

Populism, PiS, and Poland: Multivariate Analysis of Populist Voting

Research Thesis

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation *with research distinction* in  
Sociology in the undergraduate colleges of The Ohio State University

by

Ethan Philip Weiland

The Ohio State University

November 2020

Project Advisors: Professor Eric Schoon, Department of Sociology; Paul Bellair, Department of  
Sociology

Special thanks to the following scholars for their support on this project:

Kazimierz M. Słomczyński

Irina Tomescu-Dubrow

Joshua Kjerulf Dubrow

## Abstract

Recent years have seen a global surge in populism, with populist politicians rising to power in countries as diverse as the United States, Brazil, and the Philippines. Often, populism is seen as a shocking and negative political development. In order to better explain this important political phenomenon, this paper examines determinants of populist voting in Poland. Poland serves as a good test case due to the salience of populism in the Polish political context, and the representativeness of its ruling populist party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS). Informed by past literature, this paper posits six hypotheses linking recent economic marginalization, holding traditional values, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism with populist right voting. In order to test these hypotheses, data from the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN) is utilized. POLPAN, conducted twice a decade since 1988, takes a biographical and longitudinal look into a large representative sample of adult Poles. This paper uses the 2013 and 2018 waves. Multivariate analyses supported five of the six hypotheses. Recent economic marginalization, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism were all significantly associated with populist right voting. Political distrust lost its significance when additional variables were added to the model and was thus rejected. Additionally, all four of the additional variables – age (decreasing), education (decreasing), locality size (decreasing), and religiosity – were significantly associated with populist right voting. Future researchers should utilize a better operationalization of anti-immigrant attitudes and use the next wave of POLPAN (2023) to see if results hold. Overall, by showing a link between nine variables and populist right voting in the useful case of Poland, it is hoped that this paper helps lead to a better understanding of populism.

## Introduction

Alarming to some, recent years have witnessed a global surge in populism. From Donald Trump in America to Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, the examples are numerous. However, populism hasn't just thrived on the right. Rather, as Bernie Sanders and Andrés Manuel López Obrador in Mexico show, populism has also witnessed recent success on the left. What features of populism explain this success across the political spectrum? Will populism continue to rise?

Scholars have devoted enormous time and effort to understanding populism, especially on the right. As Cas Mudde (2016:2) points out, "at least since the early 1990s, there have been more academic studies of populist radical right parties than of all other [political] party families *combined*". Scholarship can generally be sorted into two groups: work that studies the supply-side of populism (parties and politicians) and work that studies the demand-side of populism (voters and voting behavior). On the supply-side, scholars have proposed useful definitions of populism (see Mudde 2004) as well as pointing out the centrality of anti-elitism to populists (Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017; Bonikowski et al. 2019:72). On the demand-side, scholars have put forth numerous factors to explain populist voting. For example, past literature has linked both anti-immigrant views (Ivarsflaten 2008; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013; Zhirkov 2014; Arzheimer 2016; Akkerman et al. 2017) and political distrust (Werts et al. 2013; Zhirkov 2014; Akkerman et al. 2017) to populist right voting.

This paper seeks to expand the demand-side literature by turning to Poland. Populism in Poland is incredibly salient, to the point where Poland's party system is fractured between populists and non-populists. Furthermore, the party on the populist side of this divide, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS), while being primarily populist right, contains some elements of the populist left. Thus, testing determinants of voting for Prawo i Sprawiedliwość serves as a useful test of voting for the populist right and populists as a whole. Specifically, this paper will turn to determinants of voting for PiS in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections, where the populist divide was truly thrust to the forefront of Polish political life (Stanley and Cześniak 2019).

Informed by past literature, this paper posits six hypotheses linking recent economic marginalization, traditional values, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism with populist right voting. In order to test these hypotheses, the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN) is used. POLPAN is a long-running study that occurs twice a decade and offers a biographical and longitudinal look into the lives of a representative sample of adult Poles. Utilizing logistic regressions, recent economic marginalization, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism were all significantly associated with populist right voting. The only independent variable not significantly associated with populist right voting was holding traditional values. Additionally, the added variables of age (decreasing), education (decreasing), locality size (decreasing), and religiosity were all significantly associated with an increased likelihood of populist right voting.

The rise and rule of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) is not a unique phenomenon. Rather, they stand as one iteration of a global rise in populist politicians. Often, populists are talked about in a confused and alarmed manner. Cas Mudde (2016:2) observes "I know of no openly sympathetic scholar of the populist radical right...they mostly set up the populist radical right as a problem for, if not an open threat to, the liberal democratic system". It was not the purpose of this paper to make a normative judgement about populists. Rather, the hope was that by demonstrating important links in populist right voting using the helpful case of Poland, a political phenomenon that has seemingly swept the globe in recent years can be better explained.

## Theory and Hypotheses

### *Definitions*

To begin, what exactly is populism, analytically speaking? Perhaps the most influential definition of “populism” comes from Cas Mudde. Mudde defines populism as:

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous 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 (2004:543).

Thus, a populist may dissemble institutional blocks on majority rule. Similarly, a populist may rail against elites at the top of economic and cultural hierarchies. Mudde’s definition sees populism as an ideology, although other scholars view populism more as a “strategy of political mobilization” or “a form of political discourse” (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016:7). Ultimately, the three approaches are not mutually exclusive, and the ideological approach is overwhelmingly popular when studying European populism. Other scholars have defined populism in slightly different ways, yet Mudde’s definition remains highly influential (Pirro and Taggart 2018).

