Populism, blame shifting and the crisis: communication strategies in Portuguese political parties

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Very preliminary draft. Please do not quote. Comments welcome!

Abstract

Riding the wave of the economic crisis and the refugee emergency, populist parties have been gaining ground in European political systems. Their claims are not simply anti-elitist or people-centred: these parties defy the tenets of democratic liberalism by presenting themselves as the only 'true' representatives of the 'pure' people. Southern Europe is no exception. Five-stars movement, Podemos and Syriza have all hit the headlines in recent years with their unique kind of rhetoric. Against this background, Portugal stands out as the only southern European country where traditional mainstream parties have not had to face the strong rise of populist challengers. Yet, this does not imply that the political rhetoric has not been affected by the populist zeitgeist. This paper starts from the premise that it is more meaningful to talk of degrees of populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) and that elements of the populist rhetoric can be

systematically detected in the political discourse (Hawkins 2009, Rooduijn 2011). By relying on Rooduijn's methodology, we analyze the presence of populist discourse in party manifestos and political leaders' speeches during the last two decades (1995-2015). The approach we adopt allows us also to examine the use of blame-shifting argument, a rhetoric device extremely important in a country that faced the intervention of external actors in national politics during the bailout (2011-2014). Portugal is also an interesting case study given the resilience of mainstream parties and the continuities in terms of party systems characteristics. Therefore, the implications of this study provide a better understanding not only on the use of distinct rhetoric tools, but also on inter-party dynamics and party competition. Finally, this case study enlarges the scope of extent research by considering how populist discourse is used in distinct party types, both in terms of ideological orientations and organizational characteristics.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of populism has certainly attracted growing scholarly attention over the last decades. And for good reasons. Over at least the past two decades, a number of populist parties have presented themselves as serious competitors at the ballot box, gaining legislative seats and, at times, making into government. Although scholars disagree on the magnitude of the populist earthquake shattering democracies in affluent societies and whether the process came to a halt, they tend to acknowledge that, from a marginal phenomenon, populist parties have now become a persistent and quite popular actor in European party systems. The recent Euro crisis and waves of immigration have contributed to boost their appeal and influence on the public agenda (Bröning, 2016). In contrast with this trend, Portugal has been portrayed as an "oasis of stability" (Politico.com, 2016), a country that succeeded to navigate the heavy storms of austerity politics without experiencing a destabilization of its traditional political establishment.

True, mainstream parties have struggled to retain their electoral support. But they have been able to provide alternation in government and to establish new patterns of alliance between traditional parliamentary parties. In particular, the 2015 general elections were a watershed in the Portuguese party system with the external support of the Portuguese Communist Party (PCP, *Partido Comunista Português*) and the Left Bloc (BE, *Bloco de Esquerda*) to the socialist minority government led by António Costa. This led to break up the 'arc of governance' – that is, the group of parties with governmental experience or willing to take governmental responsibilities – that characterized the Portuguese party system during the democratic regime (Lisi 2016).

This paper is not primarily devoted to analyzing the historical and present reasons underlying the Portuguese peculiar path. Rather, by means of a content analysis of Portuguese electoral manifestos over four elections (one in the 1990s, one in 2000s and two in 2010s), it aims at inspecting empirically the spread of populist discourse over time and across parties. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first time that such an analysis has been carried out on Portugal, a case study that, in light of the lack of successful populist parties, has not been warranted scholarly attention (e.g. Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Using a continuous measure of populism derived from Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011, we test in a comparative setting **to what extent Portuguese parties**

have really remained immune from the populist contagion, thus rejecting to adopt whatsoever populist rhetoric. Secondly, we ask whether the circumstances of entering a painful adjustment program in the middle of one of the worst recessions in Portuguese history had an impact on the share of populist messages. Finally, we go beyond the analysis of populism and dissect party programs in search of the targets of political criticism, distinguishing between attacks against other parties, national institutions, external elites and interest groups. We expect parties to differ not only along the dimension of populism, but also in the way they frame their attacks.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section examines the growing relevance of populist parties, in particular in the Southern European periphery. Section three provides an overview of the trajectory of Portuguese democracy over the last decade and develops the hypotheses. Section four deals with methods and data, whereas section five presents the empirical analysis. The final section discusses our findings and concludes.

2. The populist *zeitgeist* and the Eurozone crisis

The recent Euro crisis has been a window of opportunity for the emergence and success of new parties, which have challenged the status quo and the format of party systems throughout Europe. The implementation of austerity politics has intensified old grievances and brought to the fore new conflicts. New patterns of mobilization have emerged, while the deterioration of previous loyalties has facilitated the emergence of new actors. From this viewpoint, Kriesi (2014) has argued that the phenomenon of 'protest populism' is of increasing relevance in the context of the euro-crisis. As Mair (2011) has argued, the crisis of mainstream parties – and the cartelization of politics -, has led to a 'division of labour' between two distinct party types: on the one hand, the mainstream parties that emphasize responsibility and take over governmental functions; on the other, parties at the fringe of the party system, which aim mostly to represent people's voice. For these reasons, parties that employ a populist discourse have been relatively successful in mobilizing new groups, especially those not taken into account by the conventional political elite.

It is now relatively consensual in the literature that the concept of populism implies the opposition and conflict between 'pure' ordinary people and a 'corrupt elite'

(Mudde 2007; Stanley 2008; Pauwels 2014; Rooduijn 2014; Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). As several authors have noted, while traditionally European populist parties belonged to the 'exclusionary' type of populism, recently there has been the emergence of various 'inclusionary' populist parties (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Kriesi 2014). In particular, the emergence of new left-wing parties such as Syriza in Greece (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis 2014) or Podemos in Spain (Kioupkiolis 2016) is an example of the rise of this new phenomenon, which is characterized by inclusive redistributive policy programs, more opportunities for disregarded groups to voice their concerns and symbolic valorization of minorities (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013). Therefore, the economic crisis has innovated European party systems, traditionally characterized by the so-called 'exclusionary' populist parties, based on nationalist, xenophobic or reactionary values.

