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Societies outside Metropolises: the role of civil society organisations in facing populism

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
SUMMARY



European Economic and Social Committee



European Economic and Social Committee

Study on Societies outside Metropolises

The role of civil society organisations in facing populism Preliminary findings

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AUTHORS *Huw Longton and Emily Long*

CONTACTS Huw.Longton@ecas.org

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1. Introduction

It is a critical time for analysing the determinants of populism, the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) in countering populist expressions and assessing whether there is a link between support for populism and attitudes towards the European Union. The latest Eurobarometer survey ‘Democracy on the move – European Elections: One year to go’ shows that a plurality of citizens are satisfied with how democracy works in the EU (46%) and a majority satisfied with democracy in Member States (54%), but there has, since 2013, also been a rise in support for emerging political parties, suggesting dissatisfaction with political representation at national and European level.

Poland has the highest level of support for EU democracy (61%), followed by Austria (49%), Italy and France (both 41%). When it comes to voters’ perceptions of new parties, there is strong agreement in Italy, Poland and Austria with the statement “We need a real change and this is what these parties and movements can bring” (71%, 62% and 62%, respectively), although the number is much lower for France (48%)¹. This feeling is reflected by results in recent elections in those countries.

2. Objectives and Method

This study aims to provide a better understanding of the factors influencing citizens' choices in favour of populism in societies in non-metropolitan areas, in which the populist vote is higher than in large urban areas, and the role played by CSOs in preventing and opposing populism by researching and analysing:

- The context of certain non-metropolitan areas in Austria, Italy, Poland and France, presenting a level of income, economic and social development which is a) on and slightly higher than the EU average and b) below the EU average.
- The role of CSOs in those non-metropolitan areas, considering for instance the typology of CSOs present on the territory, their availability of resources, the thematic areas covered by them as well as examples of successful/unsuccessful actions carried out.

For the purpose of the study, one region above the EU average in terms of GDP (PPS) per inhabitant and one region below the EU average with high populist vote at the most recent elections were identified per country. The research was carried out in:

Country	More advantaged region	Less advantaged region
Austria	Klagenfurt-Villach	Niederösterreich-Süd
France	Drôme	Aisne
Italy	Udine	Reggio di Calabria
Poland	Płocki	Nowosądecki

¹ Eurobarometer – ‘Democracy on the move - European Elections: One year to go’, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/en/heard/eurobarometer/eurobarometer-2018-democracy-on-the-move>

The regions were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

1. Eurostat's metropolitan² typology;
2. GDP (PPS) per inhabitant³ (2015), Eurostat;
3. Total population of the region (2016), Eurostat;
4. Population density (2015), Eurostat;
5. Size of the largest urban area; and
6. Populist vote⁴.

In order to understand **why citizens living in non-metropolitan areas in Austria, France, Poland and Italy express a populist vote**, we have:

1. *Defined the nature of populism in the eight regions*

Through an in-depth literature review, we have defined the four aspects of populism (based on the Cas Mudde's⁵ 'influential' definition, Inglehart and Norris⁶ frame of the populism), to which we have added Euroscepticism for the purposes of the study. A brief overview of the history and development of populism in each country has been developed based on a literature review. Populist parties⁷ in the countries concerned were selected and categorised according to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES)⁸.

Hypotheses of the nature of populism in the eight regions were developed based on the literature review described above and were tested and verified through surveys of citizens in each of the regions. The results informed our findings of the degree to which populist political parties reflect the different aspects of populism and the extent to which voters' choices in the eight regions reflect the values and the positions of populist parties.

2. *Analysed the socioeconomic conditions of citizens and their voting choices in order to establish the determinants of a populist vote*

Two statistical analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between socioeconomic indicators and populist voting patterns – one on the voting patterns observed in the eight regions themselves (based on indicators at the NUTS 3 level when available or NUTS 2 level otherwise) and one on national level indicators and their relationship to overall national voting patterns.