As noted in Bonikowski et al. (2019:63), populism often occurs in conjunction with ethno-nationalism and authoritarianism, but it is important to keep in mind that these are “analytically distinct phenomena”. For example, Donald Trump is often considered a “populist” because of his nativist rhetoric and anger at blocks on his executive power. This is a mistake; populism is not strictly a right-wing or a left-wing phenomenon (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). When nativism, authoritarianism, and populism occur together, the politician or political party should be deemed “populist radical right” rather than solely populist (Mudde 2007). When a left-wing economic ideology occurs with populism, the politician or political party should be considered populist left (Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017). Overall, right-wing populism (e.g. the populist radical right) aims its anti-elite sentiment at cultural elites while left-wing populism aims its anti-elite sentiment at economic elites (Bonikowski et al. 2019:60).

Unfortunately, these strict definitions have not achieved widespread usage in the literature on the populist right and the populist radical right. What results is a “terminological quagmire” (Mudde 2016:3) with commentators using terms such as “populist radical right”, “extreme right”, “radical right”, and “right-wing populist” to describe similar and disparate phenomenon. However, this research specifically examines Poland and Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS). While there may be a debate about populism as a whole, there is a consensus that PiS is a populist party (Pienczykowska 2015; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Gidron and Hall 2017; Stanley and Czeński 2019). Studying a party that is definitively populist should hopefully help to resolve this terminological quagmire and shed light on populism as a phenomenon.

### *New Political Cleavage?*

Throughout the twentieth century, the main political cleavage revolved around economic philosophy. What separated the “left” from the “right” were differing ideas on the state and the market. Those on the left leaned into the state; they favored economic interventionism, government spending, and regulation. In contrast, those on the right leaned into the market; they favored a *laissez-faire* attitude, self-dependency, and deregulation. This cleavage, albeit with both

sides at extremes, was at the heart of, and best represented by, The Cold War. On one side was a capitalist, pro-market, First World. On the other side was a communist, pro-state, Second World. Yet, it has been nearly thirty years since the end of The Cold War, and with changing times has come changing political cleavages.

Recent years have witnessed the rise of “populism”, best embodied in politicians like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in America, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Marine Le Pen in France. While not a new phenomenon, the current popularity of populism certainly is. Unlike the politics that came before it, economic philosophy takes a backseat for populists (Mudde 2016). Instead, other issues, like immigration and political corruption, are prioritized. Thus, populists do not easily sort into the existing “left” vs. “right” paradigm, rendering the paradigm insufficient. As mentioned earlier, populism is not solely a left-wing or right-wing phenomenon (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017). As a result, some have theorized that an additional political fissure has emerged, with populism itself as the divider. In an influential conference paper, with their ideas later expanded into a book (Norris and Inglehart 2019), Inglehart and Norris (2016) sought to explain this new political cleavage. They kept the original economic philosophy cleavage (i.e. “left” vs. “right”), as it has not completely gone away, just decreased in sufficiency. Rather, differences in economic philosophy now serves as one axis of a two-dimensional political differentiation space. The other axis consists of “Populism” at one extreme and “Cosmopolitan Liberalism” at the other.

With populism as a divider, society splits into a populist people and a non-populist elite (Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017; Bonikowski et al. 2019:72). In fact, elitism may necessarily be the opposite of populism (Mudde 2004). Who are these populist people? In their right-wing manifestation, they seek to defend their “national, political, social and economic ways of life against external actors who penetrate the state by migrating, exchanging goods or exerting rule” (Hooghe and Marks 2018:110). Thus, they are traditionalist, opposed to multiculturalism, opposed to immigration, and opposed to international institutions that can supersede their national governments. They oppose the “cultural elites”, who would correspondingly believe in progressive values, multiculturalism, immigration, and support international institutions. In their left-wing manifestation, the populist people support economic interventionism and system change to make the economy work for the people, rather than just the elite (Stanley 2019). The populist people oppose the “economic elites” who support the established economic arrangements from which they have benefitted. Doesn’t this make left-wing populism align with left vs. right differences? In a way, but this approach by populists on the left is motivated by anti-elite sentiment, rather than deeply held economic philosophy.

The context of the United States serves to illuminate this new cleavage particularly well. The populist people on the right are represented by Donald Trump. Trump’s campaign ran on the premise that it was going to “drain the swamp” in Washington D.C., i.e. upend elite hold on political power. Additionally, Trump ran on an anti-immigration platform and alluded back to a time of traditional American society and power (i.e. “Make America Great Again”). In office, Trump has sought to reduce the influence of international organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), as their support entails national sacrifice (i.e. “America First”). The populists on the left are represented by Bernie Sanders. Sanders, who came close to winning a Democratic presidential nomination twice, ran on a platform railing against the established economic system and those “billionaires” that have benefitted from it. Instead, Sanders wanted policies that gave the “the people” a better shot at economic prosperity. Ultimately, Sanders and Trump ran populist, anti-elite, campaigns. Sanders narrowed in on the economic elites; Trump narrowed in on the cultural elites.

## *Poland*

Populism has been a part of Polish political life for decades, but the 2015 Parliamentary Election thrust it to the forefront (Stanley and Czeński 2019). Now, Poland's party system is fractured between populists and non-populists. On the populist side of the cleavage lies Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS). PiS is traditionalistic, nativist, skeptical of the international organization that is the European Union, somewhat skeptical of markets, and supportive of economic interventionism (Stanley 2019). These last two characteristics leads some scholars to classify PiS as a left-wing manifestation of populism (Inglehart and Norris 2016). But, the cultural component of PiS' populism is much more important, leading PiS to be widely grouped with right-wing populism (Pienczykowska 2015; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Gidron and Hall 2017; Stanley and Czeński 2019). The rise of PiS has caused alarm from some for its alleged interference in the Polish legal system, xenophobia, and other controversies (Pienczykowska 2015; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016). Other populist parties exist in Poland (e.g. Kukiz' 15), but the 2015 elections largely established PiS and the non-populist, culturally progressive, and market-friendly Platforma Obywatelska (PO) as the only two main parties. Poland's populist cleavage goes beyond just the supply-side (i.e. differences in political parties). As argued by Stanley (2019), the populist divide exists among the electorate as well. The salience of the populist cleavage in Poland, as well as a general desire to expand populism research to a Central and Eastern European context, makes Poland a great candidate for the study of populist right voting behavior.