A recent study has found that radical left parties are equally likely to employ a populist discourse than the radical right (Rooduijn and Akkerman 2015). From this viewpoint, parties with a radical ideology are significantly distinct from mainstream parties in terms of their degree of populism, regardless of their particular ideology. This research also argues that two main factors have led more extreme parties to adopt a competitive strategy based on the populist element. On the one hand, this is a tool that allows new or outsider parties to challenge directly the cartel of dominant parties by using an anti-establishment rhetoric. On the other, populism allows radical parties to appeal citizens dissatisfied with representative democracy but rejecting anti-democratic stances. However, a longitudinal study that surveys the degree of populism in five Western European countries (from 1988 until 2008) has shown that mainstream parties – from both left and right – have not displayed an increase in the populist message over time (Rooduijn et al. 2014).

To what extent may the 'Great Recession' stimulate a diffusion of populist rhetoric? Kriesi (2014) has argued that the denationalization process has important consequences in socio-economic terms, fostering the emergence of new left populist actors. According to this scholar, 'protest' populism may take distinct forms. The first is when new challengers successfully replace traditional mainstream parties and politicize new conflicts, thus bringing voters back in by taking up the representative function. From this viewpoint, Kriesi and colleagues (2008) have argued that the new rightist populist parties have articulated a new structural conflict that opposes globalization losers to globalization winners. The second form of populism is based on the radical

rejection of the party system as such. This means a total dismissal of governing authorities, a strategy of non-cooperation and voluntary marginalization due to the rejection of constructive criticism. The 5 Star Movement (5SM) can offer an example of such a type of populism. Finally, Kriesi identified a third type of populism, which originated not from the electoral arena but from civil society, through the mobilization of discontented citizens. In the context of the economic crisis, and more specifically in Southern Europe, political strikes combined with large demonstrations may pave the way not only to the emergence of protest behavior, but also to new populist actors.

The growing literature on the populist phenomenon links the success of new populist parties to a context of crisis, which can have a political and/or economic nature (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). The electoral roots of populist parties are based on the diffusion of political distrust, discontent, resentment, as well as on negative attitudes that citizens develop against representative democracies, the 'establishment', the political elite and the incumbents. A number of studies have found that anti-political sentiments are crucial factors that drive the support for populist parties (Oesch 2008; Barr 2009). In addition, the electoral bases of populist forces center on more dissatisfied voters, with lower levels of political trust, lower levels of education, ideologically more extreme, with weak social ties and Eurosceptic (Pauwels 2014; Ramiro and Gómez 2016). But there is also a protest component that may boost the success of these new parties; this is related mainly to government (or system) performance, measured through the satisfaction with political actors and the (perceived) output of democratic regimes. In other words, there is broad consensus in the literature that the emergence and success of populist parties are found in the failure of representative democracy.

We argue that Portuguese parties are an interesting case for the study of populism because they illustrate 1) how party systems are relatively immune to the adoption of populist discourse, even under a deep political and economic crisis and 2) how they vary not only in their degree of populism but also with regard to its components. In addition, this study advances the literature on populist parties by examining a new case that has been hitherto neglected. The next section illustrates the rationale behind this choice and derives the main hypotheses to be tested empirically.

3. The spread of populist discourse in Portuguese manifestos before and during the Eurozone crisis

Populism is a complex phenomenon that depends on a number of factors. First, we know that in hard economic times, people are more likely to channel their grievances by supporting new challenger parties appealing to voters' dissatisfaction with the current situation (Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Hobolt and Tilley 2016). Second, a number of authors have investigated the importance of cleavage theory on the emergence of new populist parties (Kriesi et al. 2008; Alonso and Kaltwasser 2014). Third, cultural aspects are also worthy of consideration, namely the degree of disaffection, apathy and voter demobilization. Finally, some institutional factors also play a considerable role, specifically in terms of electoral threshold, the structure of competition in the governmental arena and the type of regime (e.g. Norris 2005). This section briefly reviews to what extent the factors behind the emergence of populist parties are also at work in the Portuguese case.

It will be shown that Portugal does not differ substantially from other Western European countries when looking at the evolution of several important dimensions related to political attitudes towards democracy in the 1990s and most of the 2000s. As a result, we expect Portugal to exhibit an average level of populism similar to other countries in this period and, as found in previous studies (Rooduijn et al. 2014, Rooduijn and Akkerman 2017), to detect a populist discourse predominantly among non-mainstream radical parties. However, since the onset of the economic crisis a number of favorable conditions have emerged for populism. Our second expectation is that populism will increase after the outbreak of the Euro crisis in 2010. Finally, we analyze more closely the anti-elite component of the populist communication strategy in Portugal and how the economic crisis impacted on it. We expect that, given the timing of the bailout right before the 2011 elections, non-mainstream parties' attacks against national and international elites – both held responsible for the dire straits the country found itself - will be especially fierce in post-crisis elections.

The economic turmoil that Portugal - as other Southern European countries - has experienced, exploded in a context of deep and longstanding disenchantment of voters towards democracy, which has long been a common trait in Western Europe. In the following, we present the evolution of several important dimensions related to political attitudes towards Portuguese democracy. Our benchmark will be the group of countries included in Rooduijn et al (2014) – France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and United Kingdom. As explained by the author, they were not selected because they are taken as

representative of Western European countries, but because they feature a suitable mix of electorally successful and unsuccessful populist parties from both the right and the left.

