



**Populism and
Civic Engagement**

Centrist and Radical Populism: the Case of Bulgaria

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Bulgaria 2021

- Three parliamentary elections in a single year + presidential elections
- Three different parties came out winners in these three elections
- Two of these were new parties: There Is Such a People and We Continue the Changes
- A new radical-right populist party (Revival) clears the 4% parliamentary threshold
- Fragmented parliament: seven parties
- Four-party governing coalition
- Frequent changes of electoral rules and the introduction of machine voting
- Falling electoral turnout: from 50,6% in April to 40% in November 2021



Centrist populism

- NDSV (2001), GERB (2009); ITN (2021); ANO; FIDESZ (early 2000s); SMER...
- Anti-establishment (Pytlas 2016, 2019)
- Skepticism of thicker ideologies of the left and the right;
- Criticism of the “transition” period in Eastern Europe
- Distrust in political parties. Direct democracy;
- Personalism - charismatic populist leader
- Constitutional scepticism;;
- Executive aggrandisement;
- Nationalism
- Welfare policies should not burden the middle class: taxes should be flat and low, so that there is no massive redistribution in favour of the most deprived members of society (Smilov and Krastev 2008:10)



Radical populism

- Contemporary Fidesz, PiS and a variety of smaller radical right parties;
- Attack on individual and minority rights (sexual orientation, Roma);
- “Symbolic thickening” (Kotwas and Kubik 2019) towards nativism;
- Attacks on independent judiciaries and other constitutional bodies;
- Attempts to take over the media and reduce pluralism;
- Anti-EU, anti-NATO, pro-Russian (in a sense, pro-autocratic) policies;
- Attacks on NGOs”;
- More aggressive redistributive measures excluding unpopular minorities like the Roma;
- Use of the police and prosecutors against political opponents;
- Attempts to entrench as dominant a particular religion or specific religious views in public life and the constitution;
- Change of the constitution in order to establish an illiberal form of

democracy.



Radicalisation of centrist populism

- Influential populist players are established and rise as “centrist” populists;
- Paradigmatic cases like Fidesz, PiS and GERB suggest that a successful strategy for the institutionalisation of a populist political player and for significant electoral influence, which guarantees it a ruling position, is radicalisation.
 - Radicalisation could be direct - both Fidesz and PiS have themselves become much more radical than their earlier “centrist” versions.
 - Radicalisation could take place “by a proxy”).



Drivers of populism and radicalisation

Economic factors (data PLUS)*

	Economic Grievances	
	Individual relative deprivation	Growing inequality
Positive	0.46 *** AfD	0.22* M5S
		0.22* PiS
		0.62*** Linke
		0.97*** FI(F)
Negative	- 0.16** FPÖ	- 0.26* Lega
	- 0.21** GERB	- 0.32** RN
	- 0.26** Fidesz	- 0.38** FI (I)
		- 0.47*** Fidesz

* Coefficients from multivariate logistic regression

Reference group - voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding "other parties".

Additional controls included: age, gender, education, residence (urban-rural), religiosity, income.

Drivers of populism and radicalisation: Cultural factors (data PLUS)*

	Identity		Illiberalism	
	Anti-immigration	Attached to nation	Strong Government	Anti-LGBT
Positive	0.50** FI (I)	0.24*FPÖ	0.38**AfD	0.17* FPÖ
	0.67*** M5S	0.78***Vox	0.40* FI (I)	0.27** Lega
	0.79***FPÖ		0.41** PiS	0.33* Vox
	0.79***Vox		0.48** Vox	0.35** RN
	0.96*** Lega		0.66***Lega	0.41***AfD
	0.98*** RN			0.42*** PiS
	1.15*** AfD			
Negative	-0.59***Podemos	-0.22* Linke	-0.39***GERB	-0.24** M5S
			-0.45** FI (F)	

