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“Populism in Latin America and Europe: A Cross-Regional, Micro-Level Analysis of Populist Political Actors”

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I. INTRODUCTION

In 1982 political scientist Paul Drake wrote regarding Latin America “Perhaps a wave of studies of populism is upon us because historians like to analyze things that are dead (1982: 21).” However, populism in the continent continues to persevere. Since 1985, charismatic presidents who deliver passionate speeches against elites to arouse support among the masses have dotted the political landscape in Peru, Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and Nicaragua. This recent re-emergence demonstrates the phenomenon’s resilience and its importance in understanding political developments in Latin America.

A similar but different brand of fiery political style has simultaneously emerged across the Atlantic in Western, and more recently, Eastern Europe. Within the European context, 1984 seems to be an important year for populism. The electoral breakthrough for the French National Front (FN) is viewed by some as the starting point for the rise of parties combining anti-establishment populism and anti-immigrant politics based on ethno-nationalist ideology (Rydgren 2004). Since that French election, populist parties have been well represented in parliaments in Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia and Switzerland.

What explains the parallel electoral success of populist political actors in the two continents? Scholars in the extant literature usually refer to the “leftist” strains in Latin America with leaders who favor state-led economies and employ inclusionary rhetoric; as opposed to the “right-wing” brand in Western Europe that is centered on identity politics that utilizes exclusionary rhetoric (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011). These different breeds of populism may have to deal with the vastly different socioeconomic and political settings that characterize both

regions. However, populists from both regions share similar political styles—a tendency to portray themselves as political outsiders (Weyland 1999a, Dugas 2003), an anti-establishment discourse that challenges the status quo and rests on a view of politics as a battle of “us” versus “them” in which the leader is a “true” representative (Betz 1994; Weyland 2001; Fennema 2004).

Like other concepts in political science, populism’s definition is widely contested because of its divergent characteristics and a general lack of consensus exists on who constitutes a populist leader or party. Scholars have attempted to define populism or classify actors as populist for more than half a century and the only constant has been disagreement. The lack of commonly accepted definitions and categorization undermines the ability of researchers to consistently compare cases and to further the general knowledge on populism (Mudde 2007: 12). Not surprisingly, the lack of conceptual agreement contributes to extensive scholarly debate and disagreement about the causes and conditions which facilitate the emergence of populists.

Why do populist political actors matter? In Latin America, populist presidents have a long history of electoral success, have often divided society by antagonizing their political and economic enemies, and have had deleterious economic effects for many countries in the region (Conniff 1999, 2; Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Populist presidents also tend to centralize power which may limit government accountability; their alleged manipulation of the masses may distort citizen participation in politics, and their attacks on political parties and, more generally, the political system may have harmful effects for democratic consolidation in the region (Weyland 1999, 189). In Europe, populist political parties have had less electoral success than in Latin America but they have been part of national governments in both Austria and Slovakia (Mudde 2007, 2). While in government they have implemented anti-immigrant policies (Rydgren 2004) and their presence may lead to lower levels of citizen trust in government (Knigge 1998).

In this paper, my intentions are threefold: 1) I briefly review past and current conceptualizations of populism and argue that, for a cross-regional study, a *moral discourse* definition is most beneficial; 2) I organize and try to synthesize the competing, generally region-specific theoretical claims for why populist political actors achieve electoral success; 3) and I review the shortcomings—namely the focus on “positive” cases of populism—of the existing literature and provide some preliminary evidence from survey data to suggest that current theoretical explanations would be enhanced were scholars to examine the “negative” cases of populism. I examine data from the Latinobarómetro surveys conducted from 1995 to 2010 in 17 Latin American countries, and data from the 2003-2012 Eurobarometer surveys. I argue that many of the conditions that scholars have identified to facilitate Populists’ emergence are relatively widespread in both continents.

II. CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF POPULISM

Numerous leading academics met at a conference at the London School of Economics in the 1960s to coalesce on a definition, but concluded about populism that “no one is quite clear just what it is...it is elusive and protean. It bobs up everywhere, but in many contradictory shapes (Ionescu and Gellner 1969: 1).” Roxborough (1984) argued that the term “populist” should be deserted because of conceptual inconsistencies and widespread confusion in the use of “classical” and “minimalist” definitions. Similar to their Latin American counterparts, European scholars have a long history of disagreeing about how to conceptualize or define populism. Cas Mudde (1996) estimated that, in the mid-1990s, the literature on the radical right contained about 26 different definitions. In this section I provide an overview of how conceptualizations of populism have evolved in both Latin American and European scholarship and discuss the limits

of contemporary definitions. Two things to note about these literatures are: 1) research on Latin American populism, started in the 1960s, predates European research which started in the 1990s (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011: 2); and 2) most studies on populism focus on a single country and there are few regional or continent-wide works. Thus the literatures developed independently of one another.¹ I also highlight conceptual similarities and differences.

Table 1 below provides an illustration of the various region-specific definitions scholars have offered. The competing conceptualizations have been organized along dimensions commonly found in the literatures: political style (the tactics or strategies employed by leaders to garner electoral support), economic policies (both advocated during the campaign and initiated once in office), characteristics of a leader's support base (demographics and social class), and ideology. Some cells are labeled "open to examination" to represent that scholars who advocate for the use of that specific definition urge for the empirical examination among their cases of that component part.

Latin America-Classical

From the 1960s to the 1980s Latin American scholars assessed the continent's populist leaders that emerged from the 1930s to the 1960s, the "classical" populists (Drake 1982: 218; Weyland 2001:4). These early researchers embraced definitions that categorized the following elements of populism: a political strategy that featured a charismatic leader who employed rhetoric aimed at inspiring people; a movement with a heterogeneous social coalition and policies that targeted the working classes; and a reformist economic agenda that promoted development through state activism (Drake 1982:218).

¹ To date there have been only 2 cross-regional comparisons of populism: Weyland (1999) and the Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) volume. The latter was an attempt by the authors to develop a conceptual and theoretical framework to study the phenomenon of populism and its effects on democratic quality across regions.

TABLE 1: Chronology of Definitions of Populism

LATIN AMERICA				
	Political Style	Economic Policies	Support Base	Ideology
<i>Classical</i>	Charismatic leader, inspirational rhetoric (Conniff 1982, Drake 1982)	State-led with heavy social spending, protectionism (Cardoso and Faletto 1979, Kaufman and Stallings 1991)	Organized masses, mostly urban, heterogeneous social coalition (di Tella 1965, Conniff 1982)	Chameleon-like, open to examination (Conniff 1982, Drake 1982)
<i>Political (neo-populism)</i>	Personalistic leader with fiery rhetoric (Barr 2003, Ellner 2003)	Open to examination (Roberts 1995, Weyland 1996, 1999, 2003; Knight 1998)	Unorganized, marginalized masses (Knight 1998; Roberts 1995; Weyland 1999)	Open to examination (Knight 1998; Weyland 2001)
<i>Discourse²</i>	Manichean discourse (Hawkins 2010; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)	Open to examination (Hawkins 2009, 2010; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)	Open to examination (Hawkins 2009, 2010; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)	Open to examination (Hawkins 2010; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)
EUROPE				
	Political Style	Economic Policies	Support	Ideology
<i>Conventional</i>	Charismatic leader, anti-politics, mobilization of resentment (Betz and Immerfall 1998)	Open to examination (Betz 1996, Schain 1997, Mudde 1999)	No one “electorate” but usually includes young, male, private sector voters (Betz 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Swyngedouw 1998; Svasand 1998; Mudde 1999)	Rightist—nationalistic, anti-immigrant, “welfare chauvinist” (Betz 1994; Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 1997; Van der Brug et al 2000)
<i>Moral Discourse</i>	Manichean discourse (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)	Open to examination (Mudde 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)	Open to examination (Mudde 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)	Open to examination (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012)

² I discuss the “moral discourse” definitions that have been proffered for both regions in a separate sub-section (limitations of past conceptualizations) below.