Figure 1 shows the longitudinal trend of six key indicators of the state of representative institutions using Eurobarometer data: satisfaction with democracy, trust towards government, parliament and parties, assessment of EU membership and trust in the European commission. The four lines represent the yearly score of Portugal and respectively the average, maximum and minimum yearly scores in the group of five countries considered by Rooduijn et al (2014). A dashed line was drawn in correspondence of 2010 (the start of the Euro crisis is commonly associated with the disclosure of the real state of Greek public debt and the ensuing frantic reaction of financial markets) to separate the pre-crisis from the crisis period.

Starting from the pre-crisis period, no indicator conveys an image of Portuguese exceptionalism. Portuguese scores are very close to the average of other countries but for two dimensions. First, satisfaction with democracy was among the lowest in the group during 2000s[1]. Existing data show that the decline experienced since the 1990s becomes more accentuated between 2006 and 2012, when this indicator achieved the lowest score of 10.2%. Data from 2014 suggest a slight recovery compared to the previous period, but the figures remain extremely low.

Second, trust in the European Commission is comparatively higher. All other indicators that are associated with the concept of specific support, such as trust in Parliament, Government and parties, or with the level of Euroscepticism, such as the assessment of EU membership, exhibit a trend (mostly a decline) similar to other countries. Moreover, these dimensions have been found quite sensitive to evaluations of performance and prevailing economic conditions (see also Teixeira et al. 2016).

In sum, the story of the performance of representative democracy in Portugal does not diverge substantially from other Western democracies, which have come to terms with significant challenges over the last decades in terms of citizens' disaffection and dissatisfaction. The empirical analysis tells us that there has been a growing

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1 It must be stressed that levels of support for democracy in Portugal (as a preferable form of government relative to non-democratic alternatives) have remained high even after the economic crisis hit the country in 2011 (Teixeira et al. 2014). This is also confirmed by the post-electoral survey conducted after the 2015 general elections, which shows that 79.5% of respondents agree that democracy is the preferred regime type, while 10% claim that there are no differences between democratic or non-democratic regimes.

distance between individuals and democratic institutions, as well as a disenchantment towards the EU. Moreover, the Portuguese case does not present any relevant specificity in terms of timing and intensity. Given this background, we expect Portuguese parties to be similar to other European parties in terms of degree of populist discourse.

Hypothesis 1: Portuguese parties are expected to show similar levels of populist discourse than other European counterparts.

Poor economic performance is barely new to Portuguese citizens. Since 2000 the country has been under-performing and living under a range of austerity measures. However, the global crisis that exploded in 2007-2008 worsened the economic situation, leading to a situation of bankruptcy during the second socialist government led by José Sócrates (2009-2011). The main political actors were thus obliged to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the so-called Troika (ECB−IMF−EU). The period of 'external intervention' took place under a new center-right government based on a coalition between PSD (Social Democratic Party, *Partido Social Democrata*) and CDS-PP (Social Democratic Centre-Popular Party, *Centro Democrático Social-Partido Popular*), in office since the 2011 elections. The implementation of austerity measures had not only economic effects, with the deterioration of the main economic indicators (GDP growth, employment, public deficit, see appendix A5), but it also fosters considerable political consequences, among which the intense mobilization of citizens and the government crisis that occurred in the summer 2013 and that resulted in a cabinet reshuffle (Fernandes 2015; De Giorgi and Santana Pereira 2015). All indicators for Portugal in Figure 1 reached their lowest record after 2009/2010.

The overall trajectory is very similar to what other Southern European countries (Greece, Italy and Spain) have experienced over the last decade (Muro and Vidal 2016). In addition, it has been found that political factors – such as perception of corruption – is also responsible for the long-term divorce between citizens and the political elite (Torcal 2014). Overall, there is clear evidence that the socio-economic context provided fertile grounds for anti-government parties that could exploit citizens' discontent and voice the lack of representation of groups suffering most from the crisis. Another consequence of the crisis was the rise of eurosceptic sentiments in a population hitherto benevolent towards EU integration. According to Eurobarometer data, almost 58% of a representative sample of the Portuguese population expressed confidence in the

European Commission in 2009, but this proportion had dropped in 2013 to only 32%. The same trend can be seen with regard to whether European membership is seen as a positive or negative thing. The crisis marked a considerable decline in diffuse support towards the EU, reaching the lowest score in 2013 when only 34% of respondents show a positive evaluation of the process of European integration. This 'perfect storm' leads us to formulate the second hypothesis as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Portuguese parties are expected to show a growing degree of populism over time, especially after the onset of the economic crisis.

Despite the fact that they present a Manichean outlook based on the contrast between a general will (*volonté générale*) and the elite, populist parties are also characterized by their host ideology (Mudde 2004). This means that populist parties may differ on many policy issues, such as social policies, institutional reforms or their core idea of the 'people' (Gherghina et al. 2013). From this viewpoint, it is worth noting that Portuguese parties differ significantly in their rhetoric style and discourse strategy, which reflect their distinct orientation towards office-seeking and governmental arena. While CDS-PP, PS and PSD are considered mainstream parties, which have tried to depoliticize important issues (e.g. European integration) and 'cartelize' the party system, radical left parties (BE and PCP) have been traditionally considered as anti-system parties. This difference can clearly be seen by observing Chapel Hill data, which measures – among other dimensions - the overall degree of anti-elitism displayed by the main political parties. Overall, Portugal scores relatively low in the anti-elitism scale, below the European average and other Southern European countries, whereas Greece presents the highest score. However, when we look at individual parties, the picture is slightly different. Both radical left parties display a relatively high score (7.5), while the MPT (*Partido da Terra*, Earth Party) shows the highest anti-elitist salience (8.0). These figures are very distinct from the rhetoric of the mainstream parties (less than 2 in anti-elitist salience), but they are also lower than other left-wing populist parties in Southern Europe (Syriza scores 8.55, Podemos and 5SM 10, while also KKE and RC rank higher, with 9.77 and 9.33, respectively). This presents a limited picture, however, because party discourse is amplified (or played down) by the mass media, thus influencing its potential impact on the electorate.

