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ABSTRACT   *Despite the increased use of the term populism in vernacular and scholarly language, the measurement of the concept has long been neglected. The label is often attached to a certain party without any justification. Minimal definitions are alternatives but lack rigor. Classical content analyses provide more systematic measurements of populism but are extremely resource hungry. This article proposes an alternative, quantitative text analysis to measure the degree of populism among Belgian parties, drawing on both internally and externally oriented party literature. The results confirm that usual suspects such as the Vlaams Belang or Lijst Dedecker are the most populist of all parties under study. Populism turns out not to be an "either–or" concept, however, since we also identify a moderately populist party. It is furthermore demonstrated how populism can be attached to other ideologies, such as the radical right and (neo)liberalism. A cross-validation of the proposed method with independent voter survey data confirms its validity. This article concludes that a quantitative text analysis might be a promising method to measure populism over time and space without the huge costs of hand coding.*

Introduction

In the last two decades, the term populism has been used increasingly in both academic and vernacular language. Typically it refers to specific political parties, such as the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) in Austria or the Front National (FN) in France. But mainstream parties are also sometimes accused of using a populist discourse. The emergence of this so-called populist *Zeitgeist* (Mudde, 2004) is not without consequences. Scholars associate it with a range of different phenomena such as a personalization of politics, the increased use of direct democracy, and less tolerance for minorities. Abts and Rummens (2007) even consider populism to be a quasi-totalitarian ideology. It comes therefore as no surprise that populism and populist parties have been extensively researched in the last decade. In particular, the theoretical debate about what exactly constitutes populism has been very intense and to some extent also fruitful. Although the discussion is far from closed, most scholars agree that populism is an ideology or style drawing upon the antagonistic relationship between "the people" and "the elite". At the same time, however, there

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have been few attempts to measure populism in a reliable way – particularly over time and space.

This article reviews the two most common methods of measuring populism in the academic literature and proposes another – more quantitative – approach. The first is the *minimal definition*, which sets out a number of minimal criteria which must be met by a certain party in order to be labelled populist (Mudde, 2007). Although this method constitutes a good starting point, it is difficult to apply systematically in practice. Another problem is that the Sartorian "either–or" logic is forced upon the data, while it might be argued that populism is more a "matter of degree". A second method is that of a classical *content analysis* (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Populism is operationalized by a number of dimensions, and party documents are coded according to these dimensions. While this method is more rigorous than that of the minimal definition, it also suffers from several drawbacks. Content analyses are time-consuming and can suffer from coder subjectivity and unreliability. Because the method is very resource intensive, the measurement of populism over time and space is extremely rare (Hawkins, 2009).

Against these two approaches, I propose another way in which to measure populism, based on *quantitative text analysis*. Quantitative text analysis is a variant of content analysis that is expressly quantitative, not just in terms of representing textual content numerically but also in analyzing it (Benoit, 2009). The method does not treat texts as discourse to be interpreted, but rather as data in the form of words (Laver et al., 2003). Because texts are being analyzed by a computer and not by human coders, it can be applied to large bodies of text while reducing drastically the problem of reliability. The downside may be that the gains in reliability come at the cost of validity. A quantitative text analysis of party literature in Belgium demonstrates that this should not be a major concern, however.

This article is structured as follows. In the next section, I explore what constitutes populism and argue that it is a thin ideology. The third section reviews the two most common methods to identify populism and considers their strengths and weaknesses. The alternative quantitative text analysis is then proposed and applied to the party literature of the main parties in Flanders (Belgium). Since the Flemish party system is expected to contain two different kinds of populist parties, it seems interesting to investigate this case in more depth. The article will discuss whether these two parties – Vlaams Belang (VB) and Lijst Dedecker (LDD) – which are often labelled as populist by both commentators and scholars are also populist according to our proposed method. The fifth section surveys different kinds of populism while the sixth attempts to cross-validate the results of our analysis. The conclusion wraps up the findings and reviews the possibilities of measuring populism using quantitative text analysis.

Populism

As Sartori often stressed in his methodological writings, it is impossible to separate measurement from the concept one wants to measure (Collier & Gerring, 2008).

Therefore, it is important to first explore what exactly constitutes populism – a concept which is vague, slippery and often defined differently depending upon the context in which it is used (Taggart, 2000). Jagers (2006) reduces the numerous meanings of populism, however, to roughly three categories: populism as an organizational form; populism as a political style; and populism as an ideology.

According to Taggart, populism refers to a particular *type of party organization* which is highly centralized and led by a personalized and charismatic leader. Although populist parties tend to define themselves as loose movements in order to demonstrate their closeness to the people, they are often very hierarchically structured with a charismatic leader at the apex (Taggart, 1995: 41). The centralized structure enables populists to reduce the institutional complexity within these parties and to contrast themselves with the bureaucratic model of the mass political party (Taggart, 2000: 102). This conceptualization is also common in Latin American studies of populism. "Populism emerges when personalistic leaders base their rule on massive yet mostly uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of people" (Weylandt, 2001: 18). Nevertheless, Taggart admits that charismatic leadership and a centralized structure are not characteristics limited to populist parties, so they provide only minimal criteria. Moreover, as Jagers (2006: 47) points out, there are examples of populist mobilization without authoritarian or strong leadership such as the American People's Party at the end of the nineteenth century.

In a second meaning, populism is defined as a *political style* in which politicians make use of a simplistic, direct language that is similar almost to demagogy (Taguieff, 2007). While the populist style tends to be varied, there is generally an emphasis on "agitation, spectacular acts, exaggeration, calculated provocations, and the intended breech of political and socio-cultural taboos" (Heinisch, 2003: 94). This style is "democratic" in the sense of being aimed at the ordinary people, resulting in a tabloid style communication while denouncing the shady compromises and complicated procedures of professional politicians (Canovan, 1999: 5). Populists legitimize themselves by referring constantly to "the people", a catch-all concept that can be used strategically by politicians ranging from the left to the right, to appeal to the electorate at large (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Not all scholars think of populism as merely a rhetorical device, though. It is argued that some parties have included a normative dimension in the populist discourse, making it more of an ideology than a style.