A survey of citizens was carried out in each region to establish the relationship between the populist vote and trust in politics, socioeconomic status, cultural openness and Euroscepticism, and verify the factors influencing electoral support for populist parties, identified through the literature review.

² Metropolitan regions are NUTS 3 regions or a combination of NUTS 3 regions which represent all agglomerations of at least 250,000 inhabitants - <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/metropolitan-regions/background>

³ <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/tec00114>. All Eurostat NUTS 3 data can be viewed here: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCI/#?vis=nuts3.economy&lang=en>

⁴ Election data was taken from national databases. Poland - http://parlament2015.pkw.gov.pl/349_Wyniki_Sejm/0/0 and <http://prezydent2015.pkw.gov.pl/>; France - <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Elections/Les-resultats>; Italy - <https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it/>; Austria - <https://wahl17.bmi.gv.at/> and <http://wahl16.bmi.gv.at/>

⁵ Mudde, C. – The Populist Zeitgeist, 2004

⁶ Inglehart, R. F. and Norris, P. – Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash, 2016

⁷ Parties selected were: *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, Austria; *Front National* and *La France Insoumise*, France; *Lega Nord*, *Movimento 5 Stelle*, *Forza Italia* and *Fratelli d'Italia*, Italy; *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, *Kukiz'15* and *KORWiN*, Poland.

⁸ All CHES survey data can be accessed here: <https://www.chesdata.eu/our-surveys/>

Two-tailed Kruskal-Wallis⁹ tests were used to examine differences in responses between those who expressed a populist vote, those who expressed a vote for a non-populist party, those who did not vote, and those who voted for a fringe party classed as “other” in the survey. Only findings regarded as statistically significant¹⁰ were considered in the findings. The results informed our findings of the socioeconomic and demographic factors that influence the populist vote at national and regional level and per regions studied and the correlation between specific factors and the populist votes.

3. *Analysed if Euroscepticism is one of the reasons why citizens in those areas express a populist vote* through desk research and literature research of the nature of populism and through the citizens’ survey in the eight regions.

In order to **assess if CSOs fulfil their role as intermediaries between citizens and institutions** in the eight regions and if they help in providing a clear and comprehensive response to the fears of Europeans as well as in communicating the European values on which the Union is based, we have:

1. *Defined* civil society organisations (CSOs) as “the sum of all organisational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who can act as mediators between public authorities and the public.”¹¹
2. *Analysed the environment* in which civil society operates in each of the countries (based on the V-Dem Varieties of Democracy dataset¹² and the CIVICUS State of Civil Society Report 2018¹³).
3. *Mapped the CSOs in each region* which are active in the areas of democracy, human rights, freedom, equality, rule of law, human dignity, civic education, disinformation, media literacy, fact-checking, minorities, migration, multiculturalism and civil liberties.
4. *Outreached* by e-mail and/or phone to all CSOs identified in the regional mapping in order to survey them on the actions that have been carried out in opposing populism, in tackling calls for more direct democracy via new media or the spreading and the effects of disinformation.
5. Carried out *desk research* to find out more about good practices in preventing and opposing populism in the eight regions.

The results informed our findings of the type and range of interests covered by CSOs, their resources, successful and unsuccessful actions and good practices in preventing and opposing populism including those of tackling the increasing calls for more direct democracy and the spreading of disinformation. Finally, we have interviewed experts in order to enrich the conclusions and the recommendations of the study on how CSOs could improve their actions.

⁹ The test ranked all of the question responses from most to least populist and tested for differences between multiple groups of voters – populist, non-populist and non-voters.

¹⁰ Findings considered statistically significant have a less than 5% probability of being attributed to chance.

