Expressing or fuelling discontent? The relationship between populist voting and political discontent

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A B S T R A C T

Many studies have found that political discontent and populist voting are positively related. Yet, an important shortcoming of these studies is that they interpret the correlation between these two phenomena as evidence that existing feelings of political discontent contribute to the support for populist parties. We argue that there is also a causal effect in the opposite direction: Populist parties fuel political discontent by exposing their supporters to a populist message in which they criticize the elite. Our study links individual level data on political discontent of voters to the populist message of the party they intend to vote for, employing various operationalizations of populism. Based on a 6-wave panel study from the Netherlands (2008–2013), we conclude that political discontent is both cause and consequence of the rise of populist parties. Our findings imply that the effect of political discontent on populist voting has been overestimated in many previous studies.

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Since the 1980s, we have seen the rise of both left- and right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. Radical right-wing populist parties such as the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs* (FPÖ) in Austria, the *Dansk Folkeparti* (DF) in Denmark, the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV) in the Netherlands, and the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (SVP) in Switzerland, and social populist parties like *Die Linke* in Germany and the *Socialistische Partij* (SP) in the Netherlands have become influential players in Western European parliaments. While much research exists on the causes of the rise of these parties, much less is known about the consequences of their breakthrough.

Many studies have found that a correlation exists between political discontent and voting for populist parties (e.g., Betz, 1994; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2000; Lubbers et al., 2002; Mayer and Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Schumacher and Rooduijn, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2001). On the basis of the observed correlation between the two phenomena these authors conclude that political discontent makes people more prone to support populist parties. We are aware of only one panel-based study, which establishes an effect of discontent on populist party support, by Bélanger and Aarts (2006). While they provide convincing evidence of a causal effect of pre-existing political discontent on support of the *Dutch Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (the LPF), they do not (and cannot)[1] test the opposite effect: the effect of support for a populist party on political discontent. We propose a model in which political discontent and support for populist parties affect each other mutually. We test our model on a six-wave panel study in the Netherlands (2008–2013), and demonstrate that the effect does indeed go both ways.

This study advances our understanding of the relationship between political discontent and populist voting in three main ways.[2] First, and most importantly, we focus on the endogeneity problem by arguing and demonstrating that the correlation between political discontent and populist voting can also be explained by a causal effect that runs in the opposite direction. Since one of the core messages of populist parties is that 'the elite' is dishonest and incompetent, it seems plausible that the message of populist parties will (also) fuel discontent among their supporters (Van der Brug, 2003). Second, given that most scholars of populism agree

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[1] Bélanger and Aarts' (2006) study is based on two waves of a panel, one in 1998 and one in 2002. Discontent in 1998 has a significant effect on the LPF-vote in 2002. Since the LPF did not exist in 1998, the opposite effect cannot be tested.

[2] We would like to emphasize that the term 'populist voting' here refers to the *act* of voting for a populist party. The term explicitly does not refer to someone's voting *motivation*. One might vote for a populist party because of its populist message, but one could just as well vote for such a party for other reasons. In fact, various studies have indicated that when it comes to voting for radical right-wing populist parties, most voters support these parties because of their attitudes towards immigration (Van der Brug, Fennema & Tillie, 2000, 2005; Ivarsflaten, 2008).

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that populism can be combined with different ideologies (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000), we do not focus exclusively on radical right-wing populism. Instead, we concentrate on different kinds of populist parties. We argue that political discontent can be expected to contribute to the popularity of both left- and right-wing populist parties and that voting for a right-wing *or* left-wing populist can be expected to fuel political discontent. Finally, we employ various operationalizations of populism. Some scholars conceive of political parties as being *either* populist *or not* populist (see for example Van Kessel, 2015), while others perceive populism as a phenomenon that can be present to a *lesser or larger extent* (parties can be more or less populist) (see for example Hawkins, 2010; Rooduijn et al., 2014). We have therefore decided to operationalize populism in both ways. In other words, a party's populism is operationalized by both a categorical 'party family' approach and a continuous 'matter of degrees' approach.

In this study we combine survey data on political discontent among individual citizens with information about the degree of populism of the parties these citizens intend to vote for. The latter stem from a content analysis of election manifestos of Dutch political parties. We focus on the Netherlands because during the last national elections (2010 and 2012) both left-wing populists (the *Socialistische Partij*, SP) and right-wing populists (the *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, PVV) were rather successful, together polling about 20–25 percent of the votes. We examine the extent to which political discontent is a cause of support for populist parties (the expressing discontent logic) and/or a consequence of support for these parties (the fuelling discontent logic). We assess these relationships employing a 6-wave panel study (2008–2013) and conducting a path analysis. Political discontent turns out to be both cause and consequence of support for populist parties.

We conclude that citizens who support populist parties are likely to be influenced by these parties' message that the political elite is corrupt or incompetent and fails to represent the interests of 'ordinary people'. This is an important finding because it indicates that the effect of political discontent on populist voting has been overestimated in previous cross-sectional studies. Political discontent is not only a cause, but also a consequence of supporting populist parties. As such, our study contributes to a growing literature examining the societal and political consequences of the rise of populist parties (see Mudde, 2013 for an inventory).