### *Voting for Populists*

Much of the literature on populism focuses on the populist parties and politicians themselves (Stanley 2019). Yet, the literature on those that vote for these populist parties and politicians is growing. One of the most discussed characteristics of populist voters is their marginalization, both economic and cultural. By definition, the populist people are marginalized (or perceive themselves to be marginalized) as they are not a member of the non-populist "elite". This marginalization is more recent, rather than being ever-present throughout history. In other words, those that vote for populists once held positions of economic and cultural power. Yet, as society has shifted, both economically and culturally, these individuals have lost their economic and cultural power (Gidron and Hall 2017). Hence why some scholars have deemed the rise of populism a "backlash" (Norris and Inglehart 2019).

Recent decades have seen societies shift from an industrial mode of economic organization to a postindustrial mode of economic organization. This shift has disadvantaged those who, in decades past, would have no trouble finding work. For instance, factory workers with little education. Yet, today, these individuals no longer have the qualifications necessary to compete for jobs. Thus, some in the media (Hirsh 2016) and in the academy (Arzheimer 2016:287; Guiso et al. 2017; Gidron and Hall 2017; Stanley 2019) argue that populist voting is a backlash against this economic shift. The (newly) marginalized people are opposed to an elite that has benefitted, and seeks to continue benefitting from, these economic changes.

Of course, this economic backlash will manifest itself in left-wing populism, as left-wing populism pits the people against an economic elite (Bonikowski et al. 2019:60). But, PiS (the populist party in Poland) is widely associated with the populist right (Pienczykowska 2015; Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Gidron and Hall 2017; Stanley & Czeński 2019). Additionally, as pointed out by Stanley (2019:40), it is a "truism in the study of Polish voting behaviour: cultural issues remain the most important determinants of party preferences, while economic issues are rather

unimportant”. So, are economic factors relevant in the Polish context? First, it should be noted that while PiS is typically grouped with right-wing populists, this is not a uniform grouping. PiS’ economic interventionism and market skepticism leads some scholars to group it with the populist left (Inglehart and Norris 2016). Additionally, as pointed out by Gidron and Hall (2017), it may be a mistake to only consider cultural backlash for right-wing populism. Rather, it is worth exploring that right-wing populism is caused by both economic backlash and cultural backlash. The first hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

**H:** Controlling for other variables, recent economic marginalization increases the likelihood of voting for a populist right party

As societies have shifted economically in recent decades, they have also shifted culturally. Specifically, recent years have seen more progressive values gain mainstream acceptance at the expense of traditional values. For example, the right of homosexual individuals to marry (a progressive value) instead of just heterosexual individuals (a traditional value). Additionally, gender equality in the workplace (a progressive value), rather than women remaining home while their husbands work (a traditional value). As these progressive values, among others, have increased in acceptance and popularity, those holding traditional values have found themselves marginalized from the mainstream. Thus, some scholars view populism (on the right) as a traditionalist backlash (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Stanley 2019). The second hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

**H:** Controlling for other variables, holding traditional values increases the likelihood of voting for a populist right party

Does a “populist” voter exist? Some scholars argue that there is no prototypical populist voter across all contexts (Rooduijn 2018). Others argue that a typical voter has been identified, if not for the populist left then for the populist radical right (Lubbers, Gijsberts, and Scheepers 2002; Arzheimer 2016). Ultimately, who are these economically marginalized and culturally marginalized voting for the populist left and populist right respectively? Economically, popular opinion would hold that having a blue-collar job and having little education predisposes populist voting, as these are the individuals most harmed by the shift to the post-industrial economy. Culturally, popular opinion would hold that the older generation, rural individuals, and the religious are more likely to hold traditional values and thus be culturally marginalized. Stanley and Czeński explicitly point out these characteristics, stating

A common stereotype concerning support for PiS is that it is concentrated in the more economically and socially more vulnerable socio-demographic groups of ‘Poland B’: older voters, those with lower levels of education, those in blue-collar jobs, those living in the countryside or in small towns and provincial cities and those who are religiously more devout (2019:81).

Yet, the key word used by Stanley and Czeński is *stereotype*; the evidence for many of these individual characteristics is mixed. For example, some assert that the older generation is more likely to vote for the populist radical right (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Yet, others claim the opposite, that it is actually the young who are more likely to vote for the populist radical right (Arzheimer 2016). Additionally, while some argue that being more religious leads to voting for the

populist radical right (Inglehart and Norris 2016), religion is not necessarily associated with traditionalist ends. Rather, religion can be associated with progressive values (Gambino 2018). Ultimately, the only individual characteristic with a solid consensus is gender. Specifically, being male is associated with voting for the populist radical right. This finding is so consistent that it has been deemed the “gender gap” (Givens 2004; see Hartevelde et al. 2015). Thus, the third hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Controlling for other variables, being male increases the likelihood of voting for a populist right party

