

Classifying European political parties

Classifying parties as populist

Although experts generally agree that populist political leaders or parties display high levels of anti-elitism, definitions of populism vary. We use three measures to classify populist parties: anti-elite ratings from the [2019 Chapel Hill Expert Survey \(CHES\)](#), Norris' [Global Party Survey](#) and [The PopuList](#). We define a party as populist when at least two of these three measures classify it as such.

CHES, which was conducted from February to May 2020, asked 421 political scientists specializing in political parties and European integration to evaluate the 2019 positions of 277 European political parties across all European Union member states. CHES results are regularly used by academics to classify parties with regard to their left-right ideological leanings, their key party platform positions and their degree of populism, among other things.

We measure anti-elitism using an average of two variables in the CHES data. First, we used “PEOPLE_VS_ELITE,” which asked the experts to measure the parties with regard to their position on direct vs. representative democracy, where 0 means that the parties support elected officeholders making the most important decisions and 10 means that “the people,” not politicians, should make the most important decisions. Second, we used “ANTI-ELITE_SALIENCE,” which is a measure of the salience of anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric for that particular party, with 0 meaning not at all salient and 10 meaning extremely salient. The average of these two measures is shown in the table below as “anti-elitism.” In all countries, we consider parties that score at or above a 7.0 as “populist.”

The [Global Party Survey](#), which was conducted from November to December 2019, asked 1,861 experts on political parties, public opinion, elections and legislative behavior to evaluate the ideological values, issue position and populist rhetoric of parties in countries on which they are an expert, classifying a total of 1,051 parties in 163 countries. We used “TYPE_POPULISM,” which categorizes populist rhetoric by parties. We added only “strongly populist” parties using this measure. In Italy, experts were asked to categorize the Center-Right coalition instead of individual parties within the coalition. The coalition includes Lega and Forza Italia. For both parties, we have used the coalition rating of “strongly populist.”

The PopuList is an ongoing project to classify European political parties as populist, far right, far left and/or euroskeptic. [The project](#) specifically looks at parties that “obtained at least 2% of the vote in at least one national parliamentary election since 1998.” It is based on collaboration

between academic experts and journalists. The PopuList classifies parties that emphasize the will of the people against the elite as populist.¹

Reform UK, formerly the Brexit Party, is only classified as populist on one measure but is still included for analysis in the report. It is not included in the PopuList and does not meet our anti-elite CHES threshold of 7.0, but is considered a right-wing populist party by the Global Party Survey and [other experts](#).

Classifying parties as left, right or center

We can further classify these traditional and populist parties into three groups: left, right and center. When classifying parties based on ideology, we relied on the variable “LRGEN” in the CHES dataset, which asked experts to rate the positions of each party in terms of its overall ideological stance, with 0 meaning extreme left, 5 meaning center and 10 meaning extreme right. We define left parties as those that score below 4.5 and right parties as those above 5.5. Center parties have ratings between 4.5 and 5.5.

¹ Mudde, Cas. 2004. [“The Populist Zeitgeist.”](#) Government and Opposition.

European populist party classifications

Party	Country	2019 Left-right	2019 Anti-elitism	2019 Global Party Survey	The PopuList
Populist parties on the left					
La France Insoumise	France	1.3	8.3	Strongly populist	Populist
Podemos	Spain	1.9	7.7	--	Populist
Syriza	Greece	2.3	7.0	--	Populist
Populist parties in the center					
Five Star Movement (M5S)	Italy	4.8	9.2	Strongly populist	Populist
Populist parties on the right					
Forza Italia	Italy	6.9	4.1	Strongly populist	Populist
Reform UK*	UK	8.2	5.3	Strongly populist	--
Sweden Democrats	Sweden	8.5	7.5	Strongly populist	Populist
Party for Freedom (PVV)	Netherlands	8.7	9.5	Strongly populist	Populist
Lega	Italy	8.8	7.6	Strongly populist	Populist
Greek Solution	Greece	9.0	7.6	--	Populist
Alternative for Germany (AfD)	Germany	9.2	9.0	Strongly populist	Populist
Forum for Democracy (FvD)	Netherlands	9.5	9.7	--	Populist
Flemish Interest	Belgium	9.6	8.5	Strongly populist	Populist
Vox	Spain	9.7	4.1	Strongly populist	Populist
National Rally	France	9.8	8.6	Strongly populist	Populist

*Previously named the Brexit Party

Notes: Left-right indicates the average score CHES experts gave each party on an 11-point left-right scale. Scores for anti-elitism are an average of party position on direct vs. representative democracy and the salience of anti-elite rhetoric within the party.

Source: CHES (2019). Global Party Survey (2019). The PopuList (2019).

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