The article proceeds as follows. In the first section we focus on the theoretical relationship between populism and political discontent, after which we develop the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic models. In the third section we discuss the case selection, data and methods of our study, and in the fourth section we present our main findings. In a separate section we discuss the robustness or our findings. In the concluding section of this study we focus on the implications of our results for both the literature on populism and voting behaviour.

1. Populism and political discontent

Many scholars define populism as a set of ideas in which the good people is pitted against the evil elite (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008; Canovan, 2004; Hawkins, 2010, 2009; Mudde, 2004; Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011; Stanley, 2008). Mudde (2004: 543) describes 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'. He argues that populism is not a full ideology, such as conservatism, liberalism or socialism, but a 'thin-centred' ideology. It does not offer an all-encompassing worldview, but contains first and foremost ideas

about the organization of democratic decision-making processes. Consequently, populism is inherently chameleonic (Taggart, 2000); it takes on the identity of the ideology to which it attaches itself.[3]

A central aspect of the populist message is the idea that every democracy is founded on the principle of popular sovereignty and that the voice of the people should give direction to decision-making (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969; Mény and Surel, 2002). The people are always defined in opposition to their perceived enemy. This enemy, the elite, is accused of being completely alienated from ordinary people and of being arrogant, incompetent, corrupt, and selfish (Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001) and is also seen as a homogeneous entity. Thus, in every respect the elite and the people are antipodes. The people are inherently good, whereas the elite is fundamentally evil. When targeting the political elite, it is usually accused of being out of touch with ordinary people's concerns and of focusing exclusively on its own interests (Mudde, 2004).[4] Populists believe that the elite dominates the people in the democratic decision-making process, whereas the principle of popular sovereignty implies that it should be the other way around.

Populists have an ambivalent attitude toward liberal democracy. According to the so-called two-strand model of democracy, a liberal democracy is built on two pillars: a democratic or populist one and a liberal one (Mouffe, 2005). The central element of the democratic pillar is the sovereignty of the people, which means that political power ought to reside with the people, while the essential feature of the liberal pillar is that political power should be curbed and controlled. This is achieved by means of three mechanisms: checks and balances, minority rights and political representation. There exists an inherent tension in the two-strand model, which is eloquently described by Kornhauser (1959: 131):

'Populist democracy involves direct action of large numbers of people, which often results in the circumvention of institutional channels and ad hoc invasion of individual privacy. Liberal democracy involves political action mediated by institutional rules, and therefore limitations on the use of power by majorities as well as minorities.'

Populists emphasize the importance of the democratic pillar. They believe that in any democratic system, the general will should be expressed as direct and unmediated as possible (see Canovan, 1981). However, in a liberal democracy the direct expression of the general will is not possible and occurs through intermediaries, such as elected representatives, and is constrained by the checks and balances and minority rights that are in place. For this reason, many scholars have concluded that populism is hostile towards liberal democracy (e.g. Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000).

Checks and balances, minority rights, and political representation — and therefore political elites — thus stand in the way of a direct expression of the *volonté générale* of the people. Yet, they play a decisive role in modern democracies. Because populists, and by extension their supporters, fiercely criticize the political elite and are also hostile towards liberal democracy, they can be expected to be discontented with politics. It has been demonstrated empirically that a relationship exists between political discontent and populist voting and most scholars have assumed discontent to be exogenous to the populist vote, and they have modelled this

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[3] We therefore do not consider exclusionism — i.e., excluding 'dangerous others' such as immigrants or religious minorities (see Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008) — to be a defining element of populism. Although it is a central feature of *radical right-wing* populism, it is not necessarily a characteristic of populism as such (Canovan, 1981; Mudde, 2007; Taggart, 2000).

[4] Anti-elitism could also be directed toward an economic elite (e.g. bankers or big corporations) or a cultural elite (e.g. intellectuals).

relationship as such (e.g., Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). We argue that it is plausible that causality also runs in the opposite direction.

2. The expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic

We present two causal logics: the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. Most scholars explain the relationship between political discontent and populist voting with the expressing discontent logic. According to these scholars, an important motive for supporting a populist party is to express discontent with the established parties. Mayer and Perrineau (1992), for instance, argue that *Front National* voters in France did not vote *in favour of* the Front National, but *against* the political establishment. According to Betz (1994), protest voters cast a ballot against 'the powers that be', which are held responsible for what goes wrong in society (see also Bergh, 2004). This is exactly what protest voters have in common with populists: they express a fierce critique on the establishment. For this reason, populists are an attractive electoral option for politically discontented citizens (Bélanger and Aarts, 2006). Hence, it might be argued that a protest vote is not only a vote *against*; it is also a vote *in favour* of a party that pictures 'the established party elites as incompetent, unresponsive and untrustworthy and argue[s] that they will do differently' (Bélanger and Aarts, 2006).

