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Central European Populism: Is there a convergence around climate change, gender- and immigration-related policies?

Executive Summary

This study explores populism in Central Europe (CE). By studying ten populist parties in four countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia), it aims to shed light on how similar these parties and their voters' attitudes are in terms of the policy domains of immigration, climate change, and gender. It also answers the question about whether a new cleavage might be emerging based on the convergence around these issues. The study explores both the supply side (political manifestos) and the demand side (two survey datasets), but it also utilizes web-scraped data to explore the similarities and differences among them.

The analysis of political manifestos reveals that there are significant differences in how CE populists address these three issues. Although immigration is uniformly perceived negatively, more nuanced approaches pertain to climate change and gender.

With climate change, the populists use a dual-track climate vs. environment strategy: They express largely critical attitudes toward EU climate change policies, while stressing their interest in the protection of the environment. This allows them to selectively support or criticize climate protection measures depending on how they frame them.

A similar distinction applies to gender. The so-called 'gender ideology' is routinely criticized, but some aspects of gender equality are selectively defended. Instead of a traditionalist position, some of them advocate a modern-traditional approach to gender which is critical of gender-based discrimination, but which rejects external influences on the national regulations.

Our analysis of the voters' attitudes (the demand side) shows that the three issues at hand do not form a single coherent dimension; a trend of the populist convergence around the three issues could not be identified.

However, a surprising development is visible in terms of the two surveys the report relied on. The analysis of the first survey (from 2017) identified anti-immigration and anti-climate protection attitudes among the key factors predicting the support for populist parties. However, newer data (from 2024) do not support these findings and no significant relationship between populist voting intention and attitudes toward gender, immigration, or climate change could be detected. The possible explanation is the changing external context (refugees from Ukraine) and the accelerating climate change. Hence, one of the major findings is that populist voters' attitudes regarding these issues are malleable.

Finally, the analysis of webscraped data (here focussing on X/Twitter for Czechia and Poland) shows that large differences among populist parties exist. These differences are both country-specific and related to the type of party. In particular, large catch-all parties are less focused on the three issues than smaller populist parties. Additionally, our analysis confirms that although populism can easily be combined with far-right ideologies, this is not necessarily the case, and some populist parties (such as the Czech ANO party) do not fully fit this pattern.

Overall, our results indicate that a somewhat greater stress on immigration, climate change and gender exists on the supply side than on the demand side. Although the analyzed political parties also take a variety of positions, it seems that the politicization of the three issues is supply- rather than demand-driven.

Content

Figures/Tables

List of Tables

List of Tables (Appendix)

List of Figures

Introduction

Populism is not a novel phenomenon, but in Europe, it has recently made a forceful comeback. Central Europe[2] is a frontrunner in this regard as populist parties have become a fixture of the political landscapes of many CE countries sooner than in most Western European ones. However, current European populism is highly diverse and even populist parties in CE exhibit distinct features. For instance, their attitudes to the European Union range from soft Euroscepticism to a radical rejection of the integration project and call for their countries' exit from the EU.

The classical definition of populism used in the European context, as introduced by Cas Mudde (e.g. Mudde 2010), is based on understanding populism as a thin-centred ideology that is defined mainly by the stark opposition between ordinary people and elites. Although this distinction is not based on substantive issues, there are several policy areas that have become central to populist parties. Most importantly, anti-immigration attitudes have become a defining feature of (right-wing) populism. First, the anti-immigration stance became commonplace in Western European populism, but since the 2015 migration crisis, CE populist parties have caught up with their Western European counterparts and immigration has turned into a central policy issue for them as well. In a slightly different manner, gender-related issues and climate change policies have also gained importance in the discourses of European populists.

However, the precise attitude of CE populists to these three issues remains largely under-researched and so is the possibility of a convergence of CE populism around these issues. Such an analysis would be of utmost academic as well as political interest since the question of the transnational cooperation of populist parties and movements and the possibility of an emergence of a future transnational political cleavage are essential for the extent to which European populists will be able to shape the future of the European Union. The same question applies regionally as well: will populist parties in CE be able to coordinate their steps in the region (for instance, in the currently floundering Visegrad Four format) and in the EU as a whole? At the moment, there seem to be large differences among CE populists on a number of issues (most importantly, regarding Russia and the Russian invasion of Ukraine), which renders the possibility of a common stance on other issues all the more important for them if they want to become a political force to reckon with.

This report studies ten populist parties from four countries - Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia (for the list of these countries see Table A below). The report presents our answers to these questions in five interrelated steps: Firstly, it introduces CE populism and its relationship to the three policy issues – immigration, gender-related, and climate change policies. Secondly, it presents the supply side of CE populism by analysing political manifestos of the selected parties, again focussing consecutively on immigration, climate change, and gender-related policies. Thirdly, the report evaluates the demand side of CE populism. This section builds on the analysis of data from two surveys, the EVS survey and our own ActEU survey. The subsequent section analyzes the data from our web-scraping analysis, focussing on Twitter/X accounts of selected populist parties. Finally, the report summarizes its findings and their political relevance.

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[2] In this report, by CE we mean Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia.