According to Canovan (2002), populism might be conceptualized as a *thin centred ideology* that draws upon the image of a redemptive democracy. As the populist ideology is thin centred (Freeden, 1996), meaning that it has not the same level of refinement as for instance liberalism, it can be easily attached to other (full) ideologies. A conceptually clear definition has been provided by Mudde (2004: 543), who defines populism as an "ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous 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". It is remarkable how the conceptualization of populism as an ideology has recently won ground in the definitional debate (Albertazzi & McDonnel, 2007; Jagers, 2006; Ruzza & Fella, 2009; Stanley, 2008).

Essential in Mudde's definition is the normative distinction between the people and the elite. The people are seen as a homogeneous, collective entity lacking internal divisions. It is often represented by populists as a "silent majority" which pays taxes, respects the law and produces economic welfare but is politically quiescent (Taggart, 2000: 93). Depending on the ideology it is combined with, immigrants, politicians, intellectuals or bureaucrats might be excluded from "the people" (Stanley, 2008). These excluded groups are often part of the elite, which is also a homogeneous entity and is perceived as incompetent, corrupt and lacking the common sense of the ordinary people. One of the common techniques of populists is to depict the elite as conspiring against the people. The goal of populists is to restore the voice of the people and to assure that the governmental policies perfectly reflect the will of the people.

In this article I argue that the distinctions that have been drawn between these different meanings of populism are partly artificial. Considering populism to be a thin centred ideology does not exclude the possibility that it features a specific style of communication as well. Scholars have pointed out that the populist style and organizational characteristics are "symptoms or expressions of an *underlying populist ideology*" (Abts & Rummens, 2007: 408). Just like other ideologies, populism has its own core concepts and its own vocabulary (Freeden, 1998). If the goal of populists is to give back power to the common people, it is not surprising that they use the (less technocratic) language of the people. Just as liberal parties are concerned about taxes, the individual or the market, populist parties are preoccupied by the people, corruption, and ways to give the power back to the people. And that ideology impacts on party organization does not come as a surprise either (Bolleyer, 2007). So even though I concur with the view that populism is a thin centred ideology, I argue that this is reflected in a specific discourse as well. This makes populism measurable by means of quantitative text analysis.

Measuring Populism: The Minimal Definition and Content Analysis

Since populism has only recently received significant scientific attention, it has not been included in the coding scheme of the Comparative Manifesto Project (CMP) or in the expert surveys conducted so far. To determine whether a party is populist or not therefore remains a difficult task. It is not uncommon that scholars use the term populism without any definition or criteria at all – the term pops up unexpectedly and is attached to certain parties or politicians without any justification. The studies of Betz (1994) and Taggart (1996), for instance, describe populism to some extent, but they do not provide minimal criteria to classify parties as being populist or not. This problem is also present in edited volumes in which every author seems to use his or her own definition of populism, so that it is arbitrary which parties are considered populist and why (Mény & Surel, 2002). Hawkins (2009: 1048) is thus right when he argues that "the label of *populist* is often applied without any systematic empirical justification".

Minimal Definition

In some of the more recent writings clear definitions and hence criteria to label parties as populist have gained importance (Albertazzi & McDonnel, 2007; Mudde, 2007). In particular, Mudde's definition is sufficiently specific to provide clear guidelines to determine whether a party is populist or not. His threshold is rather high since a populist party should consider (1) the people as a homogeneous and pure entity, (2) the elite as a homogeneous and corrupt entity, (3) the people and the elite as two antagonistic groups, and (4) favour measures to give power back to the people (e.g. direct democracy). Mudde (2007) uses his definition to identify an impressive number of populist parties throughout both West and Eastern Europe. He also distinguishes populist radical right, neoliberal populist and social populist parties. Nonetheless, there are some serious problems with using minimal definitions to identify populist parties in practice.

To begin with, it is not known which party literature is used to determine whether a party matched his proposed criteria. Are only party manifestos considered, or also internally oriented party literature, interviews or speeches? Obviously, language restrictions also make it questionable whether a scholar can investigate the ideologies of parties in so many countries. Another problem is related to the frequency and the level of populist instances that are needed to consider a party populist. Is it enough to find one interview in which a party leader argues that the political system is corrupt, or do we need multiple examples? The condition that the people and the elite have to be homogeneous groups is also rather vague. In the case of Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF), for instance, it can be questioned whether the leader considered the people as a homogeneous entity, since it has been argued that Fortuyn was too much of a sociologist to consider the people to be a homogeneous bloc (Lucardie, 2007), yet Mudde (2007) considers the party as populist. This illustrates that if the concept is used in a Sartorian sense, a party is either populist or not, while it might be argued that the LPF was a moderately populist party. Even though they provide a necessary starting point, minimal definitions are not sufficiently fine grained to measure concepts such as populism accurately.

Content Analysis

A second method to measure populism is based on content analysis, i.e. the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics (Neuendorf, 2002). Even though these sorts of analyses to measure populism are still very scarce, they seem to have gained prominence in the last few years. Jagers and Walgrave (2007), for instance, developed a coding scheme to measure "thin" (referring to the people) and "thick" (against politics, the state, the media and immigrants) populism among Belgian (Flemish) parties, drawing on political party broadcasts. The content analysis revealed that the VB is by far the most populist of all the examined parties. While this study constituted a breakthrough in measuring populism, it was limited to one country and it is not entirely clear whether their method would work for data

other than the rather scarce political party broadcasts that were analyzed. Moreover, issues of reliability and validity are not dealt with by Jagers and Walgrave (2007).