To summarize, according to the expressing discontent logic, citizens support a populist party partially because they are politically discontented. However, most empirical studies that support the expressing discontent logic are exclusively based on the analysis of correlational data (e.g. Betz, 1994; Lubbers et al., 2002; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2000; Mayer and Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005). An important exception is the study by Bélanger and Aarts (2006), which, on the basis of Dutch panel data, shows that political discontent in 1998 contributed to voting for the populist party *Lijst Pim Fortuyn* (List Pim Fortuyn, LPF) in 2002. As such, this study makes a strong case for the expressing discontent logic. However, since the LPF did not exist in 1998, Bélanger and Aarts (2006) could not test whether the effect also runs the other way around. So, their study does allow for the possibility that support for populist parties affects political discontent.[5]

According to the fuelling discontent logic, voters become more discontented with the functioning of politics as a result of being exposed to the messages of the parties they vote for. Those who support parties that frequently express populist statements are more likely to be affected by their claims that the political elite is incompetent and that the democratic system is not functioning well than those who vote for parties that express few or no populist messages (Van der Brug, 2003). Thus, political discontent cannot only be the cause, but can also be the consequence of voters' support for populist parties.

Although not much is known about the way in which populist messages affect citizens' attitudes, it has been shown that people are affected by the (political) messages they are exposed to. Early studies of voting behaviour expected that elite messages would impact on citizens' attitudes (e.g. Lasswell, 1927; Lippmann, 1922). These studies have inspired a vast amount of articles on the direct effects of elite messages both in the fields of communication

science and political science (see Bartels, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Lenz, 2009; Brandenburg and Van Egmond, 2011; Boomgaarden and Vliegenthart, 2009). Citizens look for elite cues and adjust their views accordingly, based on the information they are exposed to (see also Lupia and Mccubbins, 1998). In other words, "citizens take cues from political elites, including party leaders, and adjust their views to be more in line with those elites" (Steenbergen et al., 2007). Voters are looking for such elite cues because most of them have neither the time nor the intent to form their opinions on the basis of an assessment of all possible relevant arguments. In most cases they simply have not all the relevant information at their disposal. "As a result, voters in large electorates who consider their opportunity costs may decide that the acquisition of 'encyclopedic' information is not a worthwhile activity" (Lupia, 1994: 63). Voters might choose to employ information shortcuts as an alternative to this encyclopedic information. They use, in other words, cues in order to arrive at their decisions (Lupia and Mccubbins, 1998; Singh and Roy, 2014; Sniderman et al., 1999). In the field of European integration various studies have found evidence for this 'top-down' perspective on elite cues and public opinion formation (Anderson, 1998; Ray, 2003; Steenbergen et al., 2007).

One approach for voters to select elite cues might be to look for cues from the party that one supports or identifies with. According to Lenz (2009: 831), the reason might be that individuals think that 'their' party defends their interests: "When the costs of developing one's own opinions are high, taking cues from a party that shares one's interests could be reasonable". It has been demonstrated that if someone supports a party, s/he will be more strongly affected by the messages of this party than someone who does not support this party (see Page and Jones, 1979; Bartels, 2002). Thus, citizens change their opinions to be more consistent with the ideas of the party they vote for. Lenz (2009: 834) argues that American voters in the 1980s learned the positions of the presidential candidates Reagan and Carter, and subsequently adopted the position of their preferred candidate as their own position. In a similar fashion Cohen (2003) demonstrates by means of a series of experiments that party identification strongly affects individuals' attitudes. He shows that supporters of a party tend to adapt their ideas to the party line when they are exposed to messages in which the position of their party is revealed.

It might therefore be expected that if a voter supports a party that expresses the message that the elite is incompetent or even corrupt, s/he might be inclined to incorporate this idea in his or her way of thinking about politics — even if s/he did not hold such a view beforehand. It may therefore be expected that the more populist the programme of a political party is, the more politically discontented its supporters will become.

Of course, individuals can have different reasons to support a populist party in the first place. They might do so because they are politically dissatisfied (this is the expressing discontent logic), but they might also vote for such a party because they agree with its main ideology (often radical left or radical right), or other reasons. For instance, anti-immigration attitudes are shown to be strong predictors of support for radical right populist parties (e.g., Ivarsflaten, 2008; Van der Brug, 2003). We argue that, whatever an individual's initial reasons to support a populist party, it might well be expected that supporting a populist party fuels this person's political discontent. This implies that both logics might well be at work at the same time. In this study we assess to what extent this is the case by simultaneously testing the strength of the effects derived from both the expressing discontent and the fuelling discontent logic.

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[5] The data presented by Bélanger and Aarts (2006: 14) in Table 6 show two important things. First, the group of citizens that supported the LPF in 2002 was in 1998 more discontented than voters for other parties, which leads them to conclude that discontent was one of the drivers of support for the LPF. Second, the data show a large increase in discontent between 1998 and 2002 among the group of citizens that supported the LPF in 2002. This finding is consistent with the idea advanced in this study that the effect could also run in the opposite direction.

3. Case selection, data and methods

We selected the Dutch case for two main reasons. First, during the last national elections in 2010 and 2012 both a left-wing populist party (SP) and a right-wing populist party (PVV) have been rather successful, polling about 20—25 percent of the votes together. Second, recent panel data are available, which allow us to focus on the issue of causality. We employed the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel.[6]

We operationalize a party's populism in two main ways. The first one is the categorical approach, which has been advocated by Mair and Mudde (1998) in their study of party families. According to this approach, parties can be grouped in ideological families, such as the liberal family, the social-democratic family or the radical right family on the basis of their ideology. Since populism is an ideological feature, this binary approach can also be adopted in this study and parties can be classified as either being non-populist or populist (see for example Van Kessel, 2015). However, populism can also be measured on a continuum, which ranges from no populism present to 100 per cent populist (see for example Hawkins, 2010; Rooduijn et al., 2014). Because scholars disagree which of these two approaches is more appropriate, we have decided to test our models by means of both types of operationalizations (see also below).