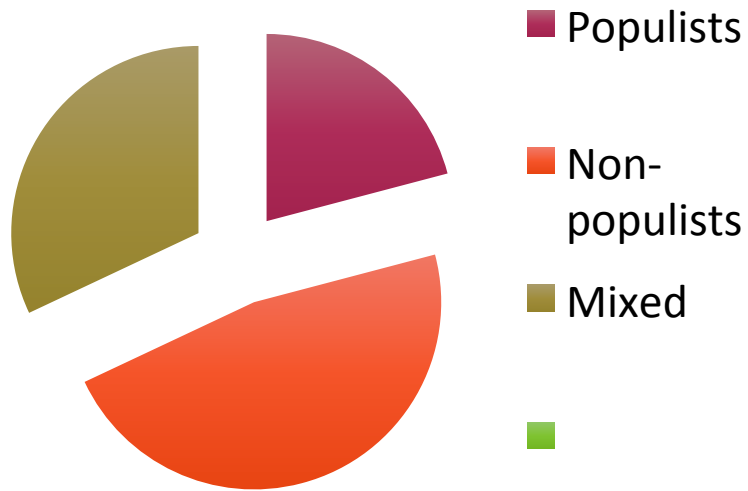
* Coefficients from multivariate logistic regression

Reference group - voters of all other parties mentioned in survey, excluding “other parties”.

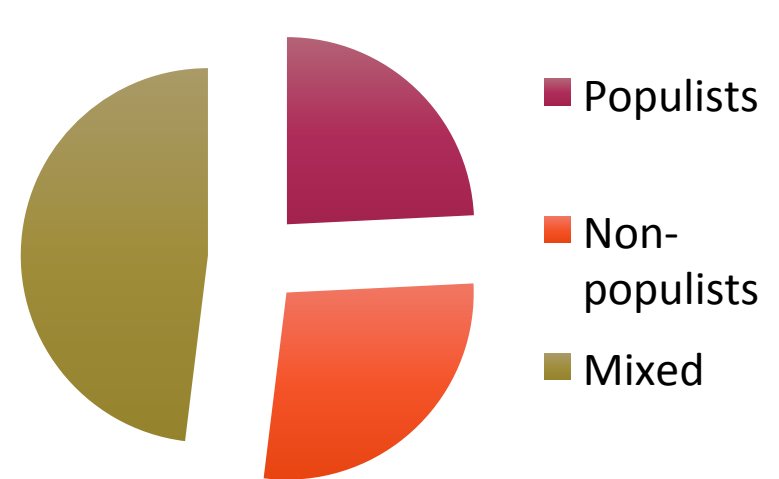
Germany 2020

Bulgaria 2021

Barometer



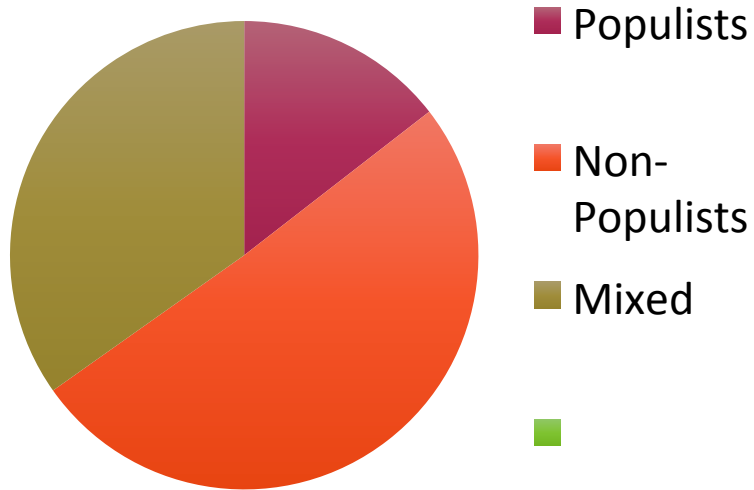
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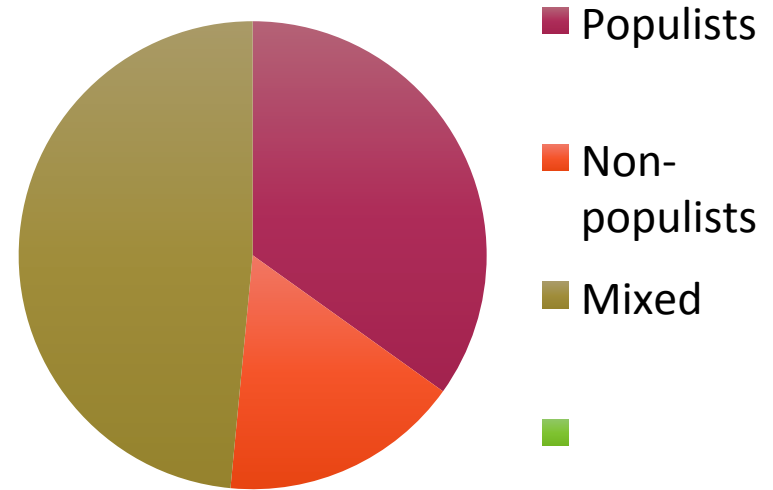
Democratic Bg