Another attempt to measure populism, which allows the concept to be applied to different contexts, has been made by Rooduijn (2009a, 2009b). By adopting a double operationalization strategy of generalization and particularization, the author attempts to measure populism in a comparative context. Rooduijn uses party manifestos as data, which is more in line with conventional research on party positions (Budge et al., 2001). Each paragraph of these party manifestos is coded on three dimensions (emphasis on the homogeneous people; anti-elitism; exclusionism). His measurements among UK parties have a reliability of Krippendorff's alpha 0.739 or higher. Usual suspects, such as the Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV) in the Netherlands or the British National Party (BNP) in the United Kingdom seem to be the most populist according to the analysis (Rooduijn, 2009a, 2009b). Although this research project is promising, one might argue that it is extremely labour intensive. Another problem could be that party manifestos are rather one-sided sources to assess the degree of populism (see below).

In line with the previously cited works is Hawkins (2009), who measured populism by means of holistic grading of speeches by chief executives. The author devised a rubric that captures the core elements of populist discourse and then recruited and trained native speakers to analyze speeches according to the rubric. The unit of analysis is the entire speech, which could be ranked on a three-point scale (non-populist; mixed; populist). This strategy enabled the author to measure the degree of populism among executives in an impressive number of mainly Latin American countries. Those who were often identified as populists, such as Chávez or Morales, were ranked high on the Hawkins measurement. The main problems with this study, however, were missing data, instances of low reliability (Kappa 0.44), rough measurement due to holistic grading and the three-point scale, and false positive cases such as the speeches of George Bush.

While content analyses provide a more systematic measurement of populism, the method suffers from several drawbacks, the main ones being (1) insufficient reliability; (2) the labour intensive work which makes comparisons over time and space difficult; (3) possible subjectivity by the coders; and (4) a lack of consensus on which data sources should be analyzed.

Measuring Populism by Means of a Quantitative Text Analysis in Belgium

In order to circumvent the problems with the minimal definition and classical content analysis, a *quantitative text analysis* is proposed to measure populism. Benoit (2009) defines it as a variant of content analysis which is expressively quantitatively oriented in the sense that texts are no longer treated as discourse to be understood and interpreted but rather as data in the form of words. It typically involves a large-scale analysis of many texts by means of a computer. Quantitative text analysis is an emerging field with many new developments and different approaches. At least three general approaches can be distinguished.

First, there is a *dictionary based approach* in which a computer allocates text units to an *a priori* or *a posteriori* defined coding scheme. Laver and Garry (2000) have made such an attempt and succeeded in producing valid party position estimates on an economic and social left–right scale. To arrive at a valid and stable dictionary is not an easy task, however. Secondly, there is the *Wordscores approach* which relies on *a priori* scores and word distributions of "reference texts" to produce party position estimates of "virgin texts" (Hakhverdian, 2009; Laver et al., 2003). The wordscores approach has been criticized, however, because there is no undisputed way of selecting the correct reference texts (Budge & Pennings, 2007). More recently a *scaling approach called Wordfish* has been used to estimate party positions. Discriminative words which are used often by one party and rarely by others are used to position parties on different scales (Slapin & Proksch, 2008). While this method eliminates the necessity of reference texts, it is nonetheless highly inductive which makes it not always easy to interpret the results of the analysis.

This article draws on the dictionary based approach because the other two approaches are less suitable to measure populism. The wordscore approach, for instance, relies mostly on expert surveys to attach certain values to words in the reference text. Since we do not have expert survey or CMP data on populism, however, the wordscore approach is not a viable option. The scaling model of word-fish is also less suitable to our purpose since this method works well for extracting a single left–right dimension but is less useful to measure more specific dimensions. While it is possible, for instance, to extract a foreign policy dimension by focusing on the sections of a party manifesto that deal with this issue, it seems almost impossible to measure populism which is hard to detect in specific sections and is probably more spread out over the entire manifesto.

A quantitative text analysis drawing on a dictionary based approach thus seems the most appropriate way to measure populism. The procedure that has been suggested by Laver and Garry (2000: 626) will be closely followed, meaning that we also "defined our dictionary by allocating words to these categories using a combination of *a priori* and empirical criteria". Most of our dictionary categories (e.g. conservatism, immigration, environment) can be designed by *a priori* reasoning and drawing on the dictionary that has already been designed by Laver and Garry. The authors explain, for instance, that a word such as "taxes" is an excellent indicator of a socio-economic rightist position. Even though such a word might have different meanings (e.g. increasing or decreasing taxes) it is in practice a word that belongs to the core vocabulary of liberal or conservative parties. To measure the dictionary category of populism, however, there was little to fall back on so some reference documents were used for inspiration. Some of the older membership magazines of the Vlaams Belang – which has been identified by Mudde (2007) and Jagers and Walgrave (2007) as populist – were analyzed to explore which words belong to the populist discourse. However, only words that had a clear theoretical relationship with the concept of populism were retained in the dictionary. More information about the data, method and dictionary can be found in the next section and in the appendices.

The use of a quantitative content analysis to measure the degree of populism among parties has three main advantages: (1) it is systematic and more reliable[1] since no human coding is involved; (2) it is less time-consuming compared to hand coding and therefore can easily be applied to large bodies of texts; (3) the dictionary that is used to detect populism can simply be extended with other categories which make it possible to explore to which other ideologies populism is attached (nativism, neoliberalism, socialism, etc.). In this article I focus specifically on this third point instead of analyzing populism in different contexts. Although it is true that an important challenge to the method lies in the measurement of populism over time and space, I will conduct an in-depth analysis of a single case as a first important test. The added value of this test is that it furthers our understanding of how populism is being attached to different host ideologies.

Data and Methods

To measure the degree of populism among political parties I will not only rely on party manifestos. Since party manifestos are typically rather formal documents with specific policy proposals, populism is less likely to be found here. Manifestos are less suitable to address the people or to depict the elite as a corrupt class. In some cases, perhaps particularly with populist parties, party manifestos are also rather short and not particularly informative. In their analysis of the ideology of LPF, for example, Pennings and Keman (2003) rely on a party manifesto of only six pages. In survey language, we would consider this too small an *n* to be reliable (Laver et al., 2003: 315). Another reason to consider not only party manifestos is because populist parties tend to have different faces depending on the audience they address. Mudde (2000) therefore stresses the importance of also exploring internally orientated party literature.