Besides this, there are also differences between the two radical left parties worthy of consideration. It is clear in the PCP that the enemy is articulated through two distinct levels: the first is related to international financial institutions and the whole European project, whereas the second is based on specific political forces within the country – i.e. mainstream moderate parties. By contrast, the BE targets more the current leadership of the EU, rather than the idea of European integration[2]. The PCP was also distinct in the use of populist rhetoric due to a more explicit use of the logic of 'equivalence'. In the election manifestos, as well as in the campaign slogans, the party aimed to capture popular sentiments of frustration and anger against the harsh austerity measures in order to create a single subject based on all those most affected by the crisis. Therefore, heterogeneous frustrated groups were opposed to the 'enemy of the people', that is, the 'pro austerity forces', the MoU and the – national and international – troika. There is plenty of reference to the term 'people' in the 2015 election program, always used as a synonymous of workers. The defence of sovereignty, national dignity and the people's interests were the main objectives of the alternative based on a left and patriotic government (PCP 2015). On the other hand, there are no direct references to the 'people' in the BE 2015 election program (see more below). Given these organizational and ideological legacies, we expect to find differences in the degree of populism displayed by the main parties and the targets of attacks.

Hypothesis 3: Mainstream parties are associated to lower levels of populism, while the PCP is expected to display the highest level, followed by the BE.

4. Data and methods

One of the most common methodologies for the measurement of populism is based on content analysis of party documents. There are two main variants of this strategy (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). One is computerized content analysis, which uses an a priori designed dictionary to gauge the degree of populism. The second approach uses trained coders in order to systematically analyze texts by means of a codebook. Both strategies rely on the ideological conceptualization of populism (Mudde

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2 See also the slogan used by the BE in 2013 that compares Portuguese Prime Minister to the German Chancellor ('A government more German than the German one').

2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2015) that consists of two main dimensions, namely 1) people centrism and 2) anti-elitism. The first dimension aims to measure references to the 'people' and other similar terms – e.g. 'we', 'country', 'society', etc. The second dimension refers to critiques towards political elites, thus coders were instructed to look at whether party manifestos contain negative opinions on the political elite in general. Coders have made use of a codebook with a list of words or expressions that could refer to the people or the political elite. A comparative study using different methodological strategies of content analysis found that the traditional method provides generally better results than the automated textual analysis, which is based on formalized content analysis of election manifestos (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011).

We investigate our research questions by replicating Rooduijn's methodology. Despite the labor-intensive work that lies behind this strategy, we contend that traditional content analysis presents several advantages for our research objectives. First, it provides a more systematic measurement of populism, allowing us to compare new cases not yet covered by the literature to other European counterparts. Second, this method allows for interpreting political discourse, that is, it offers a more fine-grained analysis of the context and the arguments used by both mainstream and challenger parties. This is clearly an important asset compared to quantitative text analysis based on a computerized large-scale analysis of different types of texts.

Party manifestos are considered to represent and express the policy collectively adopted by the party (Budge et al. 2001). Moreover, as a number of works have already highlighted (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011), this type of source presents other positive aspects. First, these documents provide a clear overview of the arguments deployed by parties during election campaigns. Second, these texts are readily available and are easily comparable across countries, parties and elections.

Our unit of analysis is party manifestos of all parliamentary parties in Portugal (see Table 1). We select manifestos of all main parties with parliamentary representation from four elections: two before (1999 and 2002) and two after (2011 and 2015) the eruption of the economic crisis. Manifestos in both 2002 and 2011 are considerably shorter because they were drafted on the occasion of snap elections. Five parties have always won parliamentary seats over these four elections. Starting from the radical left-side of the political spectrum, the BE and the PCP, plus the Socialists (PS, *Partido Socialista*); on the opposite side, the Social-democrats (PSD) and the CDS-PP. Additionally, for the last two elections, we also coded the manifestos of parties which

did not make it into parliament (*LIVRE/Tempo de Avançar*, Democratic Republican Party [PDR] and National Renovator Party [PNR]) or which elected just one representative (People–Animals–Nature [PAN] in the 13th legislature) but had an impact on the campaign debate at the level of communication.

As already mentioned, we applied Rooduijn and Pauwels' classical content analysis of populist references (2011) by focusing on individual paragraphs in party manifestos. The coding of populism is based on the identification of words or set of words associated to the 'people' or to 'anti-elitism' (see appendix and the original codebook in Rooduijn and Pauwels [2011]). To be coded as populist, one paragraph should include references to both people and anti-elitism.[3] We also applied the same weighting procedure suggested by Rooduijn et al. (2014, 567), so as to make the two data sets comparable.[4]

As a second step, we decided to analyze the type of actors which are mentioned in party manifestos and the tone of these references, adapting the analysis framework developed by Vasilopoulou et al. (2014). Four categories of actors were taken into consideration: mainstream parties (PS, PSD and CDS-PP); challenger parties without experience in office (PCP, BE); external elites, which can be either international actors (e.g. EU institutions, International Monetary Fund, Troika), countries (e.g. Germany, Greece) or foreign elites (e.g. Merkel, Draghi); national and international economic and financial interest groups (including banks, multinational companies, investors, rating agency, national trade unions, etc.); national institutions (e.g. Constitutional Court, national parliament and government, parliamentary committees etc.).[5] When one of these actors was detected (more than one actor can be mentioned in a single paragraph), coders had to classify the tone of the reference as either positive, negative or, in the few cases where both applied, neutral.

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3 To make the coding more reliable, two different coders were asked to analyze the same election manifesto. We thank the valuable work of Ana Cameira, Soraia André and Tânia Pereira.

4 Rooduijn et al. (2014) adopted two weighting criteria: populist paragraphs in the introduction were counted twice; populist paragraphs in long and short manifestos were weighted respectively 1.5 and 0.67 (see note 13, ibid.).