Our measure of parties' degree of populism is based on a content analysis of election manifestos of parties, conducted by Rooduijn et al. (2014). One might wonder whether analysing manifestos is the best way to assess the degree of populism of parties. One objection might be that voters are often not aware of the content of manifestos, since they receive their political information via mass media. We nonetheless focus on election manifestos for three main reasons. First, manifestos are authoritative documents that give a clear overview of the ideas of parties. Politicians are often bound to the policy promises laid down in an election manifesto (Laver and Garry, 2000: 620). Although voters may not read these documents, they are of the upmost importance to parties themselves. Second, election manifestos are appropriate documents for comparative content analysis, because they are reasonably comparable between countries and over time (Klemmensen et al., 2007: 747). Third, although we admit that party programmes only tell part of the story, we would like to emphasize that the analysis of manifestos seems to 'catch' populism rather well. The results of the content analysis show that there is much more populism in the programmes of parties that are generally seen as 'populist', as we will discuss below.

For every paragraph in each election manifesto, extensively trained coders have determined whether this paragraph contained indications of the two core elements of populism: People-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism was measured with the question 'Do the authors of the manifesto refer to the people?'. Coders were instructed to include every reference to the people, irrespective of whether it concerned 'the electorate', 'the nation' or 'our society'. Anti-elitism was measured with the following question: 'Do the authors of the manifesto criticize elites?' Only when the critique

concerned elites in general it has been coded as anti-elitism. Critique on individual politicians or parties was not coded as anti-elitism. If both people-centrism and anti-elitism appeared in the same paragraph, the paragraph was coded as populist. For every manifesto the total percentage of populist paragraphs was computed. This percentage is the so-called populism-score for a party in a specific election. Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) have demonstrated that this operationalization yields a valid and reliable measurement of populism.

Table 1 presents the measures of the degree of populism in the manifestos of the five largest Dutch parties, two of which are considered to be populist by several scholars: The SP (see March, 2011) and the PVV (see Vossen, 2011). Therefore, it could make sense to employ a binary distinction, as we will do in our first operationalization. However, we also see that the PVV uses much more populist rhetoric than the SP, and there is also substantial variation in the degree to which mainstream parties employ a populist discourse. This speaks more in favour of a 'matters of degrees approach' in measuring populism. For this reason, we will test our models using both approaches.

To this avail, we combined the information from our content analysis with survey data from the LISS panel (discussed above). Every year, respondents were asked: 'If national elections were held today, which party would you vote for?'.[7] In the binary classification, we employed a dummy variable to measure 'populist party support'. In this variable a '1' indicates a vote for either the SP or PVV and a '0' a vote for another party. To measure populist party support on a continuum, we selected respondents who expressed an intention to vote for any of the parties whose manifestos were coded.[8] We then created a new variable, labelled 'populism of the party intended to vote for', to which we attributed the populism scores of the party the voters intended to support. Because the most recent analyzed manifestos are from 2006, the populism scores from this year have been employed. So, if a respondent intended to vote for the PVV, we have attributed the populism score of the PVV to that person: 23.08. If the person intended to vote for the PvdA (Labour), s/he would receive the value 0.61 on this variable. In this way we have created a dataset in which the information about the intended vote choice was replaced with an interval level variable: the degree of populism of the party. The degree of populism of

Table 1
Degree of populism of 5 Dutch parties.

Party	1994	2002	2006
CDA	0	0	0
D66	0.65	0	2.64
PvdA	1.03	0.85	0.61
VVD	0	0	0
PVV	—	—	23.08
SP	16.41	5.04	1.43

The Krippendorff's alpha's are $\alpha = 0.78$ for people-centrism and $\alpha = 0.84$ for anti-elitism. The reliability statistics are based on a sample (of roughly 5 percent) of all paragraphs from the analyzed manifestos.
Source: Rooduijn et al. (2014)

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parties ranges from 0 to 23.08.[9]

Theoretically, the degree of populism of the party a respondent intends to vote for has three sources of variation: 1) changes in party preferences at the individual level; 2) differences between parties in their degree of populism; and 3) changes in the degree of populism of parties over time. However, when we look at the party level data only, over-time changes in the degree of populism accounts for only 10 per cent of the variation, while 90 per cent of the variation can be explained by party level differences. In the analyses that we present in the main part of the paper, the populism scores of parties are therefore assumed to be constant over time. This means that over-time changes in the degree of populism of the party a respondent intends to vote for stem *only* from individual changes in party preferences. In the binary coding, a positive change in this variable means that a respondent changed his/her vote intention from a mainstream party to either the SP or the PVV. A negative change indicates a change in the opposite direction. In the continuous measure, a positive change indicates that the respondent changed from a less populist party to a more populist party, whereas a negative change indicates that the respondent changed his/her vote intention to a less populist party. In a series of robustness checks (see the 'Robustness of the findings' section), we also conducted analyses in which we took into account the changes in populism at the party level (measured by means of an automated content analysis). The estimated effects hardly change as a result of these different codings and the substantive conclusions remain unaltered.