> It seems plausible that this literature will hide "the true nature of the party" to a far lesser extent than externally directed literature since it is aimed at a different group of recipients, i.e. the party members (the internal arena), as against the whole electorate (the external arena). (Mudde, 2000: 21)

Since a quantitative text analysis is less time-consuming than other forms of content analysis, we can rely on both externally and internally orientated party sources. In respect of external party literature all party manifestos from 2007 and 2009 were examined. The internal party sources are the membership magazines of all Flemish parties, except for the socialist party SP.a (Socialisten en Progressieven Anders, previously SP), that appeared in 2007, 2008 or 2009.[2] A full list of all sources can be found in Appendix Table A1.

As mentioned earlier, populism is considered to be a thin ideology containing some core concepts which guided us to the dictionary category of "populism". A first constituting concept of the ideology is *the people*, so parties that often refer to "the people" are considered more populist than others. Another key concept

within populism is *the elite*, which is depicted as a homogeneous group of corrupt politicians. Words such as "elite", "establishment", "corruption" or "particracy" thus indicate populism. A third crucial element is that the people are constantly *lied to and betrayed by* the self-interested, arrogant and corrupt elite. Words such as "arrogant", "promise", "betray", "disgrace", or "truth" are hence included to measure populism as well. Finally, since populists are in favour of *direct links* between the people and politics, the words "direct" and "referendum" are also indicators of populism. As explained, the gains in reliability using quantitative content analysis come at the cost of validity. For example, examining whether the people and the elite are depicted as homogeneous groups is not possible using this method. Yet judging whether these groups are depicted as homogeneous is also difficult for human coders. Finally, while there is insufficient space to explain the entire dictionary, the categories other than populism will be briefly outlined.

A first category gauges *conservative* values and is measured by words such as "family", "values", "church" and "custom". The second category aims to measure the attention that parties devote to *environmental* issues by identifying words like "green", "climate", "durable" and so on. Next, I examine to what extent parties deem *immigration* important by counting words such as "Islam", "immigration", "Morocco" and so on. *Law and order* identifies words such as "safety", "crime", "violence" and "drugs". The category *liberalism* is meant in an economic sense and detects words such as "taxes", "reduction", "efficiency" and "deregulation". *Neoliberalism* goes one step further and considers words that indicate a real aversion towards big government and state intervention (Heywood, 2003). Typical words and phrases included are "bully tax", "flat tax" and "parasite". Another category measures whether parties addressed *progressive* issues such as women's rights or individual freedom. The category *social* counted all words on social issues such as "pension", "poverty", "handicapped", etc. Finally, *Flemish nationalism* is measured by words such as "separation", "independence", "state reform" and "Flanders". The full dictionary can be found in Appendix Table A2.

In the next step, I used the open software program Yoshikoder to measure how many of our dictionary words were identified in the different party documents. These ranged from 3681 for the party manifestos of the environmentalist Groen! to 544 for the party manifestos of LDD. The dictionary words matched mostly with about 2% of all the words in the party documents. The amount of meaningful words that might tell us something about party positions is therefore small. This is the consequence of the fact that irrelevant words such as "the", "and", "or" are used far more often than "taxes" or "elite". Absolute numbers are not our concern, however. Even comparing dictionary categories with each other is not always useful, since some dictionary categories contained far more words than others. The real test is to compare the categories among the different parties (noting that the SP.a is the sole party for which internal party documents are not available).

The Belgian Case

As noted in the introduction, the focus of the analysis is Belgium, a federal country that exists out of three main regions: Dutch-speaking Flanders in the north, the bilingual area of Brussels, and French-speaking Wallonia in the south of the country.[3] Due to several state reforms these regions have received increasing autonomy. The electoral system has also been adapted to arrive at a configuration where Flemish parties can only compete with other Flemish parties on the one hand and francophone parties with francophone parties on the other in unilingual constituencies (except in the contested constituency Brussels–Halle–Vilvoorde) (Pilet, 2005). Because of this segregation it makes sense to focus on a single party system, in this case the Flemish one. Since the francophone party system is believed to have only one minor populist party (Front National) and because of the lack of comparative data, this party system is not analyzed here.

All traditional party families can be found in the Flemish party system. On the left there is the green party Groen! (previously called Agalev) which participated in the purple coalition government from 1999 until 2003 but was punished severely by voters for its time in office and has been in opposition since 2003. The other leftist party is the socialist SP.a, which shared governmental responsibility with the liberal party Open VLD (Open Vlaamse Liberalen en Democraten) from 1999 until 2007. It was Open VLD which delivered the Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt in this eight-year period but the party faced some electoral losses and had to rescind its leading position to the Christian democrats. In 2007 the Christian-Democratic CD&V (Christen-Democratisch & Vlaams) and the small Flemish nationalist N-VA (Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie) decided to go to the voters with a joint list and won the elections convincingly with their claim for more autonomy for the regions. This state reform was not enacted, however, because of the resistance of the francophone parties and the N-VA decided to leave the government in 2008. This move was electorally successful as the Flemish nationalist party did very well at the 2009 European and regional elections.

Two Flemish parties have stayed in permanent opposition so far and it is exactly those parties which are expected to be populist. On the one hand, the VB is often considered to be a prototype of the populist radical right. Indeed, its main leader, Filip Dewinter, featured on the cover of the seminal book *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* by Cas Mudde (2007). Few scholars doubt that the VB is a populist party. Moreover, one of the rare content analyses measuring the degree of populism among parties revealed that "[i]n terms of the degree and the kinds of populism embraced by the six political parties under scrutiny, the extreme-right party Vlaams Blok behaves very differently from the other Belgian parties. Its messages are a copybook example of populism" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007: 319). Following the study by Jagers and Walgrave, another populist party emerged in the Belgian party system, however. The LDD, established by Jean-Marie Dedecker in 2007, is believed to be a good example of neoliberal populism. "As the LDD party programme mentions a 'policy of common sense' and the need for citizen initia-

tives, and is full of references to limited government and the free market, it qualifies as a textbook example of a neoliberal populist party" (Pauwels, 2010: 1026). It is therefore hypothesized that VB and LDD are the most populist of all Flemish parties.