After an interlude of “antipopulist governments” (authoritarian regimes) in the 1960s and 1970s, populist leaders re-emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Conniff 1999: 12). More importantly, they re-emerged in very different socioeconomic environments than the classical populists. Although these new leaders reached and maintained office by using populist political strategies, a marked difference occurred as they initiated neoliberal economic reforms while in office. Labeled “neopopulists”, these presidents illustrated a radical divergence in economic policies from the earlier populists (Roberts 1995; Weyland 1996, 1999; Knight 1998). The neoliberal reforms they implemented in office drastically changed the socioeconomic characteristics of their support base—from one that centered on the organized working class to one that depended on support from the unorganized masses (Knight 1998; Roberts 1996).

The deviation in economic policies and support bases from prior populists presented a conceptual challenge to scholars. As one may expect, scholars disagreed about how to classify the new personalistic leaders who enacted market reforms. Some refused to classify the neopopulists as populists and retained state-led economic policies and generous social programs as definitional requirements (Dornbusch and Edwards volume 1991; Nun 1994; Vilas 1992, 1995). Other Latin American scholars have tried to find a conceptual middle ground by employing multidimensional definitions while relaxing categorical requirements. These efforts incorporate political aspects and class components. Roberts (1995) and de la Torre (2000) maintain that neopopulists tend to have a multi-class, heterogeneous social base consisting of members in the informal economy but can also implement neoliberal economic policies (privatization, reduced state involvement in the economy, and economic liberalization).

While some authors cling to socioeconomic attributes, most scholars have entirely discarded these characteristics (which they see as accidental) in their definitions and seek to conceptualize populism solely in political terms. As a result, most contemporary definitions view populism as solely a political strategy. Weyland (2001) has defined populism as “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers (14).” Weyland’s “minimal procedural” definition initially proved fruitful as subsequent scholars utilized variations of strictly political definitions (Barr 2003, Ellner 2003, Weyland 2003, Hellinger 2005). In sum, efforts to find a consensus of the definition of populism in the Latin American context continue to be undermined by scholarly disagreement on which traits should be considered constitutive elements (Collier 2001:11814).³

Europe-Conventional

Like Latin America, political style seems to be a major identifier of populist parties in the European literature. Populist political parties have leaders at the helm who try to exploit and cultivate resentments (Immerfall 1998, 257). These leaders construct enemies to verbally attack in an effort to score political points. Enemies usually include (relatively) unpopular actors like traditional political parties, the “political class” and bureaucrats, immigrants, and efforts at European integration (Betz 1998, 4; Immerfall 1998, 257). Populist leaders are able to capitalize on the resentment of certain sectors of the population by publicly acknowledging that ordinary people have been wronged in some fashion, and are morally superior to elected officials (Betz 1998, 4). Above all, populist actors chose to portray themselves as political outsiders devoid of corrupting influences that have wronged the general population.

³ Although this applies to studies on Populism, the same may hold for many concepts in social science.

European scholars, unlike their early and some contemporary Latin American counterparts, generally exclude economic policies from their definitions or conceptualizations. Some (Ignazi 1992, Betz 1994, Kitschelt and McGann 1995) advanced early arguments that claimed right-wing populists generally espouse economically rightist, free-market agendas. However, subsequent work (Betz 1996, Schain 1997, Mudde 1999) illustrates that most right-wing populist parties may advocate various forms of economic nationalisms in that they view the goal of the economy is to serve and protect the nation. The campaign platforms of most European populist parties eschew many neoliberal provisions and rather call for differing aspects of “welfare chauvinism”--protections against foreign competitors, governmental subsidies to struggling yet vital sectors, and welfare for only their “own people” (Mudde 1999, 189).

Another difference among the literatures is that European scholars refrain from defining populist political actors by their electorates. However, the support base of parties has figured prominently in explanations for their electoral success, and some patterns can be ascertained. The populist parties of the 1970s and 1980s derived most of their support from male (Betz 1994, 142-3; Mudde 1999, 184), younger (Betz 1994, 146-8; Swyngedouw 1998, 70-1; Svasand 1998, 85), and private-sector voters (Kitschelt and McGann 1995, 26; Svasand 1998, 85). Their neoliberal, individualistic programs also appealed to better-educated middle classes (Betz 1994, 142-150). However, as many West European countries faced struggling economies in the late 1980s, the pool of likely supporters expanded.

By the late 1980s and early 1990s, the demographics of voters also reflected citizens who were or felt threatened by economic modernization (McGann and Kitschelt 1995). The expanded coalition of voters began to include independent and small business owners, blue-collar workers, and educated white-collar professionals who had become disillusioned with clientelist,

patronage-driven political systems (Betz 1994, 148-50; Kitschelt and McGann 1995, 21-2). Thus, the “electorate” of right-wing populist parties is constantly changing, there is no “one electorate” (Immerfall 1998, 257; Mudde 1999, 186). Any political party must compete for additional votes and exogenous factors (i.e. economic crises) may condition the arena in which they operate and to whom they appeal.

European scholars fervently debate whether populist parties lack an ideology and are merely single-issue or protest parties (Betz 1994). In a survey of the literature, Mudde (1999, 187-190) contends that populist parties do have an ideology comprised of certain core features: nationalism, xenophobia, welfare chauvinist economic programs, and a belief in law and order. In short, populist parties have a belief that the state and nation should be congruent and strive for a mono-cultural nation-state (Mudde 1999, 2007), make frequent xenophobic appeals that include anti-immigration rhetoric (Van der Brug et al 2000, 2003, 2005; Ivarsflaten 2008), protect vital domestic economic sectors (Betz 1996, Schain 1997) and frequently advocate for a strict legal system with a hierarchical social order (Mudde 1997).

Limitations of Past Conceptualizations and new “moral” definitions

Both regions’ scholars have a long history of disagreeing about how to conceptualize or define populism. As a result, a vast amount of empirical work has been undermined by a lack of coherent or consistent definition. In the Latin American context, researchers disagree on which traits should be considered constitutive elements (Collier 2001). Similarly, Anastasakis (2000:5) identifies three shortcomings in the study of the European extreme right: authors use confusing terminologies, there is a lack of a commonly accepted definition, and most researchers have difficulty in categorizing parties that are heterogeneous. These shortcomings undermine the

ability of scholars to compare conclusions and findings across studies and inhibit the furthering of general knowledge on populism (Mudde 2007: 5).

Recent cross-regional studies have sought to address this problem. Efforts have usually centered on constructing minimal definitions that include “*only* the core—necessary and sufficient—attributes of a concept”, in an attempt to have a high level of abstraction that allows for the analysis of a greater pool of cases (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011: 4). The trend has been to define populism in *moral*, rather than economic or political terms. Kirk Hawkins in an effort to place Hugo Chavez’s populist movement in a global comparative perspective defines a “populist worldview” as “a Manichean outlook that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring minority” (2010:29). Similar to Hawkins, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) define populism as “a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous 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” (Mudde 2004: 543, Mudde 2007: 23, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012: 8).