¹¹ Divjak, T., and Forbici, G., The future evolution of civil society in the European Union by 2030, 2017

¹² The latest data can be found here: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-8/>

¹³ Civicus State of Civil Society Report, 2018: <https://www.civicus.org/index.php/state-of-civil-society-report-2018>

3. Main findings – factors influencing the populist vote

3.1 National factors

- Income inequality as measured by the Gini Coefficient¹⁴ - strongest factor
- Social benefit expenditure
- Satisfaction with democracy, trust in national parliament and government and higher rating of household financial situation all associated with a lower populist vote.
- Low employment an additional factor

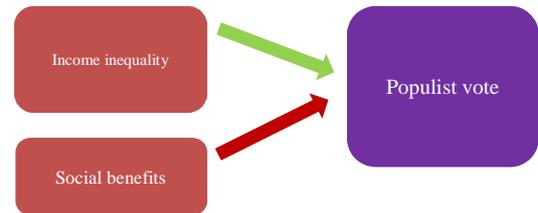


Figure 1 – Illustrates a possible relationship between income inequality, social benefits and populist vote. The green arrow depicts a positive relationship and the red a negative relationship.

3.2 Regional factors

- Lower disposable income, employment rate, social benefit expenditure and GDP are positively associated with a higher populist vote.
- Employment, social benefit expenditure and GDP have an indirect effect on the populist vote by contributing to levels of disposable income (see Figure 2).

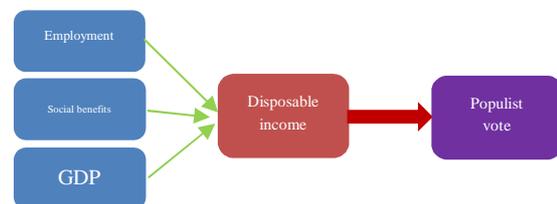


Figure 2 – Illustrates a possible relationship between employment, social benefits, GDP, disposable income and populist vote. Green arrows indicate a positive relationship, whilst red arrows indicate a negative relationship.

This relationship is stronger when considering right-wing populism alone (that is, low disposable income is a stronger determinant of the populist vote when considering right-wing populist parties alone).

- A high employment rate at regional level, unlike the national level, unexpectedly shows a positive relationship with the populist vote.

3.3 Patterns per region

General patterns of voters' profile in all eight regions:

- Age: non-populist voters tend to be older, whilst young people are more likely to vote for populist parties or to not vote at all.
- Education: highly educated citizens are most likely to vote for mainstream parties, whilst those who have received the least education are much more likely not to vote at all.
- The unemployed were most likely to vote for populist parties, whilst those who are self-employed, retired or unable to work tended to vote for mainstream parties. Students and homemakers were the least likely to vote overall.
- Populist voters tend to be more anti-migrant, pro-referenda, authoritarian, culturally conservative, anti-globalist and Eurosceptic than non-populist voters, in line with the description of populism in this study.
- Populist voters are more likely to trust national government and to be more optimistic about the economic situation than non-populist voters.
- There are no significant differences in terms of gender.

¹⁴ Represents the income or wealth distribution of a population – 0=perfect equality; 1=maximal inequality.

Specificities:

- Klagenfurt-Villach: Despite the positive rating of national economy by Austrian citizens, populist party voters are less optimistic than other voters about the prospects for the national economy in the next 12 months. They also expressed a greater desire for more direct democracy and were more Eurosceptic than other voters.
- Niederösterreich-Süd: Populist party voters are more anti-immigrant and authoritarian, less happy with how inequality is being addressed and Eurosceptic.
- Aisne: Strong anti-elitism and majoritarianism among populist party voters. Anti-immigrant sentiment evident among *Front National* voters.
- Udine: Populist party voters were less likely than other voters to express satisfaction with national democracy, although they did indicate a greater level of trust for national government than five years ago. Support for direct democracy and Euroscepticism also evident.
- Reggio di Calabria: Low levels of trust in government among all voters.
- Płocki: Populist voters showed support for the notion that “Being a Christian/Catholic is essential for being truly Polish”. Euroscepticism, but also support for EU membership, evident.
- Nowosądecki: A greater proportion of students voted for populist parties. Euroscepticism also evident.