Political discontent has been operationalized by means of three items from the LISS panel dataset — 'Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me', 'Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion', and 'People like me have no influence at all on government policy' — which we combined into the new variable 'political discontent'.[10] This was done as follows. All three items were coded on a two-point scale: 1 = that is true; 0 = that is not true. We added up these variables, so that the new variable has a range from 0 (contented) to 3 (discontented).

In order to assess the causal relationship between the degree of populism of the party one intended to vote for and one's political discontent, we estimated the model presented in Fig. 1 by means of a path analysis. This allows us to estimate the causal 'cross-lagged' effects simultaneously (see Carsey and Layman, 2006; Dancey and Goren, 2010). Which mechanism seems to be at work: the expressing discontent mechanism, the fuelling discontent mechanism, or both?[11] We have constructed a model in which the degree of populism of the party one intended to vote for at time t is affected by this person's political discontent at time $t-1$, controlling for the party preferences at $t-1$. Since the populism scores of *parties* do not change over time in our model estimates, a positive effect means that respondents who are *more* discontented are likely to *change* their intended vote choice from a mainstream party to the SP or the PVV (in the binary coding), or to a party that is *more* populist (when applying the continuous measure). This is the *expressing discontent logic*. Simultaneously, we estimate whether someone's political discontent at time t is affected by his/her populist party preferences at time $t-1$, controlling for discontent at $t-1$. A positive value indicates that someone who intended to vote for a more populist party becomes more discontented over time. This is indicative of the *fuelling discontent logic*. Hence, we estimated all effects simultaneously in one single "autoregressive cross-lagged model" (see Selig and Little, 2012). Because this way of modeling implies that the variance of a variable left to explain at time t is the change in that variable that has occurred between time $t-1$ and time t, the cross-lagged coefficients show how much change over time in one variable is caused by the other variable (see Schlueter et al., 2008: 571).

In order to obtain an acceptable model fit, we have also included the lagged effects of each attitude at $t-2$ and $t-3$. We evaluate the goodness of fit of this model using the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and the comparative fit index (CFI). We define acceptable model fit by the following criteria: RMSEA ≤0.05; CFI ≥0.95; and TLI ≥0.95. The path model has been estimated using Mplus Version 5.21 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010).[12] The sample size is $n = 629$.

4. Findings

The path analysis shows that political discontent is both a cause and a consequence of populist voting (see Table 2). In Model 1 the results for the 'matter of degrees approach' are presented. In two of the five years under investigation, we find a significant effect of political discontent at time $t-1$ on populist party support at time t. In three of the five years, there is a significant effect of populist party support at $t-1$ on political discontent at time t. The standardized regression coefficients regarding the fuelling discontent logic (0.149 in 2013, 0.117 in 2010 and 0.075 in 2009) are slightly, but probably not significantly,[13] higher than the coefficients regarding the expressing discontent logic (0.075 in 2010 and 0.061 in 2009). The model turns out to fit the data very well (RMSEA = 0.028; CFI = 0.995; and TLI = 0.989).

The binary coding of populism yields similar results (see Model 2). In two of the five years under investigation, we find a significant effect of political discontent at time $t-1$ on populist party support at time t at the $p < 0.05$ level. In one year the effect is statistically significant at the $p < 0.10$ level. In three of the five years, there is a significant effect of populist party support at $t-1$ on political discontent at time t (in two years at the $p < 0.01$ level and in one year at the $p < 0.05$ level). The standardized regression coefficients regarding the fuelling discontent logic (0.072 in 2013, 0.158 in 2010 and 0.106 in 2009) are, again, slightly, but probably not

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[9] Although the values range from 0 to 23.08, most observations cluster around 0. This might affect the results of our regression analyses. We have therefore also operationalized a party's populism by means of a binary approach (populist or not). Moreover, we have investigated if the results are different for a left-wing populist party (SP) compared to a right-wing populist party (PVV). See Table 2 for the results.

[10] These items tap into what often has been labelled "external political efficacy", which concerns the extent to which a person thinks that politicians are not responsive to the demands of citizens. We employ these specific items because they reflect the populist message that political elites would ignore ordinary citizens. A lack of external political efficacy is often seen as a specific type of the more general category of political discontent (see Craig et al., 1990).

[11] It needs to be emphasized that one should be somewhat cautious when drawing causal inferences from these analyses. The failure to reject a path model does not *prove* that the causal model is correct. Statistical causal modeling alone can *never* fully prove causation (see Kline, 2005). The estimates of the causal effects in a path analysis are all based on the assumption that the specified model is correct — something we never know for certain. Yet because our study is based on panel data, and because we have estimated the effects of both the expressing and fuelling discontent logics in one single, well-fitting model, we believe that the substantive conclusions we draw from our statistical analyses are warranted.