The recent conceptual framework advanced in cross-regional studies emphasizes a certain discourse—the reliance on bellicose and moralizing language that illustrates how the political system has been corrupted or undermined. Central to these definitions is a moral component, that politics pits the “corrupt” elites against the “pure” masses. The key advantage to this definitional strategy is that it leaves populists’ political mobilization strategies (top-down or bottom-up), characteristics of their electoral bases, and type of socioeconomic policies open to empirical investigation. Additionally, this definition, developed by scholars who have tried to extend the geographical scope of their analyses, identifies the common core feature of populist actors across

time and space. As mentioned above, the Latin American and European literatures have developed independently of one another. The use of this “minimal” definition facilitates greater cross-regional analysis (not only between Latin America and Europe) that could have the potential utility of explaining core features of populism in a global context (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011: 1). As my goal in this paper is to compare populism across regions I will use the *moral discourse* definition to identify the “positive” cases of populism.

III. EXPLANATIONS FOR ELECTORAL SUCCESS

In this section I organize the competing theoretical claims for why populist political actors achieve electoral success. I try to synthesize the arguments advanced by scholars of both regions and highlight similarities and differences. *Electoral success* is yet another arbitrary assessment. Some studies focus on leaders or parties who have governed (Hawkins 2010; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). Others examine presidents who have received at least 20 percent of the vote in Latin American elections (Doyle 2011), or parties who garnered at least 5 percent support in national or European elections (Betz 1994; Ivarsflaten 2008). My purpose in this paper is not to contribute to this debate but rather to review past explanations. Below, I discuss the consequences of weakened political parties, the role of corruption and mistrust in public institutions, and the effects of poor socioeconomic performance by governments.

A. Political Opportunity Structure—Weakened political parties

One of the leading contemporary theories for the emergence of populist political actors includes the collapse of the political party system. The 1980s debt crisis that afflicted most of Latin America bankrupted and undermined state-led economic models. The long period of economic torpidity also discredited the major forms of institutionalized political representation:

labor unions and political parties (Roberts 2003: 36). Labor union memberships and political party identifications have declined significantly the last few decades in Latin America (Roberts 2003). The severing of these political representation linkages create a “political vacuum” that allows populist leaders to exploit and capitalize on the situation in their attempt to come to power (Barr 2003). Roberts (1995: 13) argues that personalistic leaders are more likely to have electoral success when civil society is fragmented and institutionalized linkages are disrupted because failed representative institutions lack the ability to mediate between citizens and the state.

Although the deinstitutionalization of traditional political representation bodies may provide an opportunity for new political actors; electorally successful populists have to convincingly frame a narrative that attracts considerable support. This discourse needs to center on the perception that the marginalized masses in the country are victims of privileged groups who have embedded themselves in the political sector and that there is a need to transform or replace the underperforming and inefficient institutions (Barr 2003). More importantly, the leader needs to convince the populace that s/he represents the people and is competent to foment change. In line with the above, and the specific argument that Doyle (2011) makes,⁴ I posit that:

Hypothesis 1: populist political actors are more likely to achieve electoral success when citizens have low levels of confidence in political parties.

B. Corruption and Mistrust of Public Institutions

Corruption itself is a contested concept. Within the populism literature, it is usually used to reflect “an *intentional* violation of the rule of law by public officials for their *private gain* (Hawkins 2010: 96).” These violations usually undermine the democratic legitimacy of a

⁴ Doyle (2011) finds that low levels of confidence in political parties explain the vote share for populist presidential candidates in Latin America.

political system and can serve as fodder for political challengers. Populist leaders often practice the politics of “anti-politics” (Roberts 1995:13) in that they relentlessly critique the inefficiency of the political status quo and go to great lengths to portray themselves as political outsiders who will restore democratic order to political institutions. This task is much easier when levels of public trust in public institutions are lower and fiery rhetoric is likely to resonate much more with publics that have lost confidence, if not complete faith, in public institutions. The populist narrative, as mentioned above, emphasizes that popular government has been subverted by a conspiring minority who seek to advance their own personal interests (Hawkins 2010).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a noticeable difference in observable individual political behavior in Western Europe. Electoral turnout declined significantly, as did membership in political parties and trade-unions, and identification with political parties (Ignazi 1992: 23). Betz (1994) characterizes the 1980s political climate as containing widespread citizen disenchantment and deep mistrust of major social and political institutions, the weakening and decomposition of electoral alignments, and increasing political fragmentation (2). Some (Betz 1994, 1998; Immerfall 1998: 258) authors in the Western European literature have labeled the resulting potential voters as “protest voters” who are attracted to right-wing populist parties because of their negative attacks or single-issue agendas.

Pervasive corruption and low levels of confidence and trust in political institutions also influence the proposed solutions populists offer during their campaigns and usually carry out once in office. Populists routinely advocate for the implementation of “participatory” or “direct” democracy as a corrective to excessive and inefficient political bureaucracies that the public perceives to have failed to represent their interests (Ellner 2003). The proposed populist prescription to malfunctioning democracy is more democracy. The belief in the wisdom of the

common folk is likely to be championed by political outsiders when the existing political system is held in contempt or seen as corrupt and self-serving. Thus, I posit:

Hypothesis 2: populist political actors are more likely to achieve electoral success when citizens have low levels of trust in public institutions and perceive political systems to be corrupt.

C. Poor Socioeconomic Performance by Governments

Briefly mentioned above, a prominent and recurring explanation in the literature for the emergence of populist leaders is that they politically capitalize on periods of vast socioeconomic inequality and abysmal economic conditions (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991, Weyland 1999). Latin America is a region that for most of the past few decades has been the most unequal in the world (Weyland 2003), constantly suffers through economic disasters and continues to be beset by high levels of socioeconomic inequality. Large swaths of the population perceive that traditional political parties and institutions insufficiently address, let alone fulfill, the socioeconomic needs of their constituents (Carrion 2009).

Periods of great socioeconomic turmoil tend to generate an enormous need for a national savior. The public, especially the poorest sectors, actively seeks a leader(s) who will provide an immediate resolution and alleviate its suffering (Barr 2003). Poor, marginalized masses hope that their leader will be “the man in power...[who] would exercise his personal benevolence in the favor of the poor and downtrodden,” (Stein, 1999:111). The argument is that populist leaders are likely to emerge and come to power when countries face a socioeconomic crisis. But scholars have been unclear about what exactly constitutes a socioeconomic “crisis”.

Some researchers have talked about “inflationary crises”. They argue that the poorest sectors of the population are most likely to experience direct consequences of a very high

inflation rate, or hyperinflation (Barr 2003, 1163). Hyperinflation may be the most immediate concern but high levels of poverty, unemployment and extended periods of negative growth are also pressing problems afflicting most Latin American societies, facilitating popular mobilization (Barr 2003, 1174; Weyland 2003). Stokes (2001) demonstrates that poor economic growth weighs heavily in the minds of voters when they evaluate both challengers' economic policy proposals and the economic performance of incumbent executives. As long as high levels of socioeconomic inequality and high levels of poverty persist, then populist discourse will have certain appeal to those who economically marginalized (de la Torre 2000).

The economic explanations in the European literature do not emphasize widespread and acute economic disasters or crises. Most West European countries are fortunate to have comparatively high levels of economic development and very low levels of socioeconomic inequality. Rather, the focus is on who the likely losers are in the competition over scarce resources or which sectors of the populace experience some sort of relative deprivation (Eatwell 2003: 56). Kriesi (1998: 180) contends that "These *losers* are first and foremost to be found among the unqualified members of the working class." Kitschelt and McGann (1995:5) argue that contemporary postindustrial democracies have generated a demand for political parties that combine ethnocentric, authoritarian and free-market liberal appeals. Specifically, Kitschelt and McGann claim that the "new-radical right" is likely to be popular among blue-collar workers (those who are less educated and less skilled), the petit bourgeois—small independent craftspeople and shopkeepers—who have indirect exposure to fierce competition in the globalized economy, and lower salaried employees and "inactives" in the labor market (9-10).