The literature consistently points to two attitudes that increase the likelihood of voting for the populist radical right: anti-immigrant views (Ivarsflaten 2008; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013; Zhirkov 2014; Arzheimer 2016; Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017) and political distrust (Werts et al. 2013; Zhirkov 2014; Akkerman et al. 2017). Immigrants, and immigration in general, become important due to the nativist element of the populist radical right. Immigrants are outsiders and thus not members of the “pure people”, to use Mudde’s (2004:543) phrase. Additionally, cultural change brought about by immigration is a threat to “traditional” ways of life. Political distrust becomes important due to the populist element of the populist radical right; politicians are part of the elite, not the people, and thus cannot be trusted. The third and fourth hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

**H<sub>4</sub>:** Controlling for other variables, anti-immigrant attitudes increase the likelihood of voting for a populist right party

**H<sub>5</sub>:** Controlling for other variables, political distrust increases the likelihood of voting for a populist right party

Finally, scholars have begun to point out the importance of Euroscepticism (i.e. suspicion towards the international institution that is the European Union) in populist right voting. Kneuer (2019) notes that populism and Euroscepticism are obviously associated, although Pirro and Taggart (2018) point out that this association is not necessary. Ultimately, scholars still predict a linkage between populism and Euroscepticism at the individual level (Stanley 2019). Why? In many ways, the European Union represents the economic and cultural elite of Europe. On the economic front, the EU pursues the integration of Europe’s disparate economies. This approach exacerbates the post-industrialist shift that has disadvantaged some segments of the population, leading to a (theorized) populist economic backlash. On the cultural front, the EU pushes many mainstream progressive values rather than traditional values (e.g. multiculturalism, homosexuality, gender equality), leading to a (theorized) populist cultural backlash. Additionally, by definition the EU has the power to supersede the government of its member nations. Thus, the EU represent the “external actors” (Hooghe and Marks 2018:110) to whom the populist people on the right are opposed.

In fact, past research has shown that Euroscepticism contributes to populist radical right voting above and beyond political distrust and anti-immigrant attitudes (Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013). This work by Werts et al. (2013) included Polish voters in its sample. How does this paper seek to build on their findings? First, the study by Werts et al. (2013) occurred before the key 2015 Parliamentary Election in Poland, in which populism truly became a political fissure. Additionally, the study only measured support for Liga Polskich Rodzin (LPR) in Poland, not



support for the major populist right party that is PiS. This paper seeks to build on Werts et al. (2013) by including data from the 2015 Parliamentary Election, measuring support for PiS, and including other hypotheses in determining populist right voting. The sixth and final hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

**H<sub>6</sub>:** Controlling for other variables, Euroscepticism increases the likelihood of voting for a populist right party

## Data, Variables, and Methods

The data used to test the above hypotheses comes from the Polish Panel Survey, abbreviated as POLPAN. The scholars who run the study report that “Carried out since 1988 in 5-year intervals, POLPAN is the longest continuously run panel survey on changes in social structure, class and stratification in Central and Eastern Europe” (Słomczyński, Tomescu-Dubrow, and Dubrow 2015:19-20). Two features of POLPAN make it particularly attractive for research purposes: it is longitudinal, and it is comprehensive. Thus, researchers have access to rich biographies of respondents and can see how these biographies change over time. The most recent iteration of POLPAN – the 2018 wave – interviewed 2,161 adults that are representative of the Polish population as a whole. These respondents included both returning interviewees in addition to a renewal sample of the young. As noted by Słomczyński et al. (2015), data from POLPAN has featured in a multitude of other published works.

**Table 1** Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in Statistical Models

Variable Name	Mean	SD	Range	Description
<b><u>Dependent Variables</u></b>				
Populist Right Voter	0.527	0.499	0 to 1	0=else, 1=populist right voter
<b><u>Independent Variables</u></b>				
Economic Marginalization	3.536	1.074	1 to 5	Ordinal; 5= “the current economic system in Poland functions very badly”
Traditional Values	2.618	1.062	1 to 5	Ordinal; 5= “strongly agree that it is wrong to do something differently than our fathers did”
Male	0.450	0.497	0 to 1	1=male, 0=else
Anti-immigrant Attitudes	2.525	1.063	1 to 5	Ordinal; 5= “strongly disagree that threat to national identity is usually an exaggeration”
Political Distrust	4.096	0.820	1 to 5	Ordinal; 5= “very low degree of trust in Sejm”
Euroscepticism	3.615	1.895	0 to 10	Ordinal; 10= “Poland lost a lot in the EU (General Evaluation)”
<b><u>Control and Additional Variables</u></b>				
Age	49.973	18.611	21 to 90	Age in years
Education	12.020	2.892	8 to 17	Ordinal; years of schooling
Size of Locality	3.684	1.420	1 to 5	Ordinal; 1= “Towns over 500,000”,

Religiosity	2.970	1.814	0 to 7	5= "Rural" Times attended church per month
-------------	-------	-------	--------	-----------------------------------------------

---

*Note:* N=2,161

The dependent variable was whether the respondent was a populist right voter or not. The 2018 wave of POLPAN asked which party the respondent voted for in the 2015 Parliamentary Election (the most recent election at the time the respondent was interviewed). A dummy variable was constructed, with a coding of "1" if the respondent voted for a populist right party and a coding of "0" for anything else. While only Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) is discussed in the literature review, the respondent was also considered a populist right voter if they voted for Kukiz'15 or Koalicja Odnowy Rzeczypospolitej Wolność i Nadzieja (KORWiN). Unlike PiS, Kukiz'15 and KORWiN are smaller parties and if they did not exist, it is highly likely that their voters would opt for PiS instead. Under this operationalization, 52.7% of applicable respondents were populist right voters.