[12] As we are interested in the relationship between political discontent and the degree of populism of the party one intended to vote for only, we have not included control variables in our path model. We have, however, also checked if our results are robust to the inclusion of control variables. This turns out to be the case, see the 'Robustness of the findings' section. Because the political discontent variables are measured on an ordinal scale, we used a robust weighted least squares estimator (WLSMV) with theta parameterization to estimate the model parameters.

[13] As far as we are aware, no formal significance test exists for the difference in effect size of the two effect parameters.
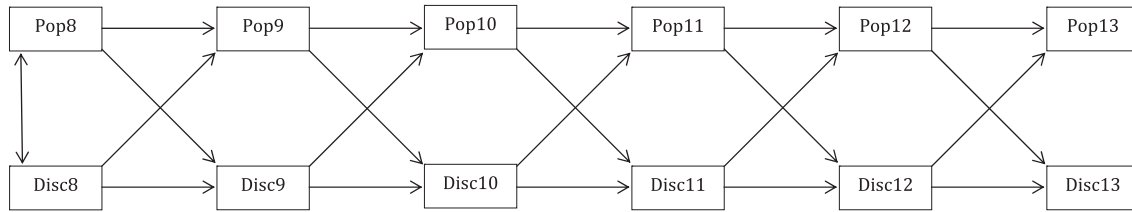
Note: 'Pop8' refers to the degree of populism of the party intended to vote for in 2008, 'Disc11' is the degree of political discontent in 2011, etc.

Note 2: The lagged effects of each attitude at *t-2* and *t-3* are also included in the model, but not displayed for reasons of clarity.

Fig. 1. Path model assessing expressing discontent logic and fuelling discontent logic.

Table 2
Path model explaining populist voting and political discontent.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
	Matter of degree approach	Party family approach	Robust 1	Robust 2	Robust 3	Robust 4	Robust 5
Expressing discontent							
Discontent 12 → Populism 13	−0.006	0.021	0.015	0.012	0.024	−0.036	−0.023
Discontent 11 → Populism 12	−0.014	−0.026	−0.004	0.007	−0.004	−0.020	0.006
Discontent 10 → Populism 11	0.016	0.047*	0.022	0.039ˆ	0.035	0.018	0.016
Discontent 9 → Populism 10	0.075*	0.047*	0.055*	0.134**	0.074**	−0.011	0.080**
Discontent 8 → Populism 9	0.061*	0.037ˆ	0.048ˆ	0.035ˆ	0.065*	0.003	0.053
Fuelling discontent							
Populism 12 → Discontent 13	0.149**	0.072*	0.096**	0.108**	0.124**	0.012	0.198**
Populism 11 → Discontent 12	0.011	0.003	0.018	0.011	0.008	−0.023	−0.300
Populism 10 → Discontent 11	−0.028	0.036	0.011	0.007	0.003	0.065ˆ	−0.062
Populism 9 → Discontent 10	0.117**	0.158**	0.160**	0.155**	0.154**	0.144**	0.177**
Populism 8 → Discontent 9	0.075*	0.106**	0.073*	0.036	0.072*	0.100**	0.130*
Chi-squared (df)	45.782 (31)	61.759 (31)	50.278 (31)	51.715 (31)	48.273 (31)	43.264 (31)	35.313 (31)
RMSEA	0.028	0.040	0.031	0.033	0.030	0.027	0.020
CFI	0.995	0.994	0.995	0.995	0.996	0.997	0.998
TLI	0.989	0.987	0.990	0.990	0.991	0.993	0.995

ˆ: significant at $p < 0.10$.
*: significant at $p < 0.05$.
**: significant at $p < 0.01$. One-tailed tests.

significantly, higher than the coefficients regarding the expressing discontent logic (0.047 in 2011 and 2010 and 0.037 in 2009). The model fits the data very well again (RMSEA = 0.040; CFI = 0.994; and TLI = 0.987).

While the effects presented here suggest that the parameters of the 'fuelling discontent logic' are stronger in magnitude than those of the 'expressing discontent logic', these differences are not significant and some of the robustness checks (to be discussed below) suggest that the effects of the 'fuelling discontent logic' are slightly weaker than those of the 'expressing discontent logic'. So, the bottom line is that our analyses provide clear support for both the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic.

5. Robustness of the findings

In order to assess the robustness of our findings we have conducted a series of robustness checks. Below we first focus on the internal validity of our study and then assess the external validity of our analysis.

5.1. Internal validity

In the path analysis we assessed the relationship between the degree of populism of the party intended to vote for and political discontent without controlling for other variables. Moreover, to measure the populism of parties, we used data from a manual content analysis of party programs from 2006 (right before the panel data were collected). We therefore conducted three sets of robustness checks. See Table 2.

First, we conducted an automated content analysis on the party programs of Dutch parties drafted for the elections in 2006, 2010 and 2012 (see for the dictionary, Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011). We tested our path models using these data in three different ways: 1) by taking for all parties the average populism score across these three years; 2) by allowing populism scores to change in an election year[14]; 3) by using linear interpolation to estimate the populism scores in the years between the elections. When testing the path models with these different specifications, we obtained the same substantive results (see models 'Robust 1' to 'Robust 3' in Table 2).