I am cautious in accepting the possibility that voters may, not only be aware of the economic situation of their countries, but also be able to accurately compare it with past leaders'

economic performances. Thus, I allow for a disconnect between voters' *perceptions* of the economic situation and reality. I posit that:

Hypothesis 3: populist political actors are more likely to achieve electoral success when citizens perceive their countries to have experienced poor economic conditions.

D. Backlash against Foreign Threat

As mentioned above, political populists utilize a Manichean discourse that challenges the status quo and rests on a view of politics as a battle of “us” versus “them”. The “them” is frequently a foreign,⁵ moral enemy that they have to actively construct in the public's mind. In Latin America, the discourse usually involves verbal attacks against the US and other actors leaders portray as Western imperialists, such as international financial institutions (IFIs) (Hawkins 2003; Shifter 2004, 2006; Castañeda 2006, Rodríguez 2008); it may also include threats to nationalize foreign companies operating in vital resource sectors (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Given the continent's long history of foreign domination and exploitation, this kind of rhetoric resounds with, at times, significant sectors of the population.

In the European context right-wing populists may employ xenophobic appeals assailing the deleterious effects (cultural, social, economic, etc) of immigrants. Within the West European literature, there is fervent debate over whether the broad and complex matter of immigration plays any role in the emergence of right-wing parties. Single-country case studies have offered inconclusive findings. Eatwell (2003) posits that Jörg Haider of the FPÖ in Austria successfully exploited widespread concerns among the public in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. During this period Austria experienced a twofold increase in legal immigration and by 1999 its

⁵ I use the adjective “foreign” to refer to both geographically foreign (in the Latin American context) and culturally foreign (in the European context as mentioned by Mudde 2007).

population had the second highest percentage of immigrants in the EU (Eatwell 2003:49). Mayer and Perrineau (1996:372) argue that, at the local level, French right-wing parties do no better in municipalities with higher rates of immigrants. Conversely, Koopmans (1996) finds evidence to support the hypothesis at the local level (Amsterdam); while Martin (1996) offers support at the French national level.

In one of the few cross-national studies that compares the voter mobilization of right-wing populist parties to left and right parties within and across countries, Ivarsflaten (2008:18) concludes that no populist right party performed well in elections around 2002⁶ without mobilizing grievances over immigration. More importantly, she finds that immigration plays a greater role in the electoral performance of right populist parties than do frustrations over both poor economic performance and political corruption. Ivarsflaten (2008) measures citizen *perceptions* about the effects of immigration, rather than the absolute number of immigrants in countries. The perception of immigrants seems to be a better explanation than reality because parties have achieved electoral success when immigration has been relatively low or not a national issue (Eatwell 2003: 50).⁷ Rather, support in Germany and Norway tends to increase when immigrants are perceived as contributing to some social ill or receiving over-favorable welfare benefits (Eatwell 2003).

Hypothesis 4a: populist political actors in Latin America are more likely to achieve electoral success when citizens hold less favorable views of foreign actors (corporations and governments).

⁶ Ivarsflaten examines data from the European Social Survey (2002-2003) for Austria, Denmark, the Flanders region in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland.

⁷ The National Front (FN) in France made electoral advances in the early 1980s and the German REP made an electoral breakthrough in 1989. In both instances, immigration was not a national issue and relatively low in historical perspective.

Hypothesis 4b: populist political actors in Europe are more likely to achieve electoral success when citizens perceive immigrants to receive more favorable welfare provisions or view immigrants as economic competitors.

In sum, there is a lot of affinity between explanations advanced in both literatures. Populist political actors are likely to have a window of opportunity when there is widespread public discontent with political institutions and parties, governments' socioeconomic policies perform poorly, and the leaders are able to construct and exploit citizens' fears of foreign threats. A key consideration to note is that these explanations naturally interact with one another. For instance, immigration may become a more salient issue during tough economic times when immigrants are perceived as competitors in the labor market or favored for welfare benefits (Fennema 2005). Poor economic performances may have a greater delegitimizing effect on traditional parties in highly unequal societies with high levels of poverty than more developed countries with more equitable distributions of wealth.

4. ANALYSIS

In this section I identify the prototypical populists in both regions, I discuss past comparative and recent cross-regional studies that examined the emergence of populism, and I present evidence from survey data that compares citizens' attitudes in countries in which populists have and have not emerged. I argue that most comparative studies have not fully addressed the question of conditions that lead to populists' emergence because scholars lack a concern for the "negative" cases of populism.

A) Case Selection

So who are the populists? An attempt to list all possible populist political actors in both regions far exceeds the purpose and limitations of this paper. I will rather list political actors for whom there is a rough consensus in the literature that classifies them as populist.⁸ Also, my focus in this paper concerns the time period 1985 to the present so earlier populists (Perón, Vargas in Latin America) will not be mentioned. Table 2 below illustrates the contemporary “clear-cut” cases of populism in both regions. One thing to note is that I have included only leaders in Latin America who have been elected president and parties in Europe who have won at least 10% of the vote in a national election. Table 2 also demonstrates that since 1985, populists have not won national office in most Latin American countries, and have been a relatively minor electoral force in most European parliamentary systems.

B) Shortcomings in Previous Cross-National Research

In most comparative edited volumes (Betz 1994; Betz and Immerfall 1998; Conniff 1999; Drake 1982; Mazzoleni, Stewart and Horsfield 2003; Mudde 2007; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Norris 2005) and recent cross-national studies (Doyle 2011; Ivarsflaten 2008; Madrid 2008; van der Brug and Mughan 2007) the authors define populism and its component parts, and then examine only positive cases (Weyland 1999:380). There is a lack of deviation on the dependent variable. Some exceptions include Kitschelt and McGann (1995) who consider why the extreme right has struggled in Germany and Britain; and Hawkins (2010) who has considerable variation in his case selection—he considered leaders from Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. Thus, research can be vastly improved if scholars are to test existing explanations across

⁸ There is significant scholarly disagreement about which leaders should be classified as populist. In Latin America, Hawkins (2010) and Dugas (2003) both conclude that former Colombian president Alvaro Uribe is not a populist. However, Galindo Hernández (2007) and Doyle (2011) argue that Uribe strengthened the executive branch and governed as a political outsider during his first term. In studies of European right-wing parties, considerable disagreement exists on whether either the Scandinavian progress parties of the 1970s or the Northern League in Italy are cases of populism (Mudde 2007: 33).