Six independent variables were coded, corresponding to the six hypotheses. All six of the variables were operationalized using the respondents' previous answers to questions from the 2013 wave of POLPAN, as the dependent variable asks about voting in 2015. Thus, a correct time sequence can be established. First, operationalizing recent economic marginalization. To reiterate from the theory section, this hypothesis was motivated by the idea that populist voting (especially on the left) is a backlash against an economic system that has benefitted an elite at the expense of the people. The 2013 wave of POLPAN asked interviewees to respond to the statement "The current economic system in Poland functions..." with a five-item Likert Scale ranging from "very well" to "very badly". As this variable increased, so did the respondent's perception that the economic system does not benefit the people. The mean response was 3.536, indicating an average answer between "neither well nor badly" and "quite badly".

Second, operationalizing whether or not the respondent held traditional values. In the 2013 wave, the respondents were asked whether "It is wrong to do something differently than our fathers did" and prompted to respond using a Likert Scale. The answers to this question can be taken as how strongly the respondent holds on to conventional ways of life, and thus traditional values. The variable was coded so that a value of 1 corresponds to "strongly disagree" and a value of 5 corresponds to "strongly agree". As the variable increased, so did the respondent's hold on traditional values. The mean response was 2.618, indicating that the average answer to the question was between "somewhat disagree" and "neither agree nor disagree". Third, operationalizing whether the respondent was male. A simple dummy was constructed, with a value of 1 corresponding to male respondents and a value of 0 corresponding to other respondents. In the sample, 45.025% of the interviewees were male.

Fourth, operationalizing anti-immigrant attitudes. Unlike the other variables, there was no direct question asking about attitudes towards immigration in the 2013 wave of POLPAN. So, the best question possible had to be used. This is a shortcoming, and future researchers seeking to build upon these findings should use a better operationalization. The 2013 wave of POLPAN asked respondents to respond using a Likert Scale to the statement "Threat to national identity is usually an exaggeration". A value of 1 corresponded to "strongly agree" and a value of 5 corresponded to "strongly disagree". Thus, as the variable increased, so did the respondent's perception that national identity is under threat (which normally accompanies immigration and is commonly used to justify anti-immigrant stances). The mean of this variable was 2.525, indicating an average response between "somewhat agree" and "neither agree nor disagree".

Fifth, operationalizing political distrust. The 2013 wave of POLPAN asked respondents to indicate their level of trust in the Sejm (the lower chamber of Parliament) utilizing a five-item Likert Scale. The variable was coded so that a value of 1 corresponded to a “very high degree [of trust]” and a value of 5 corresponded to a “very low degree [of trust]”, so as the variable increased so did the respondent’s political distrust. It should be noted the very high levels of political distrust overall: only 1.68% of the sample answered that they had a “very high degree [of trust]” or a “high degree [of trust]” while a whopping 74.3% of respondents answered that they had a “low degree [of trust]” or a “very low degree [of trust]”. Sixth, operationalizing Euroscepticism. Again, Euroscepticism can be defined as “scepticism” (i.e. hesitancy toward or a negative view of) the European Union. Respondents were asked whether, in general, Poland has lost or gained by being a member of the EU. Respondents were prompted to respond using a Likert Scale, with a value of 0 corresponding to “Poland lost a lot” and a value of 10 corresponding to “Poland gained a lot”. The variable was reverse coded, so as it increased so does scepticism (as a value of 10 now corresponded to “Poland lost a lot”). Scepticism overall was low, as only 10.31% of respondents indicated that Poland had lost by being a member of the EU. On the flip side, 66.75% indicated that Poland had gained by being a member of the EU.

Four control variables were coded, all coming from Stanley and Czeński (2019). As discussed above, these four variables (age, education, size of locality, and religiosity) are frequently thought of as being associated with populist right voting. Yet, empirical scrutiny has led to mixed results. Thus, there was not enough confidence to posit explicit hypotheses between these variables and populist right voting, but there was enough confidence to warrant inclusion in the analyses as control/additional variables. First, age. Age was measured in the 2013 wave of POLPAN at the interval level. Ages of respondents ranged from 21 to 90, with a mean equal to 49.973 years and a standard deviation of 18.611 years. Second, education. Respondents to the 2013 wave of POLPAN were asked their highest level of education completed, with this response translated to years of schooling (as completing a certain level of education takes a certain number of years). Possible categories for years of schooling were 8 years, 10 years, 12 years, 15 years, and 17 years. The mode for years of schooling was equal to 12 years.

Third, size of locality. Respondents in 2013 were asked the size of their town, and five ordinal categories were constructed depending on their answer: “rural”, “towns below 20,000”, “Towns 20,000 – 99,999”, “Towns 100,000 – 499,999” and “Towns over 500,000”. The variable was reverse coded, so as the variable increased the size of the respondent’s locality decreased. Thus, a value of 1 corresponded to “Towns over 500,000” and a value of 5 corresponded to “Rural”. The mode of locality size was “Rural”, with 45.62% of respondents living in a town that fit this categorization. Fourth, religiosity. The 2013 wave of POLPAN asked respondents their frequency of participation in religious services and meetings. The respondents’ answers were then approximated numerically as times per month. For example, if a respondent answered that they participated “about once a week” this was approximated as “4” (times a month). The mean was 2.97 times participating in religious services or meetings a month.

To test the association between the independent (and control/additional) variables with the dependent variable, two logistic regressions were run. The coding of the dependent variable as a dummy made logistic regression a particularly attractive statistical option. The first logistic regression solely tested the six hypotheses. Thus, the first logistic regression took voting for a populist right party as the dependent variable and recent economic marginalization, traditional values, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism as the independent variables. The second model tested the six hypotheses *and* the four control/additional variables. Thus, the second model took voting for a populist right party as the dependent variable

and recent economic marginalization, traditional values, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, Euroscepticism, age, education, size of locality, and religiosity as the independent variables. The results of these two logistic regressions are displayed and discussed below.