4. The type and range of interests covered by CSOs and their available resources

The following table details the typologies and activities of CSOs in the different regions.¹⁵

	Associations		Cooperatives		Foundations		Other		Total
KV ¹⁶	4054		31		20		0		4105
NO-S	3035		14		24		0		3073
DR ¹⁷	14344		44		6		0		14394
AI	9601		14		3		0		9618
UD ¹⁸	556		83		41		0		680
RC	341		79		14		4		438
PL ¹⁹	498		72		107		5		682
NW	1025		140		197		11		1373
²⁰	Culture	Sport	Leisure	Social	Health	Education and training	Economy	Environment	Others
DR ²¹	19.6%	21.7%	14.5%	5.7%	4.2%	6.7%	3.7%	4.7%	19.2%
AI	13.3%	27.5%	20.6%	5.7%	3.5%	6.2%	3.7%	2.7%	16.9%
	Culture, sport and recreation	Education and research	Health	Social assistance and civil protection	Environment	Economic development and social cohesion	Others		
UD ²²	70.5%	1.1%	1.6%	7.0%	2.3%	1.1%	13.8%		

¹⁵Data available on CSOs typologies and resources is not uniform across the regions

¹⁶Data for the Austrian regions is taken from local authority websites – accessed August 2018

¹⁷Data on the French regions is taken from the *Répertoire National des Associations* - <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/repertoire-national-des-associations/>. Latest available data is from 1 August 2018.

¹⁸Data for the Italian regions

¹⁹Data on the Polish regions is taken from <https://mojepanstwo.pl/> and <https://ekrs.ms.gov.pl/web/wyszukiwarka-krs/strona-glowna> - accessed August 2018

²⁰Data on the Austrian regions is not available.

²¹Data on the French regions is taken from the *Répertoire National des Associations* - <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/repertoire-national-des-associations/>. Latest available data is from 1 August 2018.

²²Data from the Italian regions is from Istat - <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/207807>. Data refers to NUTS 2 level.

RC	59.3%	0.8%	0.8%	10.3%	1.1%	3.4%	17.4%
	Sport, tourism, recreation and leisure	Education and training	Culture and art	Health	Social	Local development	Others
PL ²³	23%	18%	12%	10%	9%	7%	22%
NW	32%	18%	18%	7%	5%	4%	15%

The following table outlines preliminary findings on the activities of CSOs in the region in preventing and opposing populism, tackling increasing calls for more direct democracy and countering the spread and effects of disinformation.

Regions	The role of CSOs in preventing and opposing populism	CSOs' actions in tackling the increasing calls for more direct democracy via new media and social networks	CSOs' actions in tackling the spread and effects of disinformation within the context of preventing and opposing populism
Klagenfurt-Villach, Austria	Strong social sector in both regions. Organisations work closely with local authorities in providing a wide range of social services addressing social issues as well as assistance and integration for migrants, asylum-seekers and refugees. Cultural associations also address misunderstandings and differences between communities.	There is little evidence to suggest that demands for direct democracy are being addressed at a local level. E.g. Aktiv Demokratie, Mehr Demokratie	Media literacy projects in Austria aiming to address the problem of fake news have a regional or local range, with only one national media literacy network (Medienbildung JETZT), which is in fact focused on the media literacy scene around Vienna. E.g. Digitaler Kompass, A1 telecom group
Niederösterreich-Süd, Austria			
Drôme, France	Social organisations are well represented in both regions, so the socioeconomic factors behind populism will be addressed by CSOs, although organisations in Aisne are facing a cut to all funding from the local authority. Organisations are also providing for the needs minorities and migrants, and also actively bringing communities together, and fighting discrimination and exclusion.	Civil society in the area of democratic participation in France is developing and the concept of 'liquid democracy' is emerging. They operate locally, nationally and internationally on issues such as enabling the public to select candidates for election, facilitating engagement between politicians and citizens, giving citizens a voice and enabling participation and providing ready-to-use civic participation platforms for local government.	France has a very active media literacy landscape, featuring around 55 key stakeholders, 22 of which are CSOs. Media literacy activities tend to be carried out by national associations that develop resources to be used directly in schools without the need for a regional intermediary.
Aisne, France			
Udine, Italy	Socioeconomic problems are much more acute in Reggio di Calabria than Udine, which is reflected in a greater number of organisations working in the social sector in the region. Organisations in both regions in this sector are addressing poverty, social development, marginalisation and discrimination, as well as issues around asylum, refugees, minorities, migrants and community relations. Organisations are also active in addressing Euroscepticism.	There are mechanisms in place in Udine and Reggio di Calabria for citizen participation and engagement, though little provision for direct democracy. The administrations of both Friuli-Venezia Giulia and the Province of Udine provide information about transparent government and consultations are held at comune level. E.g. AUSER RisorsAnziani (Udine)	Efforts to address disinformation in Italy include legislation to criminalise the sharing of fake news, an online portal to for citizens to report fake news to the Polizia Postale and a national "Ten Commandments" for spotting fake news, which was rolled out in 8,000 schools across Italy in 2017. E.g. Media Educazione Comunita (Udine), AICA Calabria Section
Reggio di Calabria, Italy			