Results

Table 1 illustrates the results of the analysis of the externally orientated party literature. The results are in line with common beliefs about the ideologies of Flemish parties. As expected, the CD&V and VB are the most conservative parties. The environment is very important only to Groen!, while immigration is most relevant in the ideologies of N-VA and the VB. Law and order is an important issue for the CD&V and VB, while there is far less mention of this by the leftist parties Groen! and SP.a. Liberal issues, such as taxes or small government are particularly common among the Open VLD and LDD. Neoliberalism is a small category and only significant among LDD and SP.a. Since SP.a is considered to be a socialist party, this finding is counter-intuitive. A closer look to the context of neoliberal words reveals however that the SP.a denounces neoliberalism instead of embracing it, casting doubt on the validity of the category.

The expectation that the VB and LDD are the most populist parties of the Flemish party system is also supported by the data. The difference with other parties is substantial, providing evidence that the dictionary is sufficiently discriminatory. Progressive and social issues are mostly found among SP.a and Open VLD. This is not surprising, illustrated by the fact that these parties were the driving forces behind the legalization of euthanasia when they came to power in 1999. It also shows that the Open VLD, partly due to government participation, has evolved increasingly towards modern or social liberalism. This was in fact one of the reasons why Dedecker left the Open VLD and established his own "genuine" liberal party, the LDD. Finally, Flemish nationalism is the main issue for the N-VA, but the VB also focuses significantly on Flemish independence.

Roughly the same conclusions can be drawn from Table 2, which presents the results of the internally orientated party literature. Interestingly, the degree of populism is higher in the internally orientated literature for every Flemish party. In particular, the N-VA can be considered as populist in its internal communication, although still slightly less so than the VB and LDD.

The results show that a quantitative text analysis is useful to measure the degree of populism among parties. The minimal definition (Mudde, 2007), classical content analysis (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), as well as our quantitative text analysis point out that the VB is a populist party. Figure 1 shows that on average 12% of its ideology is devoted to populism. Perhaps surprisingly, LDD can be considered to be slightly more populist with about 16% of its ideology being devoted to populism. One explanation for this difference might be that the VB has two major other issues to address – immigration and Flemish nationalism – while the LDD focuses almost exclusively on (neo)liberalism alongside populism.

Table 1.   The amount of attention for different ideological dimensions in externally oriented party literature

	Groen!		SP.a		CD&V		N-VA		Open VLD		LDD		VB	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Conservatism	154	4.2	59	4.9	73	7.5	8	0.6	67	4.6	10	1.8	103	5.8
Environment	1148	31.2	133	11.1	102	10.5	144	11.6	95	6.5	29	5.3	82	4.6
Immigration	162	4.4	44	3.7	60	6.2	141	11.4	85	5.8	27	5.0	200	11.2
Law and order	236	6.4	59	4.9	124	12.8	98	7.9	98	6.7	62	11.4	271	15.2
Liberalism	331	9.0	108	9.0	162	16.7	200	16.1	314	21.6	149	27.4	199	11.1
Neoliberalism	105	2.9	64	5.3	29	3.0	28	2.3	60	4.1	41	7.5	29	1.6
Populism	100	2.7	27	2.2	29	3.0	48	3.9	50	3.4	53	9.7	111	6.2
Progressive	320	8.7	183	15.2	67	6.9	70	5.6	183	12.6	56	10.3	105	5.9
Social	729	19.8	340	28.3	213	22.0	140	11.3	307	21.1	82	15.1	293	16.4
Flemish nationalism	396	10.8	185	15.4	109	11.3	363	29.3	197	13.5	35	6.4	395	22.1
Total	3681	100.0	1202	100.0	968	100.0	1240	100.0	1456	100.0	544	100.0	1788	100.0

Table 2. The amount of attention for different ideological dimensions in internally oriented party literature

	Groen!		SP.a		CD&V		N-VA		Open VLD		LDD		VB	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Conservatism	35	3.5			116	11.8	38	3.9	32	5.6	34	4.4	156	7.9
Environment	568	56.2			57	5.8	18	1.9	35	6.2	25	3.2	18	0.9
Immigration	25	2.5			45	4.6	51	5.3	46	8.1	78	10.1	535	27.1
Law and order	24	2.4			77	7.8	32	3.3	27	4.7	18	2.3	164	8.3
Liberalism	64	6.3			94	9.5	59	6.1	185	32.5	150	19.4	62	3.1
Neoliberalism	15	1.5			32	3.2	16	1.7	12	2.1	50	6.5	33	1.7
Populism	43	4.3			83	8.4	166	17.1	27	4.7	164	21.2	345	17.5
Progressive	50	4.9			121	12.3	59	6.1	50	8.8	46	5.9	109	5.5
Social	105	10.4			135	13.7	123	12.7	92	16.2	89	11.5	71	3.6
Flemish nationalism	82	8.1			225	22.8	407	42.0	63	11.1	120	15.5	482	24.4
Total	1011	100.0			985	100.0	969	100.0	569	100.0	544	100.0	1975	100.0
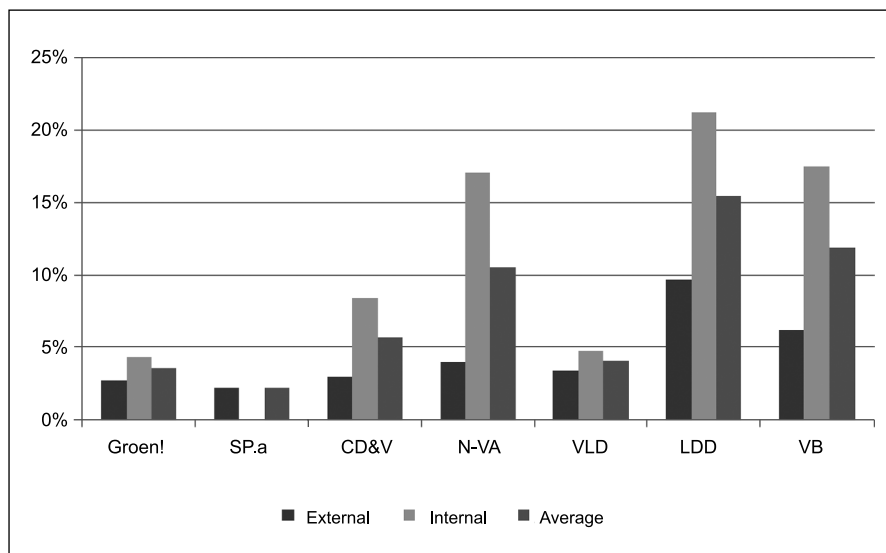
Figure 1.   The degree of populism among Flemish parties.