There Is Such a People

Voters



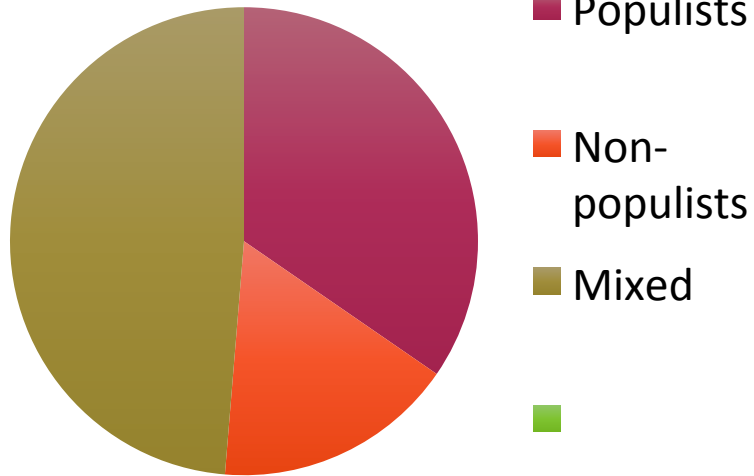
Voters



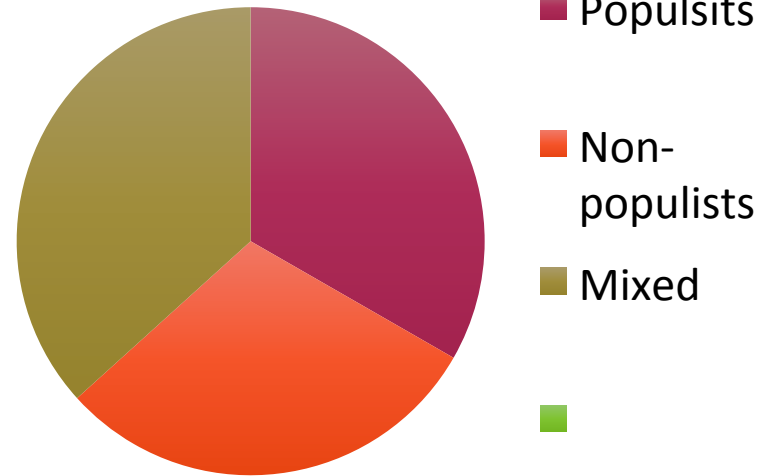
Centrists (TSP)

Radicals (Revival)

Voters



Voters



Taking stock

- The “mixed” category is of special importance for centrist populists
- Apart from ideological factors, other types of factors of “strategic” and more contextual nature do play a role:
 - To deal a decisive blow to the opponent;
 - To displace an entrenched incumbent;
 - To achieve a goal, which cannot be achieved in cartelized politics (to avoid the policy trap);
 - To shake up the political system, so that it becomes more responsive to particular preferences.