²³ Data on the Polish regions is taken from <http://mazowieckie.ngo.pl/> and <http://malopolskie.ngo.pl/> - accessed August 2018. Data refers to NUTS 2 level.

Płocki, Poland	Many organisations are active in the social sector in both regions, but funding and financial sustainability is an issue, as well as the politicisation of civil society in the region. Funding from national and local authorities can depend on whether an organisation is politically favoured and funding has been withdrawn for activities relating to activities for migrants and minorities. Organisations are active in addressing Euroscepticism.	In both Płocki and Nowosądecki, CSOs have been working particularly to facilitate participatory budgeting mechanisms. E.g. Polski Zespól Humanitarny	The field of media literacy in Poland is highly active, with 63 main stakeholders, including 19 CSOs. There are four main media literacy networks operating at national level and media literacy projects in Poland address content creation, critical thinking, intercultural dialogue and challenging hate speech, how to use different media and participation, engagement and interaction in social, cultural and economic life. E.g. Demagog,
Nowosądecki, Poland			

5. Issues to be tackled by CSOs to effectively counter populism

On the basis of the preliminary research and surveys carried out, the following issues emerge:

Enabling environment	Austrian CSOs experiencing reduced access to policy-makers. CSOs need to speak with a common voice and larger organisations should support smaller ones.
	'Clientelisation' of Polish civil society is dividing CSOs by creating a privileged sector close to the government. Political and social hostility towards organisations working with migrants and minorities
Funding	"Unexpected and existence- threatening" cuts reported by Austrian civil society umbrella group (IGO).
	A majority of funding in France is switching from public to private – sustainability of organisations at risk. Local authority funding in Aisne to stop from 2019.
	Public funding in Poland can be distributed according to the political preferences of local and central government. Many small organisations at local level with small budgets and few employees. Structural funds could be better distributed at local level, and more funding could be managed locally
	CSOs across all the regions would benefit from financial independence from local authorities and greater social partners
Capacity	French CSOs need to professionalise because nature of work is becoming more technical, but most organisations work only with volunteers.
	Italian civil society mostly service-based – needs to develop advocacy function.
	Advocacy capacity of small, non-metropolitan CSOs needs to be developed to give citizens a voice across all regions. Stronger networks and cooperation are also required – larger organisations can support smaller ones and small organisations can provide a link to small communities
	Technical training and capacity-building would enable organisations to better manage bureaucratic requirements and diversify funding.
Others issues	Euroscepticism needs to be more effectively addressed in all regions; Europe needs to be effectively communicated, especially in areas where Euroscepticism is strongest.
	Attitudes towards migrants, refugees and asylum seekers – dialogue between communities is essential.
	Persistent socioeconomic disparities need to be more effectively addressed.



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