## Results

**Table 2.1** Logistic Regression Results for Populist Right (PR) Voting (Control and Additional Variables Not Included)

	PR Voting
Economic Marginalization	1.407 *** (0.092)
Traditional Values	1.200 ** (0.075)
Male	1.464 ** (0.193)
Anti-immigrant Attitudes	1.393 *** (0.091)
Political Distrust	1.192 * (0.102)
Euroscepticism	1.266 *** (0.051)
Constant	0.016 (0.007)

N=1,148

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>=0.122

*Notes:* Odds ratios listed followed by robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Models contains 1,148 observations as not every interviewee from the 2018 wave of POLPAN was included in the 2013 wave or asked the relevant questions. "Populist Right (PR) Party" = PiS, Kukiz15, and KORWiN.

Without the control and additional variables added, all six of the independent variables were significant at the .05 p-level. Furthermore, five of these variables were significant at the .01 p-level (political distrust was the lone exception). Additionally, three of the independent variables were significant at the .001 p-level (economic marginalization, anti-immigrant attitudes, and Euroscepticism). Euroscepticism, economic marginalization, and anti-immigrant attitudes were the most significant variables respectively in terms of their z-scores. To assist with the following interpretation, odds ratios will be utilized. For every increased level in a respondent's Euroscepticism, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 26.606%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level in a respondent's economic marginalization, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 40.678%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level in a respondent's anti-immigrant attitudes, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 39.304%, controlling for other variables. Being male increased the likelihood of voting for a populist right party by 46.358%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level in political distrust a respondent's likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 19.225%, controlling for other variables.

Finally, for every increased level in a respondent's traditional values, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 19.979%, controlling for other variables.

**Table 2.2** Logistic Regression Results for Populist Right (PR) Voting (Control and Additional Variables Included)

	PR Voting
Economic Marginalization	1.329 *** (0.090)
Traditional Values	1.061 (0.072)
Male	1.620 ** (0.229)
Anti-immigrant Attitudes	1.398 *** (0.094)
Political Distrust	1.299 ** (0.118)
Euroscepticism	1.221 *** (0.050)
Age	0.986 ** (0.005)
Education	0.893 *** (0.023)
Locality Size	1.142 * (0.059)
Religiosity	1.349 *** (0.058)
Constant	0.040 (0.029)

N=1,139

Pseudo R<sup>2</sup>=0.184

---

*Notes:* Odds ratios listed followed by robust standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . Models contains 1,148 observations as not every interviewee from the 2018 wave of POLPAN was included in the 2013 wave or asked the relevant questions. "Populist Right (PR) Party" = PiS, Kukiz'15, and KORWiN.

When the control/additional variables were added to the analysis, five of the six independent variables remained significant at the .05 p-level. Like in the first model, economic marginalization, anti-immigrant attitudes, and Euroscepticism were all significant at the .001 p-level and being male was significant at the .01 p-level. However, political distrust became significant at the .01 p-level (rather than just the .05 p-level) and traditional values lost its significance. All four of the control/additional variables were significant at the .05 p-level. Furthermore, education and religiosity were significant at the .001 p-level. Religiosity, anti-immigrant attitudes, and Euroscepticism were the most significant variables in terms of their z-scores. Finally, it should be noted that this model has a higher Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> than the first model and is thus a better predictor of populist right voting.

Again, odds ratios will be used to ease in the following interpretation. For every increased level in a respondent's economic marginalization, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 32.891%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level in a respondent's anti-immigrant attitudes, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 39.784%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level in a respondent's Euroscepticism, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 22.064%. Being male increased the likelihood of voting for a populist right party by 61.981%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level in a respondent's political distrust, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 29.933%, controlling for other variables. For every increase in a respondent's age by one year, the likelihood of their voting for a populist right party decreased by 1.433%, controlling for other variables. For every increased level of a respondent's education, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party decreased by 10.667%, controlling for other variables. For every decreased level of a respondent's locality size (i.e. getting closer to "rural"), the likelihood of their voting for a populist right party increased by 14.205%, controlling for other variables. Finally, for every increased level in a respondent's religiosity, their likelihood of voting for a populist right party increased by 34.882%, controlling for other variables.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This research rested on the foundation of six hypotheses, each of which explored a potential determinant of voting for a populist right party. In order to test these six hypotheses, Poland was studied due to the salience of populism within the country and the representativeness of its populist party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS). Data was drawn from the Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN), a comprehensive biographical and longitudinal look into a representative sample of the Polish adult population. The independent variables in this research included recent economic marginalization, traditional values, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism. Additional variables that have more limited empirical evidence in past literature (age, education, size of respondent's locality, and religiosity) were also added to the analysis. The dependent variable was operationalized as which party the respondent voted for in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections and coded into a dummy with a "1" indicating that the respondent voted for a populist right party (PiS, KORWiN, or Kukiz'15). In order to test the association between the independent and dependent variables, logistic regressions were employed. How did the hypotheses hold up to empirical scrutiny?

The results led to the failure to reject five out of the six hypotheses. Recent economic marginalization, being male, anti-immigrant attitudes, political distrust, and Euroscepticism were all significantly associated with populist right voting. This significance held both with and without the control/additional variables. The only hypothesis rejected was the second one, which linked traditional values with populist right voting. While holding traditional values was significant at the .01 p-level in the first model, it lost its significance once the control/additional variables were added to the analysis. Additionally, the control/additional variables (age, education, locality size, and religiosity) were all significant at the .01 p-level.