The empirical analysis also illustrates that populism is not necessarily an "either–or" concept. Figure 1 shows that the N-VA is not far behind the other populist parties and that at least in the internally oriented literature, populism is an important aspect. Two explanations for the moderately populist discourse of the N-VA can be identified. First, it is possible that the Flemish nationalism of the party blends well with populism. Because the N-VA favours an independent Flemish state it tends to consider the current political elite as not being truly representative. The party often claims that Belgium is being governed by a francophone, alien elite and it denounces the Flemish parties because they do not have the courage to defend Flemish interests. Secondly, it is important to note that the N-VA left the federal government in 2008 because its cartel partner CD&V was considered to be too submissive towards the francophone parties (see above). The N-VA thus played the role of an outsider which stayed loyal to its principles, and its fierce opposition was not always easy to distinguish from populism (Barr, 2009). Under normal circumstances, the difference to genuine populist parties might have been greater.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the quantitative text analysis is that the strategy to analyze both internal and externally orientated party literature is of added value. In fact, the degree of populism was always substantially higher in the internally orientated party literature when compared with the externally orientated party manifestos. Some might argue that this is contradictory since populism is considered to be a strategy to reach out to the electorate. However, it is well known that party members often have more extreme views compared with the electorate, which might explain why there is more populism in the internal literature. Furthermore, membership

magazines are published several times a year and lend themselves more to criticism of the current government actions and depict it as being corrupt.

Varieties of Populism

As suggested, this approach is able to identify different kinds of populist parties. According to Mudde (2007), the populist radical right is constituted by nativism, populism and authoritarianism. By means of adding the scores of the categories immigration, populism, and law and order, I attempted to explore to what extent Flemish parties adhere to populist radical right values. Figure 2 shows that the VB is without doubt the party that embraces most of the populist radical right ideology. To substantiate this claim, some excerpts of the membership magazine of the VB are included to illustrate its nativism, populism and authoritarianism:

Nativism. I would like my children to live again in a Flemish Flanders. Not as foreigners in their own country, scared white people, but free and proud men and women, who feel at home in their own ward and their own street. (VBM 2004/4 cited in Jagers, 2006: 213)

Populism. We do not want to be part of the establishment. The VB is no protest party but a principled *programme* party. A maverick in Flemish politics. We are not welcome in the Belgian *salons* precisely because we want to abolish these *salons*. (VBM 2008/10)

Authoritarianism. The mayor communicates about almost everything … to show how well Antwerp is doing. But crime does not fit into this story, so it is silenced. The VB wants to break this taboo with a website. This website enables citizens from Antwerp to report on crime events. (VBM 2008/3)

The only party that approaches the VB to some extent is the neoliberal populist LDD. This ideological proximity explains why the LDD has been able to steal a significant share of the votes of the VB in recent elections (Pauwels, 2010).

Mudde suggests that populism is a thin centred ideology which can be attached to other ideologies, such as neoliberalism or socialism (March & Mudde, 2005; Mudde, 2007). Neoliberal populist parties, such as Forza Italia, Ny Demokrati or the LPF combine "primarily economic liberalism and populism" (Mudde, 2007: 47). To explore whether such a neoliberal populist party exists among the Flemish parties, I added the amount of liberalism and neoliberalism to populism for each party on a scale. Figure 3 shows that LDD could indeed be labelled as a neoliberal populist party. Interestingly the VB does not produce a similar score, which can be explained by the fact that this populist radical right party largely neglects economic issues such as taxes or job creation.

The following quotations from the 2009 party manifesto demonstrate the neoliberal worldview and populism from LDD:
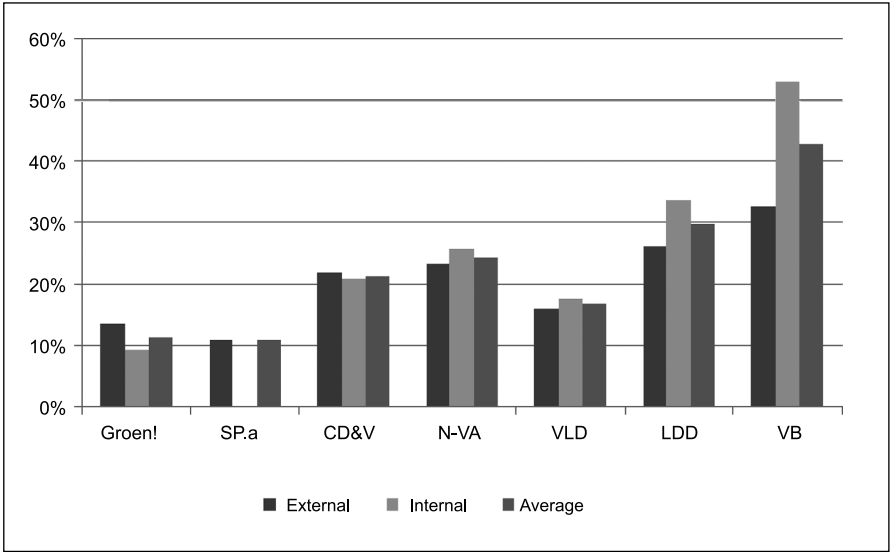
Figure 2.   The degree of populist radical right values among Flemish parties.
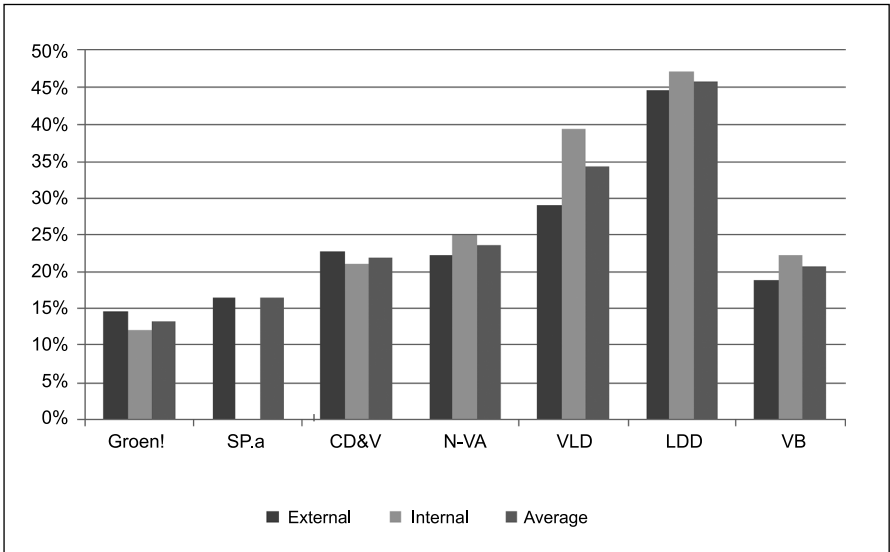
Figure 3.   The degree of neoliberal populist values among Flemish parties.