5 Self-references (i.e. the PS talking about itself) were not coded to avoid an inflation of positive references.

5. Analysis

The first hypothesis states that the share of populist discourse in party programs should not significantly differ between Portugal and other countries. To investigate this conjecture, we used data on election manifestos from five Western European countries collected and coded by Rooduijn et al. 2014. Since these manifestos were published between 1988 and 2008, namely before the start of the Euro crisis, we opted for running the comparison using only Portuguese data from the 1999 and 2002 elections. Fig. 2 plots for each party in the data set the mean level of populism across elections dividing by country (sorted in ascending order based on the median of the distribution) and type of party (mainstream or not). To ease the cross-country comparison, country-specific box-plots are overlaid. The plot shows that Portugal occupies a middle position in the ranking. The Portuguese median score is similar to Italy and the UK, although the distributions in these two cases are more right-skewed due to the presence of few cases with extreme levels of populism. This is reflected by the country means which are 2.8 for Portugal, 4.0 for Italy and 5.5 for the UK: a result which aligns Portugal closer to France (2.6).

INSERT HERE FIGURE 2

To inspect the difference between Portugal and the rest of other countries we set a linear model where the unit of analysis are election manifestos. In line with Rooduijn et al. (2014, 568), we computed a linear model with clustered standard errors to take into account the nested structure of our data: each manifesto is clustered in a country. The dependent variable is the manifesto-specific share of populist paragraphs. Our main independent variables are five country binary variables where the reference country is Portugal. Since Figure 1 points to clearly distinct patterns between mainstream and non-mainstream parties, we controlled for it by means of an additional binary variable. Table 2 shows that none of the country dummies is significant at a conventional 0.5 level. All in all, we found evidence in support of H1. Portugal is no exception when looking at the share of populist content in its party manifestos.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

Our second and third hypotheses look at Portugal from a longitudinal and cross-party perspective. H2 asks whether the Euro crisis had an impact on the extent parties used populist rhetoric in their party manifestos. H3 posits that parties in the non-mainstream group exhibit significant differences in their usage of populist references. Figure 3 plots all studied Portuguese manifestos according to the year of the election and the share of populist paragraphs. It shows that the average level of populism in the manifestos of mainstream parties (PS and PSD/CDS, PAF in the 2015 election) does not increase over time and it is always less than 1% of the manifesto. In contrast, the sharpest growth in populist references is among non-mainstream parties with parliamentary representation, PCP and BE, and it is mainly associated with one election, 2011. As already recalled, this election was preceded by the signing of the MoU between the Troika and all mainstream parties. The Communists and the BE did not take part in the hasty negotiations with external lenders in the spring of 2011, thus marking a clear distance between them and those "responsible/in charge" for the harsh adjustment programme (ruling elites and external actors). The average share of populist paragraphs changes from 6.2% and 10.6%, respectively in 1999 and 2002, to 22% in 2011. The main driver behind this staggering increase is the BE, which includes populist-like references in almost 30% of its manifesto. Vice versa the Communists did not follow the BE along this road: they exhibit only a marginal increase from 14.3 to 14.6.

Interestingly, the average level among non-mainstream parties drops dramatically in 2015, returning to levels closer to the pre-crisis period: around 10.7%. It is worth reminding that by 2015 the emergency had already ended, with Portugal regaining access to the financial markets. Once again, BE and PCP diverged in their communication strategy. The former opted for substantially toning down its appeal to populism, reaching its lowest record of 4.6%. The latter moderately increased it up to 16.8%.

As regards parties that launched their election bid in 2011 and 2015 but either were not successful or got only one representative (PAN), their manifestos can be qualified as only moderately populist with an average share of 5.1% in 2011 and 4.8% in 2015. Parties ranking the highest in this group are the PNR in 2011 and the PDR in 2015, although their 10 per cent score still keeps them at a reasonable distance from the BE in 2011 (29.3) and the PCP in 2015 (16.8).

To sum up, descriptive data do not reveal an overall increase over time in the average recourse to populist rhetoric in the manifestos of mainstream parties. Two different trajectories characterize the parties in the non-mainstream camp. The BE performance in 2011 looks like a one-off deviation from a rather consistent path of otherwise moderate populism, which it shares with other unsuccessful non-mainstream parties. Vice versa, our data reveal that PCP manifestos features the highest share of populist discourse but for one election and that their share of populist references has been constantly increasing since 1999. This finding lends partial support to H3.

Table 3 reports the result of a formal test of H2 using a multivariate linear regression to account for the variation in the share of populist content of Portuguese manifestos over the four elections. In order to provide a more nuanced overview of the change in party rhetoric, the same model is applied also to variation in the share of paragraphs containing references to people and anti-elitism, the two necessary components of our definition of populism. Our main covariates are three binary variables for each election (the reference category is 1999), while two control variables measure whether the party is either non-mainstream or unsuccessful/non-mainstream (the reference are mainstream parties). Tellingly, none of the election-variables is statistically significant at conventional level, except for a decrease in people-centred references in 2002. Ultimately, we could not find evidence that the Euro crisis brought about a long-term change in the communication strategy of Portuguese parties in their electoral manifestos. The 2011 electoral campaign was indeed peculiar, as indicated by estimated coefficients for the 2011 election which are comparatively larger for populism and anti-elitism. Yet, by 2015 the content of manifestos had for the most part already returned to pre-crisis levels.

Another interesting finding is that BE and PCP exhibit a remarkably strong tendency to use anti-elitist language (whatever the target of the attacks) in comparison with the rest of parties (see the estimated coefficient of BE/PCP in the "Anti-elitism" model). On average, the share of anti-elite paragraphs in these two parties' manifestos is 20 and 14 points higher when compared to, respectively, mainstream and unsuccessful non-mainstream parties. In order to look more closely at this finding and better tell apart

these two parties, we made recourse to our second level of content coding, distinguishing paragraphs by the type of actor they mentioned and the tone of the reference.

