radical right-wing party, VOX, and the creation

of a system of two blocks in which the differences between the left and the right interacted with the Catalan territorial crisis. In the Czech Republic, another feature of populism contributed to an increase in polarization – growing ideological distance between the governmental (populist) parties and the opposition. In France, the growing polarization is connected more to the form of government of the Fifth Republic – a semi-presidential regime together with the voting system that overrepresents establishment parties and puts extreme and populist parties in constant opposition which leads to increasing levels of their polarization which in turn influences the whole party system.

The last hypothesis, coalition elective affinity, produces mixed results. These results are based on political contexts, voting systems and on relative strength of populist actors. Where populists are used to governing alone, and the voting system allows them to obtain the majority, they do not need to seek a coalition partner, they in fact show very low elective affinity (in the case of Fidesz in Hungary). In Poland, Law and Justice is also relatively strong but shy of an absolute majority. The Polish political system is based on coalition government – in this context ideological outbidding between coalition parties over populism and right-wing credentials tends to happen occasionally, thus increasing the level of polarization. A similar situation is valid also for Greece and Spain. The Spanish case is interesting due to its long-term experience with stable bipartism – only after the emergence of new populist parties, Spain's two main populist political forces adapted to the spatial theories of the left-right dimension and reach agreements with parties which are ideologically close to them (Podemos with PSOE and VOX with PP and Ciudadanos). In the Czech case, the technocratic aspect of the ANO movement helped Andrej Babiš to form a coalition government twice already. However, in recent years with rising polarization, his coalition potential is gradually declining.

AfD in Germany manifests a very low level of elective affinity. The party did not yet engage in coalitions with other non-populist parties, even with those that employ populist discourse schemes. The AfD was not able to form any coalition yet, neither at the federal nor at the state level, mostly because other parties strictly reject it and build around the AfD an effective *cordon sanitaire*. The French party system shows a similar level of elective affinity for populist actors as the German one, but for completely different reasons. As explained above, the specific French voting system does not favour parliamentary coalitions, thus political parties are not forced to collaborate (local and regional elections, on the other hand, are more favourable to coalition governments). A completely different situation applies for the Slovak party system –

the level of fragmentation in the parliament is very high but due to an increased level of polarization it is hard for political parties to have more than one option for creating a coalition. In this case it would be right to talk more about a lack of available alternatives and less about elective affinity.

The table below shows all the analysed party system in comparative perspective:

**Table 3: Party Systems in eight European countries**

	Represent. gap	Contagion	Polarization	Elective affinity
Hungary	Yes	No	Yes	No
Poland	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Greece	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Spain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Czech Rep.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
France	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Slovakia	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

## 4. Conclusions

This paper analysed the impact of populism on party systems in selected countries. Based on the theoretical framework adapted from the theory of party systems of Giovanni Sartori, eight case studies have been conducted in four clusters based on the shift in support for populist parties in the defined period (2000-2020). By testing four hypotheses on these cases, we found that populist parties and movements behave in certain aspects almost the same regardless the political context, relative strength, or importance of non-populist actors. All analysed populist pursued a strategy designed to exploit gap of representation in their party systems and pick up issues which have been neglected by other political representants. All selected party systems also manifested in the examined period an increased level of polarization – various populist actors behave differently but the result was always the same, an increase in polarization.

Countries with strong and gradually reinforcing level of populism (Hungary, Poland, Greece) showed very low level of diffusion of populist ideas in the policy agenda of non-populist parties. On the other hand, the second cluster of party systems (German, Spain, Czech Republic) manifested higher level of contagion of populist ideas into the system. The most divided hypothesis has been the elective affinity coalition. The results there did not correspond with pre-set clusters and were based more on the political context, voting system, and local

political customs of each country. Last but not least, Slovakia was a special case which did not fit entirely to one of the categories, however, even this least similar case of a party system showed a lot of similarities to other cases.

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