Second, we assessed whether the causal logic is the same for radical right and radical left populists. In model 'Robust 4' we employed a dummy variable for which '1' indicates a vote for the SP (a vote for the PVV was set to missing), and in model 'Robust 5' we use a dichotomous variable where the score '1' refers to a vote for the PVV (a vote for the SP was set to missing). In both cases a '0'

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[14] For 2008 and 2009 we took the populism score based on the 2006 election program, for 2010 and 2011 we defined these values on the basis of the 2010 program and for 2012 and 2013 we used the program of 2012.

refers to a vote for a mainstream party. The results show that the fuelling discontent mechanism seems to be at work for both left-wing and right-wing populist parties.

Third, we estimated two regression models in which we controlled for various attitudinal, and socio-demographic variables, all at time $t{-}1$. We measured the left/right position with a scale ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right). Left-right radicalism ranges from 0 (not radical) to 25 (very radical). We measured attitudes towards immigration by means of a scale from 1 (immigrants can retain their own culture) to 5 (immigrants should adapt entirely). Income was measured by categorizing the net household income of every respondent in 13 ordinal categories (1 = low; 13 = high). Education was measured with an ordinal variable ranging from 1 (low) to 6 (high). And gender was measured with a dummy (0 = male; 1 = female). We also included a lagged dependent variable in our models. In the first model the dependent variable is the degree of populism of the party intended to vote for, and the main independent variable is political discontent at $t{-}1$ (expressing discontent logic). In the second model the dependent variable is political discontent and the independent variable the degree of populism of the party intended to vote for at time $t{-}1$ (fuelling discontent logic). The findings support both logics and can be found in the Online Appendix.

5.2. External validity

To evaluate the external validity of our findings, we assess to what extent the results can be generalized to other Western European countries. In addition to the Dutch case, we have selected France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. We have again constructed a dataset containing information about citizens' political discontent and the degree of populism of the parties they intended to vote for. Because we employ cross-sectional data here instead of panel data, we should be much more cautious when drawing causal inferences. It is therefore of the upmost importance that the model is well-specified. Therefore, we control for all kinds of attitudes and demographic and socio-economic background variables, which have been shown to influence populist party support and political discontent. The data concerning the degree of populism of political parties again come from Rooduijn et al. (2014). The content analysis data were combined with survey data from the European Elections Studies (EES) of 1999, 2004 and 2009. We have combined the data in the exact same way as in the Dutch case.

In each EES wave, respondents were asked: 'If national elections were held today, which party would you vote for?'. Respondents who expressed an intention to vote for any of the 66 parties whose manifestos were coded, were included in our analyses. We created the new variable 'populism of the party intended to vote for', for which we attributed the populism scores of the party manifestos to the voters that intended to support these parties. Political discontent was measured on a 4-points scale ranging from 1 (contented) to 4 (discontented). Respondents' positions on the left-right dimension were measured on a 10-points scale that ranges from left (1) to right (10). How radical a respondent is on the left-right dimension, is measured on a scale which ranges from 0 (not radical) to 16 (very radical). Someone's attitude towards European integration ranges from 1 (has already gone too far) to 10 (should be pushed further). We also included a variable measuring the net household income per month (standardized per country-wave combination), and a measure of subjective class position on a 5-points-scale, ranging from working class (1) to upper class (5). We have also controlled for gender (0 = male, 1 = female), and the age of the respondent. For details on our measurement, see the Online Appendix. The pooled dataset consists of 6016 respondents, nested in 15 country-year combinations (five countries and three years:

1999, 2004 and 2009).

We estimated two path models, which are graphically shown in Fig. 2, and which allow us to compare the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. The models have again been estimated using Mplus Version 5.21 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2010).

Both models turn out to fit the data very well. The RMSEA of Model 1 is 0.036 and the RMSEA of Model 2 is 0.037. Because the differences between the models are extremely small and not significant, we cannot refute one of the logics and accept the other. Hence, these results confirm that political discontent can be modelled both as a cause and as a consequence of populist voting.

6. Conclusion

Various scholars have demonstrated that political discontent is related to populist voting and they have concluded that discontent (partially) explains the support for populist parties (e.g., Betz, 1994; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2000; Lubbers et al., 2002; Mayer and Perrineau, 1992; Norris, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2001). These studies suffer from two drawbacks: (1) they ignore that support for populist parties might also cause political discontent; and (2) they only focus on *radical right-wing* populist parties. In this article we have argued and demonstrated empirically that people who support (more) populist parties become more politically discontented, most probable as a *consequence* of the messages of these parties, whether from the left or from the right.

More specifically, we have compared two logics: the expressing discontent logic and the fuelling discontent logic. According to the expressing discontent logic, citizens vote for populist parties because they are politically dissatisfied. According to the fuelling discontent logic, citizens become more dissatisfied as a result of being exposed to the populist message and of being more susceptible to that message.

Combining the results of a content analysis of election manifestos with the Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Science (LISS) panel, we have linked information about the parties individuals intend to vote for to these parties' populism. This way we have combined data at the level of parties with data on political discontent at the individual level. Through a path analysis of panel data, we have demonstrated that, at least in the Netherlands, political discontent is not only a cause, but also a consequence of supporting populist parties.