Table 2: “Clear-cut” Populist Leaders (1985-Present)			
Country	Leader	Year of Election	Scholars Who Score Leader As a Positive Case
Argentina	Carlos Menem	1989	Conniff (1999); Horowitz (1999); Levitsky and Roberts (2011); Weyland (1999, 2001)
Bolivia	Evo Morales	2005	Shifter (2004); Castañeda (2006); Haarstad and Andersson (2009); Lerager (2006); Hawkins (2009, 2010); Sabatini (2010); Shifter (2006)
Brazil	Fernando Collor	1989	Cardoso (2010); Chaffee (2009); Conniff (1999a, 1999b); Weyland (1999, 2001)
Ecuador	Rafael Correa	2006	Carrión (2009); Castañeda (2006); Hawkins (2010); Levitsky and Roberts (2011); Rodríguez (2008)
Peru	Alan García (1 st term)	1985	Dornbusch and Edwards (1991); Conniff (1999); Roberts (1995, 1996); Stein (1999); Weyland (1999);
Peru	Alberto Fujimori	1990	Ellner (2003); Hawkins (2010); Levitsky and Roberts (2011); Roberts (1995, 1996); Stein (1999), Weyland (1999, 2001, 2010)
Venezuela	Hugo Chávez	1999	Ellner (2001); Krastev 2006; Hawkins (2001, 2003, 2009, 2010); Hellinger (2003, 2005); Roberts (2003, 2011); Weyland (1999, 2001, 2009)
Country	Party	Year(s) of Election	Scholars Who Score Leader As a Positive Case
Austria	FPÖ	1990-present	Betz (1994, 1998); Kitschelt and McGann (1995, 2005); Mudde (2007); Norris (2005)
Belgium	Flemish Interest (VB)	2003-2010	Mudde (2007); Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012); Norris (2005); Swyngedouw (1998)
Denmark	Danish People’s Party	2005, 2007, 2011	Mudde (2007); Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012); Norris (2005)
France	Front National	1993-2002	Betz (1994, 1998); Kitschelt and McGann (1995); Mayer (1998); Mudde (2007); Norris (2005); Schain (1996)
Netherlands	Pim Fortuyn List; Party for Freedom (VVD)	2002; 2006-2010	Mudde (2007); Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012); Norris (2005)
Norway	FP, Progress Party	1989-present	Betz (1994, 1998); Kitschelt and McGann (1995); Mudde (2007); Norris (2005)
Slovakia	SNS	2006	Mudde (2007); Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012)
Switzerland	SVP	1999-2007	Kitschelt and McGann (2005); Norris (2005)

a more complete set of cases, especially in the “negative” cases of populism which lack successful populist politicians (Ivarsflaten 2008:18).

In Latin America, Weyland (1999) argued that populism would likely not take root in Chile, Colombia and Uruguay because of their strong party systems. Few studies have vindicated these assumptions. In early works, Larraín and Meller (1991) examined the economic populism of the Allende government in the early 1970s, and Urrutia (1991) evaluated the lack of economic populism in Chile but neither discussed political populism. Considering Chile, Drake (1999:74) concludes that the country never experienced “pure, full-fledged, classic populism” like Argentina, Brazil and Peru. However, he speculates that future populist efforts would be negated if parties can recapture their traditional strength by encouraging the inclusion of the masses in the political process, and by addressing working-class grievances. Although recent work (Pribble and Huber 2011, Roberts 2011) scrutinizes the socioeconomic policies of leftist governments in both Uruguay and Chile, the lack of populism has not been directly addressed. Similarly, populism (or the lack thereof) in Colombia also continues to be understudied.⁹

In the European context, Eatwell (2003:60) points out that the extreme right has not been successful in Greece, Portugal, or Spain, and has been relatively weak in Eastern Europe. Similarly to Latin American edited volumes, there is a scarcity of research that explains why populist actors have not been able to mobilize support in these countries. In one of the few (if not only) works that examines this phenomenon, Davis (1998) argued that populism did not take root in either Portugal or Spain because they lacked established political parties and new right parties could not shed their associations with past authoritarian figures. Davis concludes that a widespread decline in political loyalties or voter disillusionment had not yet occurred. However,

⁹ Some scholars have examined the (alleged) populist characteristics of former president Alvaro Uribe. Hawkins (2010) and Dugas (2003) both conclude that Uribe is not a populist—Hawkins does a content analysis of the president’s speeches while Dugas examines the political mobilization strategies Uribe employed as a candidate. However, Galindo Hernández (2007) and Doyle (2011) argue that Uribe strengthened the executive branch and governed as a political outsider during his first term. These definitional disagreements should facilitate greater research with regard to Colombia, but there is no mention of the country in major edited volumes (Levitsky and Roberts 2011; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012; Conniff et al 1999, 2012).

Davis conducted his analysis more than a decade ago. Kitschelt and McGann (1995) and Mudde (2007) have convincingly argued that new right parties have been able to shed past fascist or authoritarian connections and represent a new breed of political party. Moreover, the three countries mentioned by Davis received hardly any mention in subsequent edited volumes on populism (Merkl and Weinberg 2003; Mudde 2007; Norris 2005).

C) Survey Data

As discussed above, some of the leading theories for why populist leaders would emerge include low levels of confidence or trust in public institutions, mistrust of political parties, poor government socioeconomic performance (real and perceived), and citizens' perceptions that corruption in society has increased.¹⁰ An analysis of citizens' perceptions in the two regions follows below. For Latin America, I collected yearly survey data from the Latinobarómetro project for all countries except the Dominican Republic and Cuba, and the data span the years 1995-2010.¹¹ For Europe, I examine responses available from the Eurobarometer annual surveys for the time period 2003-2012.¹²

I) Level of confidence in public institutions

In assessing citizens' levels of confidence in public institutions in Latin America, I follow Doyle (2011) and analyze the following survey question:

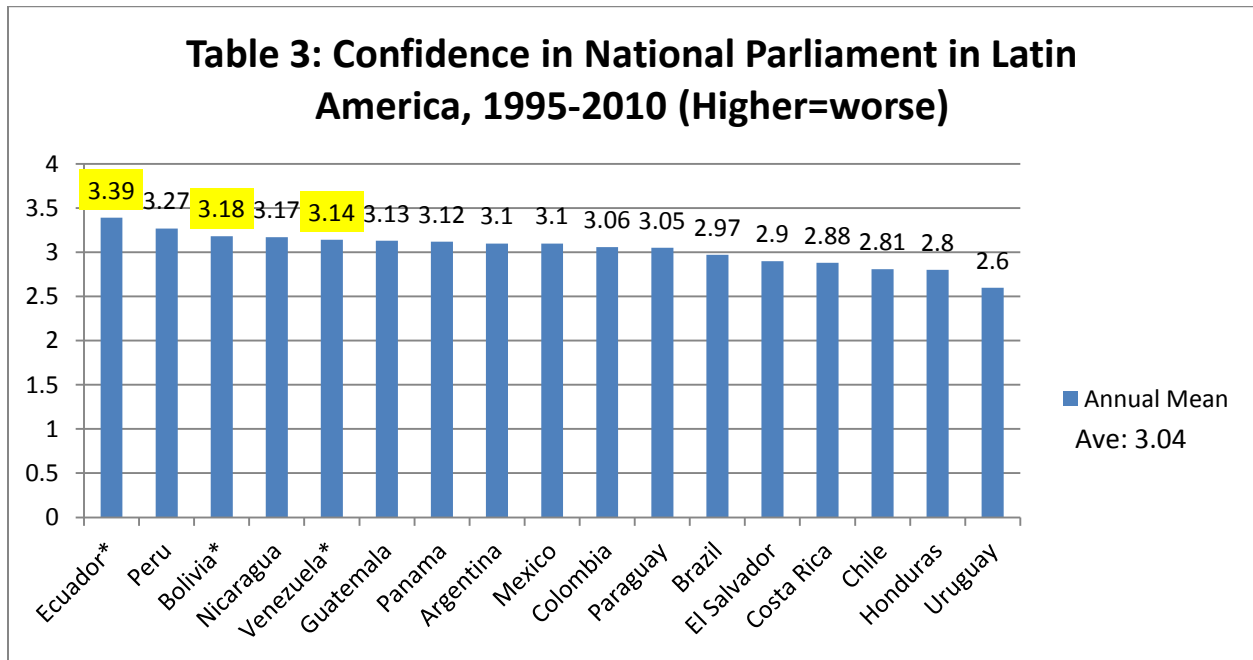
“Please look at this card and tell me how much confidence you have in each of the following groups, institutions or persons mentioned on the list: National Congress/Parliament.”