Neoliberalism. Imposing taxes serves to meet some societal needs. But welfare gets threatened if government is too greedy. Decreasing taxes gives the economy more oxygen, encourages entrepreneurship and increases purchasing power. And fiscal security is equally important for the working population as social security is for the needy. Calculating, imposing and controlling taxes will be thoroughly simplified by the introduction of a flat tax.

Populism. Systematically excluding democratically chosen candidates from power makes democracy a farce. Up to a quarter of the Flemish public opinion has been silenced to death like this in the past, just to give "the left" an unnatural governmental benefit.

Validating the Method

In this section I assess the validity of the quantitative text analysis, i.e. the extent to which our indicators adequately reflect general agreement on the real meaning of a concept. Adcock and Collier (2001) distinguish between three sorts of validation: content validity, convergent/discriminant validity and nomological/construct validity. To explore the *content validation* we must ask ourselves whether the produced indicators adequately capture the full content of the systematized concept. This can be done by evaluating whether key elements are omitted from the indicator or whether inappropriate elements are included. One pitfall might be, for instance, that the quantitative text analysis merely identified opposition parties instead of populist parties. However, since Groen! is also an opposition party while being one of the least populist parties according to our indicators, this concern seems unjustified.

To explore *convergent/discriminant* validity it might be useful to investigate whether the indicator correlates with previously established indicators. While this is difficult for populism, it is nonetheless reassuring that our results are in line with previous findings. The fact that the two parties that according to the existing literature can considered to be populist are also the most populist in our analysis suggests that we can speak of a sufficient convergent/discriminant validity. The moderately populist character of N-VA has been recognized by commentators as well. Van de Voorde (2010), for instance, argued that the N-VA combines the protest populism of LDD with the identity populism of VB.

Finally, *nomological/construct validation* assesses the performance of a measurement in relation to causal hypotheses. Adcock and Collier (2001) use the acronym AHEM to explain the underlying logic: "Assume the Hypothesis, Evaluate the Measure". In this case, we assume that populists, since they challenge the "corrupt" political elite, profit from political distrust. If we find a correlation between the degree of populism and the level of political trust among its electorate there is evidence of nomological validity.

To measure how much citizens trust the political system, I rely on the 2009 Belgian election survey (see Deschouwer et al., 2010). A scale based on six items (trust in government, parliament, parties, and so on) indicates how much voters of

different parties trust politics.[4] As hypothesized, a negative relationship between political trust and populism of –0.71 was found. Voters of VB and LDD are the least trusting of all Flemish voters (excluding those who did not vote or voted blank or invalid) while voting for the most populist parties. It is particularly interesting to see that the N-VA was also able to recruit among distrusting voters. A more detailed analysis showed that the odds to vote for the N-VA compared to the main governing party CD&V was 3:1 for people with little political trust, controlling for socio-demographic characteristics (Hooghe et al., 2011). This is probably related to the N-VA's (moderately) populist discourse at the latest elections.

Conclusion

Despite the increased use of the term populism in vernacular and scholarly language, the measurement of this concept has long been neglected. In the worst case, the label is attached to a party or politician without any justification at all. Minimal definitions and content analyses provide more systematic measurements of populism, but they too suffer from several drawbacks. The main problem seems to be the immense costs, both in financial terms and in time, when human coding is involved. This is probably the reason why the measurement of populism over time and space is extremely rare.

In this article, a quantitative text analysis is proposed to measure populism. Since no hand coding is involved, the procedure is more reliable, less time-consuming, and easy to apply to large bodies of texts. By detecting words that belong to the core of the populist ideology, such as the people, establishment, betrayal and referendum, this method is able to measure populism among parties and even politicians.

An empirical analysis of Belgian parties showed that the VB and LDD are, as hypothesized, the most populist parties among our sample. Four interesting findings can be mentioned. First, by not restricting ourselves to party manifestos but also including internally orientated party literature, we have improved our understanding of the populist nature of Flemish parties. In general, internally orientated party literature contains more populism. Second, it has been shown that populism is not an "either–or" concept but that some parties can be moderately populist, such as the Flemish nationalist N-VA. Third, the proposed method enables an exploration of which other ideologies populism is attached to. Our results confirm that the VB is a populist radical right party, while the LDD might be more accurately labelled as neoliberal populist. Finally, several tests confirmed that we have been able to measure populism in a valid way.