Specifically, for each manifesto, we calculated the number of paragraphs referring to a category of actors (mainstream parties, external elites, interest groups and national institutions) with a negative tone and computed the share out of all paragraphs. The results are illustrated in figure 4. All quadrants reveal a strikingly similar temporal pattern for the two parties. As regards "external elites" and "national institutions", the trends are almost indistinguishable. This finding hints at the fact that the two parties have similar "enemies" and that the intensity of the attack reflects election-specific circumstances. As expected, the 2011 campaign witnesses the highest percentages of negative attacks according to most categories. What differentiates the PCP from the BE is, first, the outstanding percentage of paragraphs containing a negative reference to interest groups in the PCP manifesto. These economic actors are normally referred to as "financial capital" or "big corporate groups". Vice versa the BE manifesto attacked less explicitly the economic sector. Secondly, the BE manifesto in 2015 devoted a greater share of paragraphs to criticize the incumbents than the PCP. Interestingly, the latter was more likely to criticize right-wing incumbents together with the socialists, which held power until 2011.

INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE

6. Conclusion

The resilience displayed by the Portuguese party system in the recent crisis years is anomalous once considered the electoral storms which washed across other European democracies, especially in Southern Europe. Against a background of harsh austerity measures, the punishment of mainstream parties did occur but it was comparatively mild. Furthermore, no new challenger, especially one exploiting a populist anti-establishment rhetoric, entered the parliamentary arena. This paper started from these premises to test by means of a content analysis of electoral manifestos to what extent Portugal have remained immune from the populist zeitgeist and what kind of differences exist among parties in their strategies of blame-shifting.

We proceed in steps. First, we set the stage for the closer inspection of the Portuguese case by testing whether, in the pre-crisis period, Portuguese manifestos were characterized by a different share of populist language with respect to a sample of other Western European countries. As expected – attitudinal indicators of the state of Portuguese democracy do not differ systematically from other countries -, our analysis did not find any significant difference. If we rank countries by their average share of populism, Portugal occupies a middle position. Moreover, similarly to other cases in Western Europe, mainstream parties have made little or no use of populist language and non-mainstream parties which are more prone to employ it.

Secondly, we found that the crisis, generally speaking, was not consequential for parties' communication strategies. The extraordinary events preceding the 2011 elections did affect the content of non-mainstream parties' manifestos, especially the BE. But this party had already moderated its language in the subsequent election (2015). On the other hand, Communist party manifestos contained comparatively higher rates of populism even before the economic crisis intervened. Only in this case, the crisis might have played the role of catalyst provoking a marginal acceleration of longer-term trends. Overall, our analysis reveals that, except for the share of populist rhetoric, the blame-shifting strategies of PCP and BE are extremely similar. Both rode the wave of citizens' discontent in 2011 by attacking external elites, mainstream parties and national and international interest groups which led Portugal to the brink of insolvency. Even so, they showed already a more cautious approach in the 2015 campaign.

The overall picture to be drawn from this analysis is that Portuguese parties, in particular non-mainstream parties, followed their European counterparts by increasing their use of a populist discourse but there is no evidence that this type of communication strategy has become dominant, as far as electoral manifestos are concerned. Data about the 2015 elections reveal that the end of the adjustment program and a partial winding down of austerity contributed to defuse the appeal of the populist message for the Left Bloc. What is more, it seems that this tactical decision paid off in electoral terms since the party more than double its representatives with respect to 2011. The same holds true for the only new party to make its entry in parliament in 2015. PAN made little use of populist language in its manifesto in comparison with, for example, the Democratic Republic Party led by António Marinho e Pinto, whose populist campaign had contributed to an unexpected two-seat gain in the European Parliament in 2014.