¹⁰ I am still collecting data to test the increased corruption and fear of “foreign” threat hypotheses.

¹¹ Data are available for the Dominican Republic starting in 2004 but no data are available for Cuba. For some countries, the Latinobarómetro project started collecting data in 1996.

¹² Switzerland and Norway are both “positive” cases of populism but are not EU members. Thus no data are available for them. Data for Eastern European countries begin with 2004. I am still in the process of collecting data for European cases. In this paper I will present the preliminary findings.

Respondents could select to answer with: A lot of confidence (1), Some confidence (2), Little confidence (3), or No confidence (4); or they could select “no answer” or “don’t know.” In analyzing citizens’ responses I have excluded the “no answers” and “don’t knows” to standardize the data across countries.¹³ Similar to Doyle (2011) I find the weighted mean (could range from 1-4) for each country year and average these scores for all years of available data. These averages are illustrated in table 3 below.



For the three positive cases of populism (Ecuador, Bolivia, and Venezuela) I collected data up until the year of election for each respective president¹⁴. My intent is to examine whether the conditions leading up to the initial electoral success in the positive cases differs significantly from the conditions present in the entire time period for negative cases.¹⁵ Table 3 offers a general overview of levels of citizen disaffection with their national parliaments. Although the positive

¹³ The total percentage of respondents selecting these two responses varies considerably among cases with a range of 0.9% to roughly 5.0%.

¹⁴ I repeated this procedure for all variables.

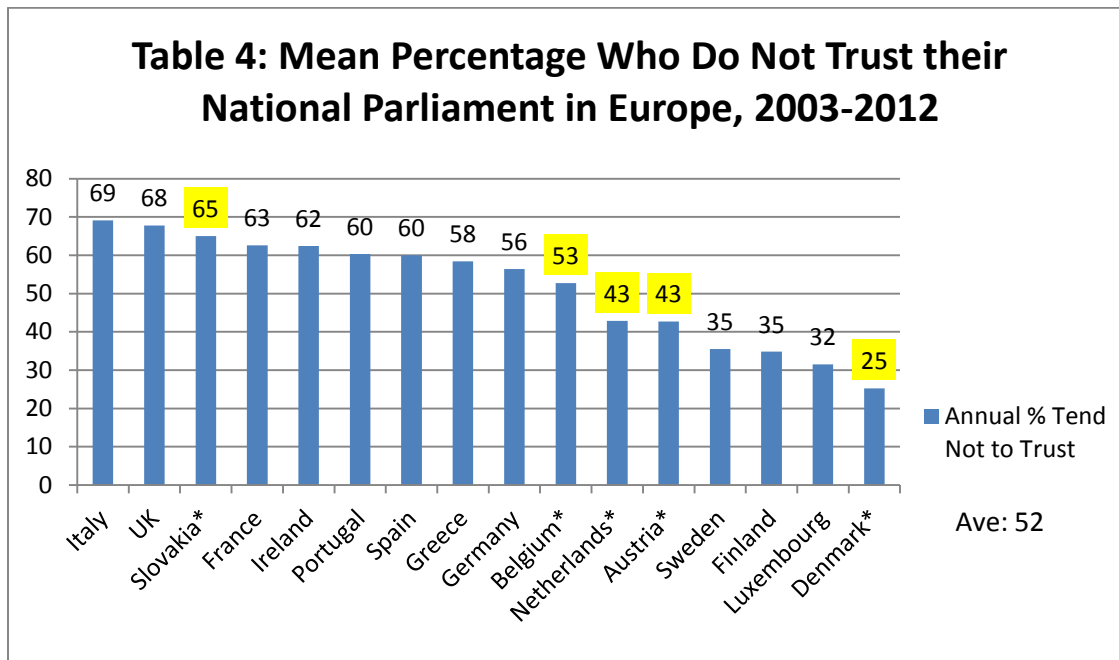
¹⁵ Similarly, I consider only the years after the tenure of other populist presidents in office during the time period: Fujimori in Peru (I consider data from 2001-2010), Menem in Argentina (I examine data from 2000-2010).

cases of populism comprise three of the five highest levels of dissatisfaction, most of the countries have rather comparable levels of lack of confidence as a score of 3 indicates “little confidence”.

In Europe, a similar question has been asked in the annual Eurobarometer survey:

“I would like to ask you a question about how much trust you have in certain institutions. For each of the following institutions, please tell me if you tend to trust it or tend not to trust it?”

A bit different from the Latinobarómetro, respondents could select to answer with: tend to trust, or with tend not to trust; also they could select “don’t know.” As above, I have excluded the “don’t know” answers to standardize the data across countries.¹⁶ I find the average of the annual percentage of citizens for each country who answered *tend not to trust*. The means are presented in table 4 below. Once again, I have highlighted the data point for the positive cases.

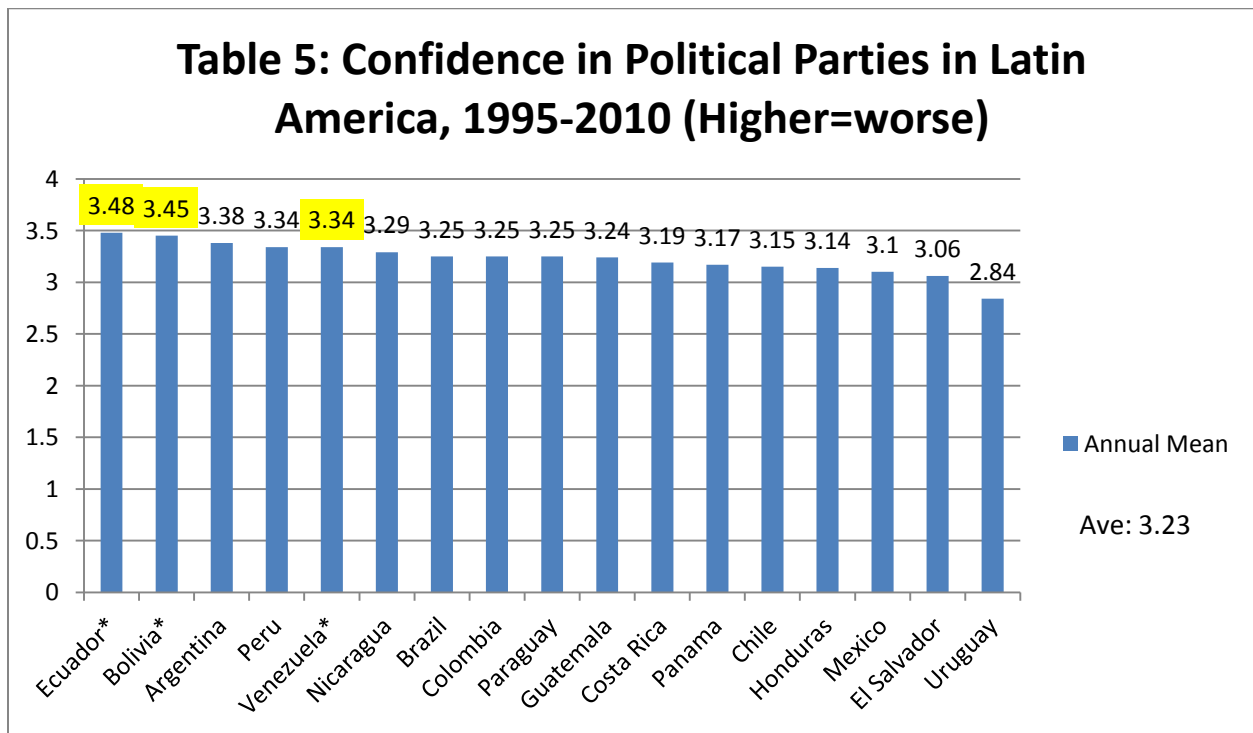


¹⁶ The total percentage of respondents selecting these two responses varies considerably among cases with a range of 0.9% to roughly 5.0%.