At this moment, a quantitative text analysis seems a promising technique to measure populism without the huge costs of hand coding. Nonetheless, we should be aware of the limits of the method. The construction of the dictionary might be challenged, for instance, and it is obvious that another dictionary will yield different results. Because the quantitative text analysis does not interpret text units, one should also be aware that the method either overestimates or underestimates the degree of populism. Some "populist" words might be meant in a non-populist fash-

ion but they will nevertheless be flagged as populist by the dictionary. Other populist words might not be detected because they are not incorporated in the dictionary. Finally, the real challenge for a computerized content analysis still lies ahead. The next step would be to apply the method to different contexts. Since the populist discourse might vary from one context to another, it will be a difficult task to arrive at a discriminatory dictionary. Future research comparing the results of hand coded and computer based coding of party manifestos across more countries may be the way forward.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Theoretically it could be argued that a quantitative text analysis is 100% reliable since a computer will generate the same results no matter how many times one runs the analysis. At the same time there is often discussion about which texts should be analyzed. Since the results could differ depending on which sources are being used, it is flawed to consider quantitative text analysis perfectly reliable.
2. The line between internal and external sources is becoming more difficult to draw. For instance, many of the internally orientated sources can be found on the websites of political parties.
3. For a good introduction on Belgian politics, see Deschouwer (2009).
4. The level of political trust for the different electorates was the following: SP.a = 5.47; Groen! = 5.36; Open VLD = 5.47; CD&V = 5.6; N-VA = 5.18; VB = 4.14; LDD = 4.91. For the degree of populism we used the average scores, being: SP.a = 2.2%; Groen! = 3.5%; Open VLD = 4.1%; CD&V = 5.7%; N-VA = 10.5%; VB = 11.9%; LDD =15.5%.

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Appendix

Table A1.   Sources

External sources 2007	
Groen !	Manifesto "De toekomst begint nu"
SP.a	Manifesto "Gemeenschappelijke programmatekst sp.a-spirit"
CD&V	Manifesto "Samenwerken werkt"
N-VA	Manifesto "Voor een sterker Vlaanderen"
Open VLD	Manifesto "Geloven in mensen. De open samenleving in de praktijk"
LDD	Manifesto "Meer welvaart, meer welzijn"
VB	Manifesto "Een toekomstplan voor Vlaanderen"
External sources 2009	
Groen !	Manifesto "De toekomst wil vooruit"
SP.a	Manifesto "Een zekere en eerlijke toekomst voor Vlaanderen"
CD&V	Manifesto "Sterk in moeilijke tijden"
N-VA	Manifesto "Afrit Vlaanderen. Uitrit crisis"
Open VLD	Manifesto "Er zit meer in Vlaanderen"
LDD	Manifesto "Gezond verstand van A tot Z"
VB	Manifesto "Dit is ons land"
Internal sources 2007–2008–2009	
Groen !	"Ecozine" Sep–Nov08; Dec–Feb08; Mar–May09; Jun–Aug09; Sep–Nov09
SP.a	No sources available
CD&V	"Ampersand" Oct08; Nov08; Dec08; Jan09; Feb09; Mar09; Apr09; May09; Jun09; Sep09
N-VA	"Nieuw-Vlaams Magazine" Jan08; Feb08; Mar08; Apr08; May08; Jun08; Sep08; Oct08; Nov08; Dec08
Open VLD	"Blauw" Ledenblad van Open VLD Antwerpen Jan-Apr08; May-Jul08; Aug-Oct08; Oct-Dec08
LDD	"De week van LDD" weeks 11; 12; 13; 16; 18; 19; 21; 22; 23; 28; 38; 40; 43; 46; 48; 49 (roughly from February until December 2009)
VB	"Vlaams Belang Magazine" Nov07; Dec07; Jan08; Feb08; Mar08; Apr08; May08; Jun08; Jul08; Sept08

Table A2. Dictionary

Dictionary	Dutch words	Translation
Conservatism	christ*; geloof; gezin; kerk; normen; porn*; seks*; waarden	christ*; belief; family; church; norm; porn*; sex*; values
Environment	ecol*; groene*; klimaat*; milieu*; opwarming	ecol*; green*; climate*; environment*; heating
Immigration	marok*; turk; allocht*; asiel*; halal*; hoofddoek*; illega*; immigr*; islam*; koran; moslim*; vreemd*	moroc*; turk; allocht*; asylum*; halal*; scarf*; illega*; immigr*; islam*; koran; muslim*; foreign*
Law and order	*veilig*; criminal*; drug*; geweld*	*safe*; criminal* ; drug*; violence*
Liberalism	*belasting*; *korting*; bureaucrat*; concur*; dereg*; effici*; job*; taks*	*tax*; *reduction*; bureaucrat*; compet*; dereg*; effici*; job*; tax*
Neoliberalism	betut*; markt*; parasi*; pestbelast*; profit*; regeldr*; vlaktaks*; zwartwerk*	overcar*; market*; parasi*; bully tax*; profit*; rule exaggeration*; flat tax*; informal labour*
Populism	*bedrog*; *verraa*; *verrad*; absurd*; arrogant*; belof*; beloof*; belov*; capitul*; corrupt*; directe; elite*; establishm*; heersend*; kaste; klasse; maffia; meningsuit*; ondemocratisch*; particrat*; politic*; propaganda; referend*; regime*; schaamteloos; schand*; toegeven; traditio*; volk	*deceit*; *treason*; *betray*; absurd*; arrogant*; promis*; promise*; capitul*; corrupt*; direct; elite*; establishm*; ruling*; caste; class; mafia; freedom of expression; undemocratic; particrat*; politic*; propaganda; referend*; regime*; shameless; shame*; admit; tradition*; people
Progressive	individu*; progressief; recht; vrijheid; vrouw*; zelfbeschik*	individu*; progressive; right; freedom; woman; self-disposition
Social	*handicap*; armoed*; bescherming; eerlijk; gelijkheid*; onderwijs; pensioen*; sociaal*; zwak*	handicap*; povert*; protection; honest; equal*; education; pension*; social*; weak*
Flemish nationalism	onfhankel*; scheidi*; splits*; staatshervor*; vlaand*	independend*; separati*; state reform; Flanders