Is Portugal really immune to the populist Zeitgeist? This paper provides a nuanced answer to this question. In a sense, populist appeals have always been part of the genetic code of anti-establishment parties such as the PCP and, to a lesser extent, the BE. This type of message has arguably achieved its peak during the bailout period, when both radical left parties exploited the argument of the 'colonisation' of Southern European democracies by the wealthiest European countries. The rhetoric adopted by these parties is responsible for the relative convergence between Portugal and other Western European countries. Given the (moderately) positive perspectives for European economies for the next coming years and the lack of resonance of the refugee problem, it is unlikely that the degree of populism will increase in the near future. However, short-term factors – e.g. corruption scandals, government crisis, etc. – and the rise of political entrepreneurs are potential elements that may destabilise the party system.
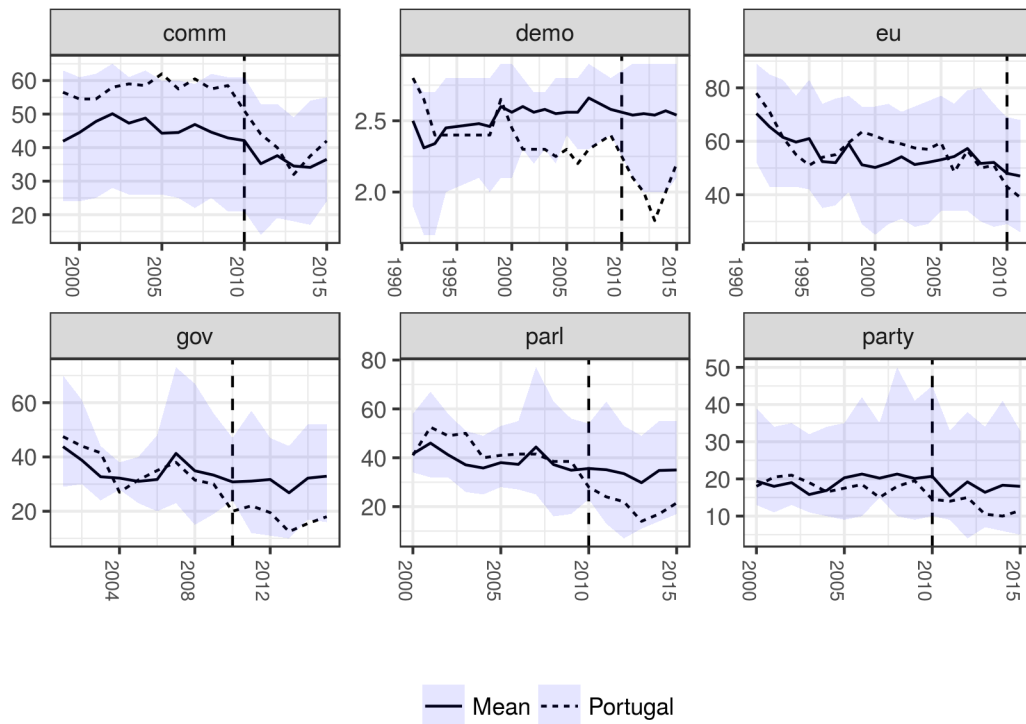
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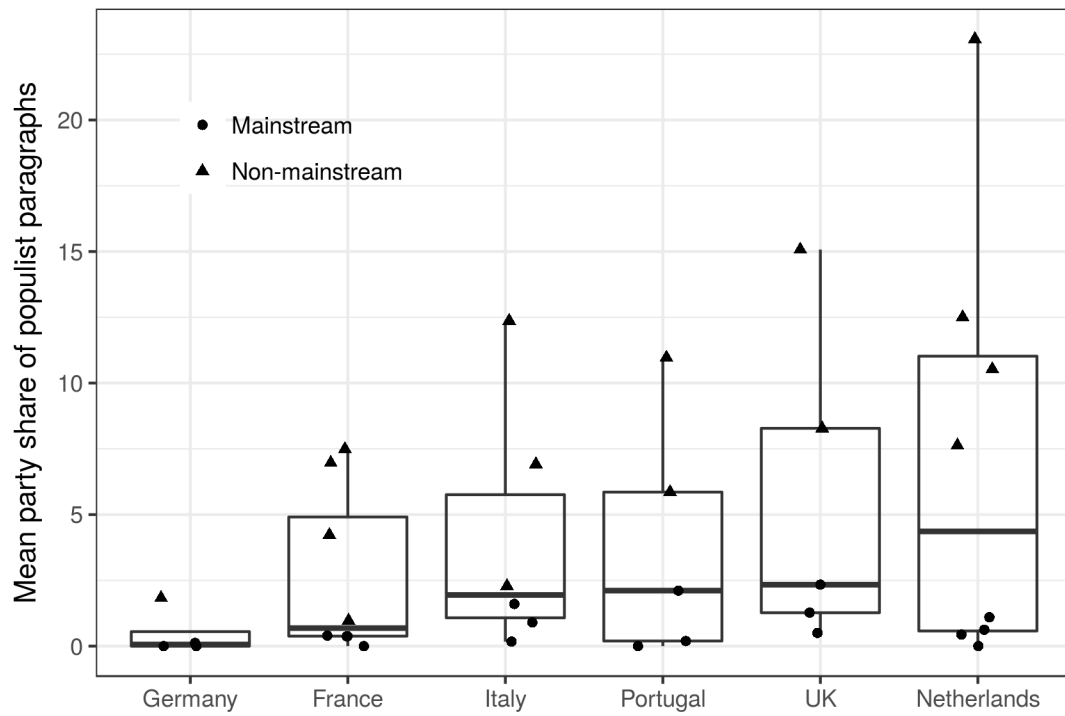
Figure 1 – Attitudinal indicators – Portugal vs other countries

Note : Comm = Trust in the EU Commission; demo = Satisfaction with democracy; EU = assessment of EU membership; gov = Trust in government; parl = Trust in parliament; party = trust in political parties; Mean = Mean of France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and UK

Figure 2 Cross-country comparison of share of populism

Source: Data from France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and UK are from Rooduijn et al. (2014). For Portugal (own data), we consider only two elections: 1999 and 2002.