Table 4 suggests that there is a considerable amount of cross-national variation in citizens' trust in their national parliaments. More importantly for this paper, countries in which populists have made electoral inroads tend to have lower levels of mistrust than their fellow EU members.¹⁷

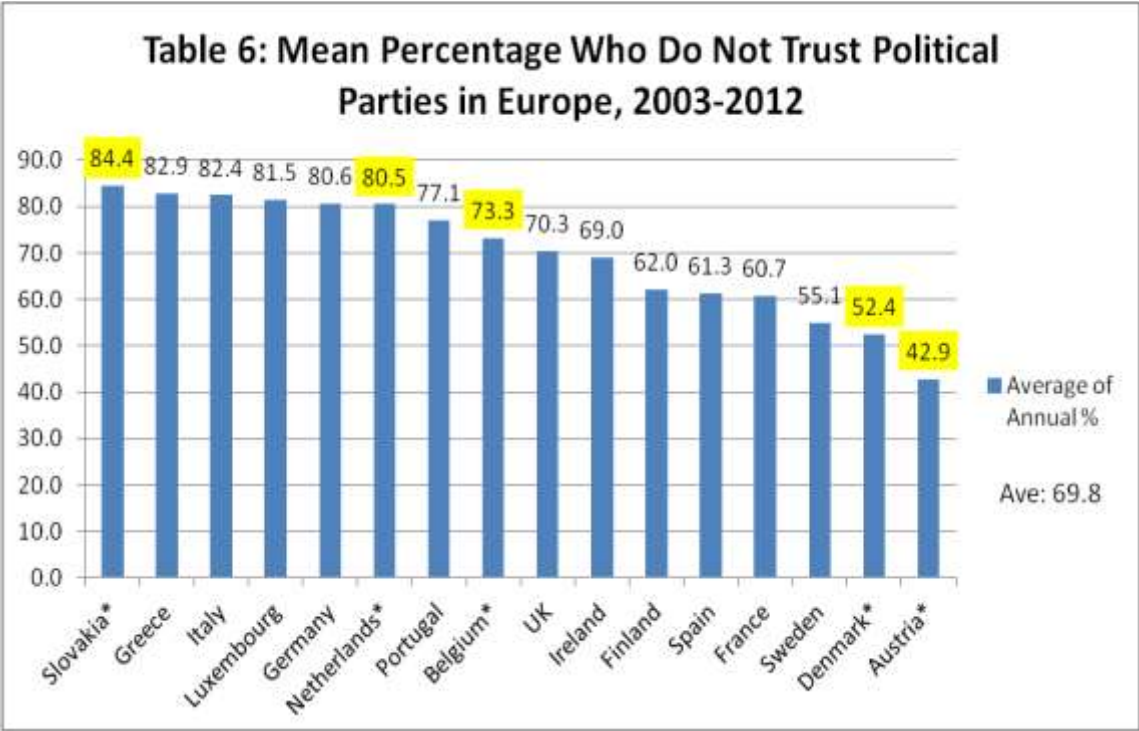
II) Level of confidence in political parties

The question of respondent confidence in political parties followed the exact format as the above national parliament question as did the possible responses. Once again, I excluded the “don't know” and “no answer” responses to standardize across countries. Table 5 below illustrates that, in general, Latin American citizens have a low opinion of political parties with Uruguay an outlier at the more positive end. More importantly, there is little variation between positive and negative cases, suggesting that conditions were very similar across the continent.



¹⁷ Although Slovakia has a high average compared to other West European countries, compared to other East European countries, levels of parliament mistrust are lower than in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Slovenia.

As above, the question in the Eurobarometer followed the exact configuration as with national parliaments and the same possible responses. Again, I excluded the “don’t know” answers to standardize the data across countries and I find the average of the annual percentage of citizens for each country who answered *tend not to trust*. The means are presented in table 6 below and again suggest that similar conditions (high levels of citizen disillusionment with political parties) are widespread throughout the continent. Although Slovakia’s value is the highest in the table, it is well below the Eastern European average of 87.25.

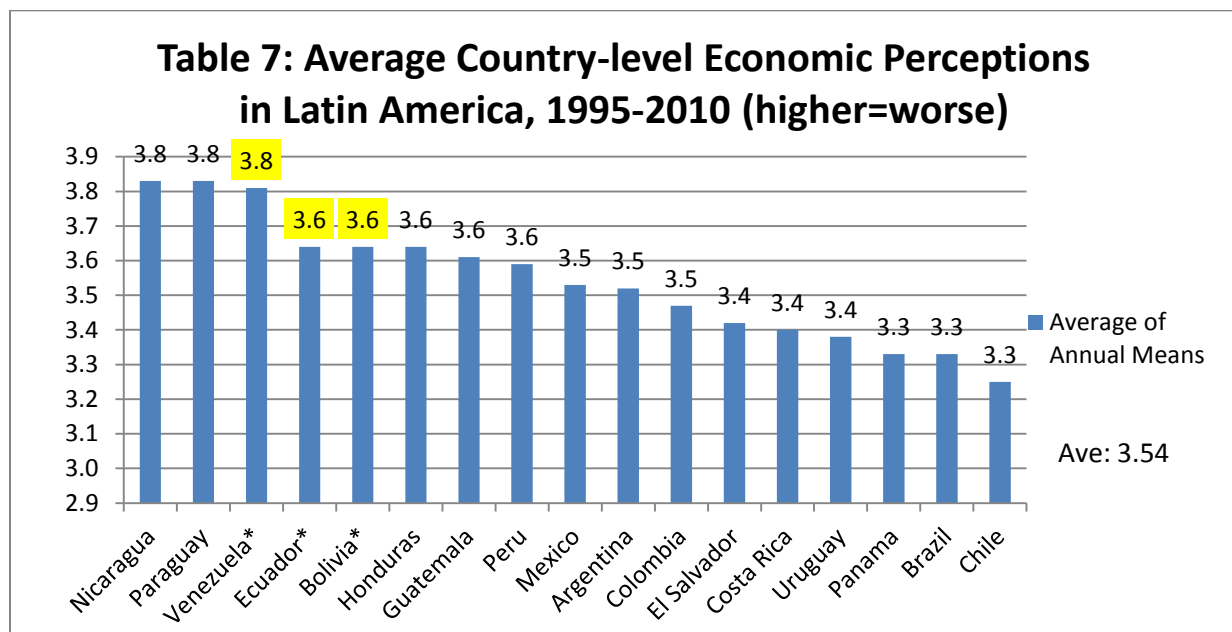


III) Governments’ Socioeconomic Performance

In examining the way citizens assess their economic situation, I consider sociotropic perceptions of the current economic situation.¹⁸ As mentioned earlier my focus is on citizen perceptions not the economic reality. For Latin American cases I use the following question:

“In general, how would you describe the present economic situation of the country? Would you say it is... 1) Very good, 2) Good, 3) About average, 4) Bad, 5) Very bad.”

