

Motivational Letter for Politicologenetmaal 2018

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Panel: POPULISM IS HERE! SO WHAT?

Dear Mr. Zaslove, Mr. Rooduijn, Mr. Van Hauwaert,

having recently addressed the question of how to best empirically approach *traditionalist populism* - a variant of populism that exhibits Cas Mudde's proposed features of the far right, we wish to participate at your conference to critically discuss our findings. To our knowledge, scholarship studying the phenomenon of populism is still plagued with conceptual conflation between populism and the far right, leading to shortcomings in empirical analyses. We seek to disentangle these concepts, with the aim of better understanding:

1. those elements that explain populism,
2. those that explain far right attitudes, and ultimately
3. those that lead to interactions between these two phenomena.

We are three aspiring young researchers, currently completing the M.A. *Empirical Political and Social Research* at the University of Stuttgart (Germany) and at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux (France). Having worked on a wide range of topics and being equipped with versatile methods, we hope to contribute to your panel's goal of "examin[ing] populism in its different forms, across different contexts". The research expertise that we will hopefully be able to bring to the seminar includes:

Conceptually speaking:

- Political extremism (esp. focus on interactions between religion and politics) - *F. Votta*
- International conflict studies (esp. focus on manifestations of left and right-wing terrorism since the 19th century in civil and international conflicts) - *N. Nguyen*
- Political outcomes of societal upheavals (esp. focus on the Middle East) - *M. Schumacher*

Methodologically speaking:

- Advanced computational methods (esp. automatic web scraping & machine learning) - *F. Votta*
- Mixed methods (esp. qualitative-quantitative content analysis) - *N. Nguyen*
- Advanced quantitative methods (esp. multilevel modeling) - *M. Schumacher*

As the conference will assemble scholars in the field, we hope to enter into a fruitful dialogue in which both established and aspiring researchers can share their ideas. Especially the presence of Cas Mudde, whose work greatly influenced our analyses, will give us the opportunity to receive feedback about the conceptual framework that we propose. This is important for us, as it helps us refine our conceptualization of populism, which hopefully sets off more nuanced discussions about the nature of this phenomenon.

On a last note, we hope we can seize the opportunity to be part of this thrilling learning experience.