The hypothesized determinants of populist voting were informed by past literature. As five of the six hypothesized determinants were significant after rigorous empirical testing, this past literature can be seen as largely accurate. But, what about traditional values? To reiterate from the Theory and Hypotheses section, populism exists in left-wing and right-wing manifestations. On the right, populists aim their anti-elite sentiment at cultural elites and the progressive values these elites push at the expense of traditional ones (e.g. the ability for homosexual individuals to marry rather

than just heterosexual individuals). Many of these traditional values are heavily linked with conservative Christianity, i.e. the type of Catholicism popular in Poland. Thus, I believe that holding traditional values lost its significance because one of the control/additional variables was *religiosity*.

Speaking of the control/additional variables, their significance in determining populist right voting should not be ignored. Not only were the four variables (age, education, locality size, and religiosity) significant at the .05 p-level, they were significant at the .01 p-level. To repeat from above, these four variables were not included as hypotheses because, rather than having past empirical consensus, they were “stereotype[s]” (Stanley and Czeński 2019:81). These results suggest that these variables may be more than just stereotypes. Yet, it should be noted that the link between age and populist right voting was different than what is held in the public imagination. Increasing age was significantly associated with a decreasing likelihood of voting for a populist right party, rather than an increasing likelihood. This finding does align with some past research on Polish society that explores “undercurrent” Euroscepticism and right-wing populism among Polish youth (Fomina 2017).

While this work highlights key linkages for populist right voting in Poland, scholars can (and should) improve upon it. POLPAN does not contain any explicit questions about attitudes toward immigrants and immigration. So, a first recommendation for future researchers is to use a better operationalization of anti-immigrant attitudes than used here (see: Ivarsflaten 2008; Werts, Scheepers, and Lubbers 2013; Zhirkov 2014; Arzheimer 2016; Akkerman, Zaslove, and Spruyt 2017). Second, these hypotheses should be expanded to other countries, as the literature on voting for the populist right is not as robust as the literature on the populist right itself. Expansion to other countries in Central and Eastern Europe would be especially useful. Hungary, currently ruled by Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party, is a particularly attractive candidate in this regard. Finally, assuming the political situation in Poland does not change too drastically (that is, populism remains a line of division), these hypotheses should be tested in the future to see how the relationships hold up over time. Utilizing the next wave of the Polish Panel Survey (2023) is the obvious choice.

This paper utilized the most recent wave of POLPAN (2018) for analysis, which contained questions about voting in the 2015 Parliamentary Elections. Perhaps obviously, there have been important elections in Poland since. How did PiS, and thus the populist right, fare? After assuming power in 2015, PiS ruled in what can be called an economically liberal and socially conservative manner. Economically, the government passed numerous welfare schemes including a child tax allowance, tax breaks for the poor, increased pensions, and a higher minimum wage. Socially, the government assumed an anti-LGBTQ, anti-abortion, and anti-migrant stance. PiS did not govern without controversy; its attempts to change the court system and anti-LGBTQ agenda drew particular international consternation. However, the Polish electorate did reward Prawo i Sprawiedliwość for its four years in power at the ballot box. The 2019 Parliamentary Election saw PiS come in first overall, followed by their anti-populist foe Platforma Obywatelska (PO) in second, and an alliance of leftist parties in third. It should be noted that PiS did not win control of the Polish Senate (the upper chamber). While the Polish Senate is not as powerful as the lower chamber, its ability to block political appointments means PiS may run into difficulty implementing its programs this term. The following year (2020) saw Poles go to the polls to elect a president. The campaign pitted the incumbent PiS candidate Andrzej Duda against the mayor of Warsaw Rafal Trzaskowski (the PO candidate). The campaign was markedly bitter and made international news for President Duda’s clear anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. Ultimately, the election was the closest seen in Poland since the end of Communism, with Duda narrowly winning a second term. It should be noted that this election, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, saw a 68.2% turnout. Ultimately, PiS

governed in a way consistent with the determinants of populist right voting studied here that brought them to power in 2015. As they won re-election in the next cycle, it is a safe assumption that these determinants remained salient.

As noted above, populism has surged globally in recent years. Indeed, populists have gained popularity in countries as diverse as the United States, Brazil, and the Philippines. Accordingly, significant attention has been given to it, both in public and in the media. Yet, many have found the phenomenon of populism perplexing. This research, by showing important links in populist voting, hopes to assuage this confusion by contributing to a broader explanation of populism, especially right-wing populism.