Once again, I find the weighted mean (1-5) for each country in a given year and average the values for years 1995-2010. The results are displayed in Table 7. Although there is some cross-national variation in average score, the overall picture is once again consistent in that citizens’ perceptions of the state of the national economy is somewhere between bad and about average for all of the Latin American countries in the given years.

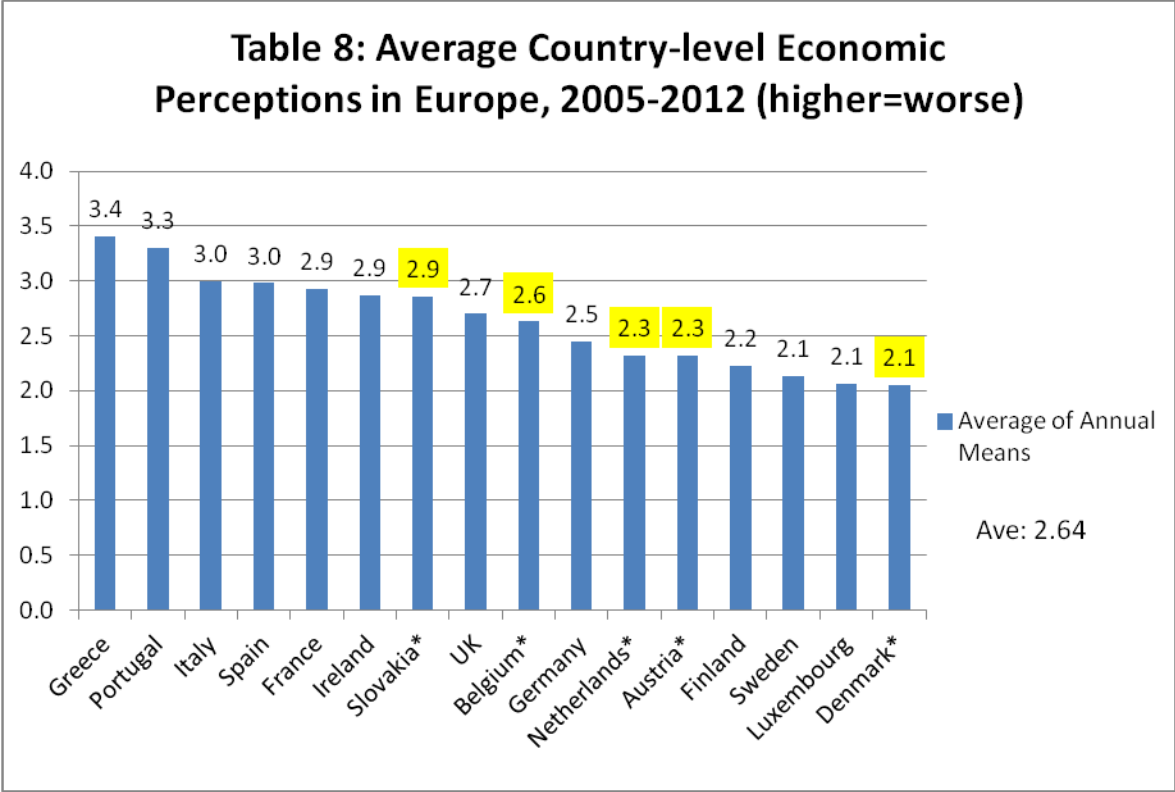


I measure individuals’ sociotropic economic perceptions in Western Europe using a similarly worded question:

¹⁸ Personal-level data are available in the Latinobarómetro surveys for years 1995-2010, but available only for the years 2008-2012 in the Eurobarometer.

“How would you judge the current situation in each of the following? The situation of the (NATIONALITY) economy....1) Very good, 2) Rather good, 3) Rather bad, 4) Very bad.”

As with the Latin American responses, I find the annual weighted mean and average this over the years 2005-2012. The results are displayed in table 8 below. One thing to note is that the positive cases of populism, unlike in Latin America, tend to occur in countries in which citizens have better perceptions of the current state of the national economy. Continuing with the trend in this paper, levels of country-level economic perceptions *are no worse* in countries where populists achieve electoral success.



In sum, the conditions that scholars (most recently Hawkins 2010, Doyle 2011) have identified to increase the likelihood of populist political actors’ electoral success are, in general, found consistently throughout both continents. In Latin America, populist presidents who have gained office tend to do so in countries that have, at best, slightly higher levels of distrust in

national parliaments and political parties; whereas economic dissatisfaction may also be marginally higher. However, the overall picture shows that these conditions are prevalent throughout the continent. In Europe, these conditions are pervasive throughout the region and many of the positive cases of populism have more favorable conditions than negative cases.

5. CONCLUSION

In this paper I have reviewed past and current conceptualizations of populism, I have organized the dominant theoretical explanations for why populist actors may emerge, and I have provided survey evidence to suggest that future comparative research should examine countries where populists do not achieve electoral success.

Although populist political leaders have won office in both continents during the same period (1985 to the present), explanations for the initial electoral success of populists have been region-specific and developed independently from one another. Although the above difference exists, the explanations bear a striking and surprising resemblance. In both regions populist leaders denounce elites, criticize existing political institutions and detail politicians' perceived ineptitude to solve issues that afflict citizens. Both sets of literatures indicate that this rhetoric is likely to translate into electoral success when the following conditions are met: traditional political representation linkages are severed, citizens have low trust in public institutions combined with high levels of perceived corruption, and governments perform poorly in their handling of the economy.

A second feature that characterizes both literatures is the persistence of definitional disagreement and a lack of conceptual synchronicity among experts. In Latin America, scholars have adjusted conceptualizations to account for populists who have emerged in very different

socioeconomic settings. Definitions have been moulded and modified to keep pace with empirical reality.¹⁹ In Europe, researchers have disagreed about which component parts should be included in definitions and, similarly to their Latin American counterparts, have rejected definitional components to account for empirical deviation.²⁰ In recent cross-regional comparative work on populism, researchers (Hawkins 2010, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012) advocate for a “minimalist” definition that includes only the core features of populism. The inclusion of only common elements provides a fruitful avenue that indicates cross-regional research is not only plausible but may allow for theoretically-enriching work.

The survey evidence that I present in this paper leads me to conclude that existing theoretical explanations will have to be refined to explain why, given similar conditions, populists have not achieved electoral success in more countries in both continents. Specifically, scholars should ask why populists have not come to power amid unpopular political institutions and political parties. How have the traditional political parties maintained political support although they are quite unpopular? Is there perhaps a tipping point or threshold that needs to be reached before political outsiders may obtain electoral success? I have mostly focused on demand-side explanations in the paper but my findings should re-emphasize the need to examine supply-side explanations. In closing, populism is a phenomenon that is not confined to a specific region or time period. The potential exists for fascinating discovery if scholars broaden the pool of possible cases to examine, specifically the negative cases. This will allow for improved theory-testing and better answer the question of why populism emerges in a specific country, continent, or context.

¹⁹ Some (Vilas 1992, 1995; Nun 1994) would argue that this practice is conceptually invalid.

²⁰ For instance, economic policies do not feature in most definitions as Schain (1997) and Betz (1996) have found empirical instances that counter Kitschelt’s (1995) earlier claims about a unified economic agenda among right-wing populists.

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