Note: points are parties (mean value of different elections when they participate in more than one election)
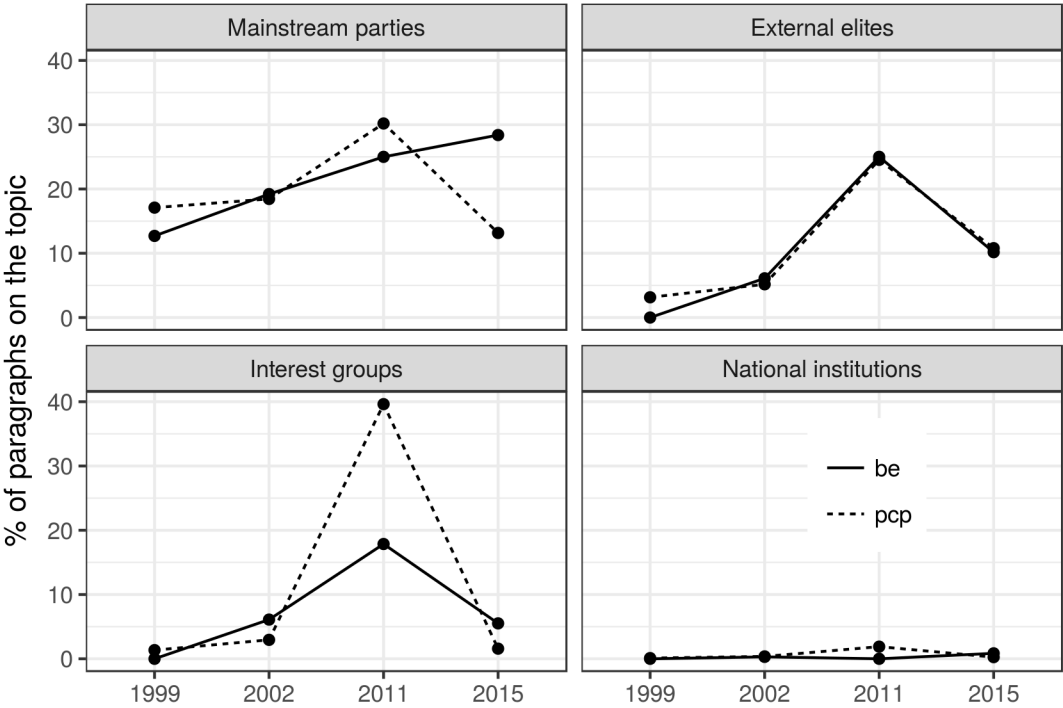
Figure 3 Share of populist paragraphs in Portuguese manifestos
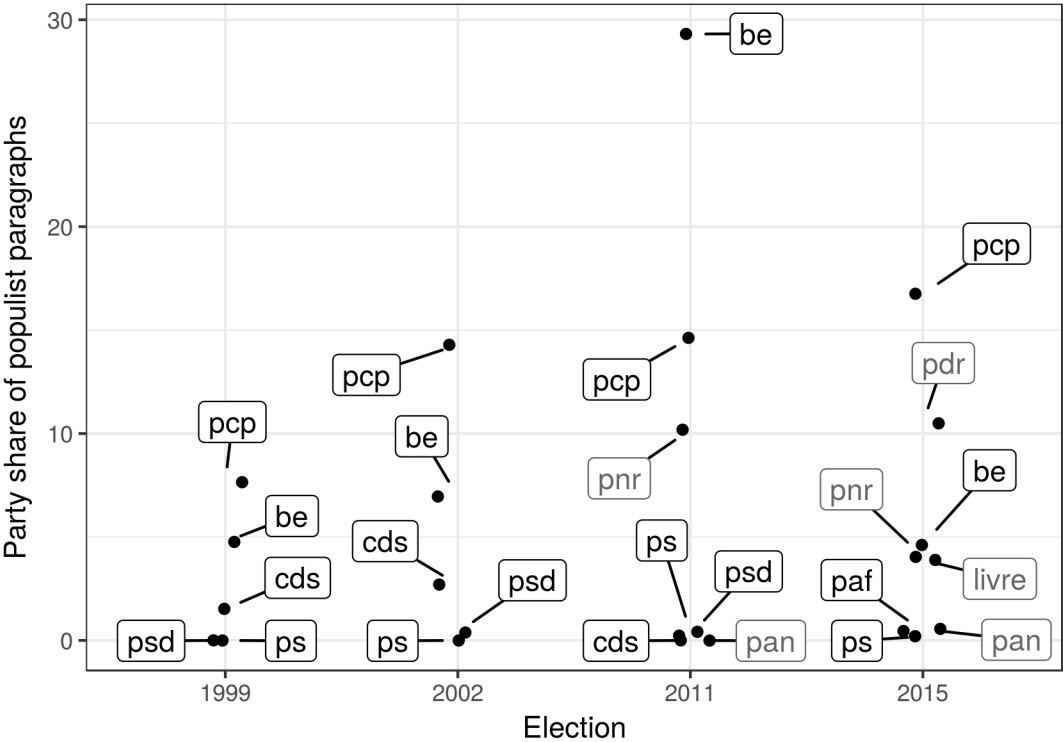
Figure 4 A comparison of blame strategies: BE vs PCP

Source: own data

Table 1: Selected cases

Party	Ideology	Election manifestos	Institutional position (2017)	Last electoral score (2015)
BE	Left Libertarian	1999, 2002, 2011, 2015	External support	10.2
CDS-PP	Conservative	1999, 2002, 2011, 2015	Opposition	*
PCP	Communist	1999, 2002, 2011, 2015	External support	8.3
PS	Socialist	1999, 2002, 2011, 2015	Government	32.3
PSD	Liberal	1999, 2002, 2011, 2015	Opposition	36.9

Table 2: Comparing populist rhetoric across different Western European countries

	DV = Share of populist paragraphs in the manifesto
Constant	1.04 (0.89)
France	-1.76 (1.11)
Germany	-2.29 (1.50)
Italy	-0.48 (1.51)
Netherlands	0.61 (1.26)
UK	1.17 (1.29)
Non-mainstream	6.96 (1.10)***
R^2	0.52
Adj. R^2	0.49
Num. obs.	96

***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$

OLS regression with clustered (party) standard errors. Reference category for state dummies is Portugal. ource: Data from France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands and UK are from Rooduijn et al. (2014). For Portugal (own data), we consider only two elections: 1999 and 2002.

Table 3: The determinants of populist rhetoric in Portuguese election manifestos

	DV = Share of populist paragraphs		
	Populism	**People-centre**	**Anti-elitism**
Constant	-1.95 (1.66)	46.78 (4.33)***	-3.48 (3.04)
2002 election	2.08 (1.27)	-11.25 (4.77)*	5.54 (3.28)
2011 election	5.43 (4.33)	-7.66 (8.69)	7.68 (6.19)
2015 election	2.42 (2.05)	-7.10 (5.30)	3.77 (2.98)
BE/PCP	11.84 (0.86)***	5.37 (5.18)	19.67 (0.54)***
Unsuccess Non-Mainstrean	3.39 (2.74)	-10.08 (6.99)	5.23 (3.37)
R2	0.60	0.32	0.73
Adj. R2	0.50	0.15	0.66
Num. obs.	26	26	26

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05

OLS regression with clustered (party) standard errors. Reference category for election dummies is the1999 election