## References

- Akkerman, Agnes, Andrej Zaslove, and Bram Spruyt. 2017. "‘We the People’ or ‘We the Peoples’? A Comparison of Support for the Populist Radical Right and Populist Radical Left in the Netherlands." *Swiss Political Science Review* 23(4):377-403. doi: [10.1111/spsr.12275](https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12275).
- Arzheimer, Kai. 2016. "Electoral Sociology: Who Votes for the Extreme Right and Why - and When?" Pp. 277-89 in *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader, Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy*, edited by C. Mudde. 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017: Routledge.
- Bonikowski, Bart, and Noam Gidron. 2016. "Multiple Traditions in Populism Research: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis." *APSA Comparative Politics Newsletter* 26(12):7-14. doi: [10.2139/ssrn.2875372](https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2875372).
- Bonikowski, Bart, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Eric Kaufmann, and Matthijs Rooduijn. 2019. "Populism and Nationalism in a Comparative Perspective: A Scholarly Exchange." *Nations and Nationalism* 25(1):58-81. doi: [10.1111/nana.12480](https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12480).
- Fomina, Joanna. 2017. "The Unlikely Eurosceptics: The Undercurrent Anti-European Attitudes among the Young Poles and the Role of the Domestic Context." *Polish Sociological Review* 198(2):141-65.
- Fomina, Joanna, and Jacek Kucharczyk. 2016. "The Specter Haunting Europe: Populism and Protest in Poland." *Journal of Democracy* 27(4):58-68. doi: [10.1353/jod.2016.0062](https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0062).
- Gambino, Lauren. 2018. "‘Jesus Never Charged a Leper a Co-Pay’: The Rise of the Religious Left." *The Guardian*, May 21.
- Gidron, Noam, and Peter A. Hall. 2017. "The Politics of Social Status: Economic and Cultural Roots of the Populist Right." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68(51):S57-84. doi: [10.1111/1468-4446.12319](https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12319).
- Givens, Terri E. 2004. "The Radical Right Gender Gap." *Comparative Political Studies* 37(1):30-54. doi: [10.1177/0010414003260124](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414003260124).
- Guiso, Luigi, Helios Herrera, Massimo Morelli, and Tommaso Sonno. 2017. *Populism: Demand and Supply. Paper*. DP11871.
- Harteveld, Eelco, Wouter Van Der Brug, Stefan Dahlberg, and Andrej Kokkonen. 2015. "The Gender Gap in Populist Radical-Right Voting: Examining the Demand Side in Western and Eastern Europe." *Patterns of Prejudice* 49(1-2):103-34. doi: [10.1080/0031322X.2015.1024399](https://doi.org/10.1080/0031322X.2015.1024399).
- Hirsh, Michael. 2016. "Why Trump and Sanders Were Inevitable." *Politico Magazine*, February 28.



- Hooghe, Liesbet, and Gary Marks. 2018. "Cleavage Theory Meets Europe's Crises: Lipset, Rokkan, and the Transnational Cleavage." *Journal of European Public Policy* 25(1):109–35. doi: [10.1080/13501763.2017.1310279](https://doi.org/10.1080/13501763.2017.1310279).
- Inglehart, Ronald F., and Pippa Norris. 2016. "Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash." Pp. 1–52 in *Rage against the Machine: Populist Politics in the U.S., Europe, and Latin America*, HKS Faculty Research Working Paper. Philadelphia.
- Ivarsflaten, Elisabeth. 2008. "What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe?: Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases." *Comparative Political Studies* 41(1):3–23. doi: [10.1177/0010414006294168](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006294168).
- Kneuer, Marianne. 2019. "The Tandem of Populism and Euroscepticism: A Comparative Perspective in the Light of the European Crises." *Contemporary Social Science* 14(1):26–42. doi: [10.1080/21582041.2018.1426874](https://doi.org/10.1080/21582041.2018.1426874).
- Lubbers, Marcel, Mérove Gijssberts, and Peer Scheepers. 2002. "Extreme Right-wing Voting in Western Europe." *European Journal of Political Research* 41(3):345–78. doi: [10.1111/1475-6765.00015](https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00015).
- Mudde, Cas. 2004. "The Populist Zeitgeist." *Government and Opposition* 39(4):541–63. doi: [10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x).
- Mudde, Cas. 2007. *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mudde, Cas. 2016. "Introduction to the Populist Radical Right." Pp. 1–10 in *The Populist Radical Right: A reader*, Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy. 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017: Routledge.
- Norris, Pippa, and Ronald Inglehart. 2019. *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Pienczykowska, Hanna. 2015. "Poland: Eurosceptics Take Over." *FUTURELAB EUROPE*, November 4, 26–29.
- Pirro, Andrea LP, and Paul Taggart. 2018. "The Populist Politics of Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: A Framework for Analysis." *Politics* 38(3):253–62. doi: [10.1177/0263395718770579](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718770579).
- Rooduijn, Matthijs. 2018. "What Unites the Voter Bases of Populist Parties? Comparing the Electorates of 15 Populist Parties." *European Political Science Review* 10(3):351–68. doi: [10.1017/S1755773917000145](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773917000145).
- Rooduijn, Matthijs, and Tjitske Akkerman. 2017. "Flank Attacks: Populism and Left-Right Radicalism in Western Europe." *Party Politics* 23(3):193–204. doi: [10.1177/1354068815596514](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068815596514).
- Słomczyński, Kazimierz, Irina Tomescu-Dubrow, and Joshua Dubrow. 2015. "Changes in Social Structure, Class, and Stratification: The Polish Panel Survey (POLPAN)." *Ask Research & Methods* 24(1):19–37.
- Stanley, Ben. 2019. "A New Populist Divide? Correspondences of Supply and Demand in the 2015 Polish Parliamentary Elections." *East European Politics and Societies* 33(1):17–43. doi: [10.1177/0888325418783056](https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325418783056).
- Stanley, Ben, and Mikołaj Cześniak. 2019. "Populism in Poland." Pp. 67–87 in *Populism Around the World: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by D. Stockemer. Switzerland: Springer.
- Werts, Han, Peer Scheepers, and Marcel Lubbers. 2013. "Euro-Scepticism and Radical Right-Wing Voting in Europe, 2002–2008: Social Cleavages, Socio-Political Attitudes and Contextual Characteristics Determining Voting for the Radical Right." *European Union Politics* 14(2):183–205. doi: [10.1177/1465116512469287](https://doi.org/10.1177/1465116512469287).

Zhirkov, Kirill. 2014. "Nativist but Not Alienated: A Comparative Perspective on the Radical Right Vote in Western Europe." *Party Politics* 20(2):286-96. doi: [10.1177/1354068813511379](https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068813511379).