On the one hand, this means that our study supports the conclusions of much of the extant research, which has identified political discontent as one of the drivers of support of populist parties. On the other hand, this means that previous studies, especially those that have used cross-sectional data, and which have modelled discontent to be exogenous to voting for populist parties, have probably overestimated the strength of these effects (e.g., Betz, 1994; Norris, 2005). After all, the correlation they have found is probably due to causal effects in both directions.

The main reason for why many individuals decide to support a party that expresses a populist message, is that they agree with this party on substantive issues, such as European integration, immigration, or taxation. In fact, it has been shown that those who vote for populist radical right parties are largely driven by the policy positions of these parties in the field of immigration (e.g., Norris, 2005; Ivarsflaten, 2008). Various studies have shown that citizens who support a specific party because they agree with this party's stances on, say, the issues A and B, are inclined to adopt this party's attitudes on the issues C and D as well (Bartels, 2002; Cohen, 2003; Lenz, 2009). It is therefore likely that once citizens support a party, they will also be susceptible to other ideas of this party, such as, for instance, its populism. Van der Brug (2003), for instance, showed in
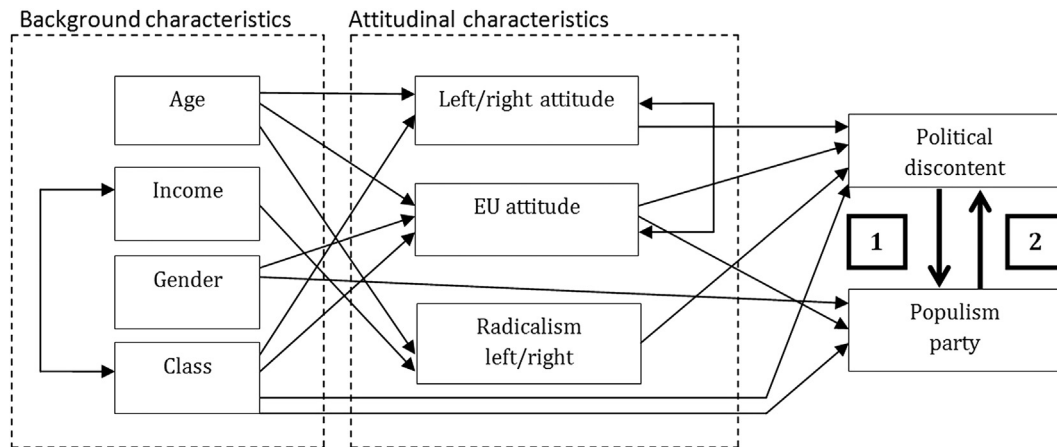
Fig. 2. Robustness check: expressing discontent logic (1) and fuelling discontent logic (2).

a cross-sectional study that it is likely that during the 2002 Dutch general elections voters have based their vote choice on the populist radical right *Lijst Pim Fortuyn*'s (LPF) position on the issue of immigration. As a consequence of the messages of the LPF, these voters became more politically dissatisfied. Since our study is based on panel data, it provides a much more rigorous test of this causal effect.

These findings form an important contribution to the relatively young literature on the societal and political consequences of the rise of populist parties. By focusing on the attitudinal consequences of populist party support, our study connects with research that indicates that, on a more general level, citizens' attitudes are affected by their voting behaviour. It has, for instance, been argued that voters prefer to be consistent with regard to their attitudes and their actions, and are, therefore, inclined to adopt their opinions to the attitudes of the party they have voted for (see Beasly and Joslyn, 2001).

This study is not only relevant for the scholarly literature. Various populist parties on both the left (e.g., Podemos, SYRIZA) and the right (e.g., UKIP, FN) have been rather successful during the elections to the European Parliament in May 2014. Our findings indicate that it might well be the case that those who have voted for these parties have become increasingly dissatisfied with European politics and/or politics in general. This raises the socially and politically highly relevant question whether we are witnessing a spiral of populism and discontent at the EU level. Future studies might focus on the question as to whether this is indeed the case.

Our study leaves open the question which aspects of the populist message makes voters more discontented. We defined the populist message by a combination of an appeal to 'normal citizens', in combination with an 'anti-elite' message. It seems plausible that the anti-elite message alone could be sufficient to exert the effects that we found in our study. However, since anti-elite messages occur very rarely without an appeal to 'normal citizens' (Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011), we cannot estimate these effects separately in a non-experimental setting. Future (experimental) studies could focus more specifically on the mechanisms underlying the reciprocal relationship between populist voting and political attitudes.

Future studies might also look at actual voting behaviour instead of vote *intentions* in a non-election context. Based on our study, we cannot rule out the possibility that the effects would have been different if we had focused on real elections. However, we have no theoretical reasons to expect that this would be the case.

Unfortunately, cross-national panel data were not available for

this study. It was therefore not possible to fully assess the causal mechanisms behind the correlation between populist voting and political discontent in a cross-national setting. While we recognize the limitations of this study, we do feel we have made an important contribution by showing that it is highly probable that political discontent is both a cause and a consequence of populist voting. Future studies should aim at further unravelling this endogenous relationship by means of cross-national panel data and/or (survey) experiments in which one could test whether, and if yes, how populist messages affect individuals' ideas about politics.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.04.006.

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