1 A New Cleavage Unifying Central European Populists?

1.1 Populism in Central Europe

Increasing support for populist parties in various parts of the world raises questions about their similarities and differences and about the explanatory potential of a single term in the face of the diversity of phenomena to which it is applied. According to the definition of populism, which has gained perhaps the widest support (Mudde 2004), the main characteristic of populist parties is their discursive strategy of presenting political conflict as the struggle between two starkly opposed groups - corrupt, immoral elites and homogenous, honest people.

As abstract as this distinction is, it allows for a wide variation, and its concrete political expressions differ from one context to another. CE countries are a case in point. Their distinct historical paths have led to the creation of a specific variant of populism (Ágh 2016; Markowski 2018; Pirro 2014). The origins of CE populism's distinctiveness can be traced to specific historical and structural conditions of party competition in the region. Some scholars look for the explanation in the pre-communist past, arguing that high levels of anti-Semitism and nationalism can still have an impact on today's societies, the dominant political discourse, cultural codes and attitudes towards minorities (Hilde 1991; Pirro 2014). Others highlight the influence of deeply rooted characteristics of CE states and societies such as the traditionalism and Catholicism of the Poles (Buzalka 2005), the post-Trianon trauma and the resulting irredentist sentiments of the Hungarians (Gal 1991, Waterbury 2006), etc.

Another group of scholars attributes the specificity of populism in CE to the experience of four decades of (communist) authoritarianism (Jowitt 1992: 293) and the traumatic experience of the transition to market economy in the 1990s (Przeworski 1991: 189-190, also Ekiert 1991). The adaptation of a large part of the population to the conditions of the communist regime (Ramet 1999; Bayer 2002) and the interrupted democratic tradition (Lomax 1997: 70) are seen as creating specific conditions for populist parties and influencing their character. The process of the axiological and discursive pluralisation of CE societies, from a state-sanctioned ideology to a wide range of views and ideas that characterize public debates in liberal societies, can also contribute to the strengthening of the populist discourse based on traditionalism and 'common sense' on one hand, and imposed values on the other. On top of that, the painful effects of economic transition created a breeding ground for the division between rich and corrupt elites and 'losers of transition' suffering from labour market instability, a low standard of living and lack of social security (Elster et al. 1998; Gerber 2002).

Some authors also highlight the importance of the mode of struggle against communism in CE states, which required the consolidation of an opposition bloc and the halting of the pluralist discussion about different visions of state and society. This mode of transition is perceived as central for the populist rhetoric about an alliance of post-communist and liberal elites and the omission of 'ordinary' citizens from the process of state (re-)creation. As the systemic changes were largely imitative (following the template of Western Europe), they were often separated from the regional context. This emulation, especially if cast as external imposition, can be then easily tapped by CE populist parties to legitimize strong opposition to liberal democracy and/or neoliberal economy (Krastev and Holmes 2020; Williams, 1999).

On the conceptual level, studies that compare populism in CE with that in Western Europe argue that both share the basic characteristics of the ideational approach to populism (Mudde 2004) but diverge in specific issues they focus on (Kim 2022; Kotwas and Kubik 2019). Going in a different direction, Ben Stanley (2017) notes that the specificity of CE populism lies in the simultaneous

occurrence of two types of populism: radical populism, which combines ethnic nationalism, authoritarianism and welfare chauvinism, and centrist populism, which lacks a strong ideological core and instead of reinforcing populist rhetoric with illiberal, discriminatory or nationalist agenda use anti-corruption and anti-elitist sentiments (Stanley 2017; Petrović et al. 2022; Havlík and Pinková 2012).

Due to their fear of being accused of ideological dogmatism, which still has bad connotations due to the communist heritage, some CE populist parties invoke policy competence and moral probity instead of specific ideological direction. A variant of centrist populism is technocratic populism (Havlík 2019; Buštíková and Guasti 2020), which is built on a similar aversion to elaborate ideological projects and the disillusionment with the political class that exploits the dichotomy between 'hard-working' people and successful businessmen (sic!) on one hand and corrupt and lazy politicians. It is important to note that technocratic populism employs an anti-pluralist strategy aiming at the delegitimization of traditional political parties and civil society through the rhetoric of technocratic expertise in the name of the people. Instead of a 'thick' ideology, some CE populist parties also declare the fight against corruption as their main objective (Stanley 2017).

Looking at the rhetoric of CE populist parties, its distinctive feature is a specific form of anti-establishment discourse. It draws not only on the opposition between the 'pure' people and the elites, but stresses that the people remain economically disadvantaged since they had no opportunity to actively shape the new political and economic order because the decisions were made by political and economic elites and foreign experts (Rupnik 2007). In some CE countries (such as Poland and Hungary), populists accuse liberal elites not only of being corrupt and disconnected from the problems of ordinary citizens but of having made a deal with post-communist politicians. In this way, the new political order allegedly allows the old network of influence to thrive (Markowski 2018; Smilov and Krastev 2008). Populist parties then call for a radical break in the personal and institutional relations between the old and new regimes. As the economic transformation of the 1990s was guided by the accession to the EU and based on the emulation of EU standards, populist anti-establishment rhetoric also targets the European Union, which is seen as a hostile force, imposing an alien political and moral order on CE societies.

But the anti-liberal attitudes of CE populists are also specific. Most populist parties do not oppose the liberal direction of economic transformation *per se* but its accelerated course, which they claim harms a wide segment of citizens (Učeň 2007). They also mostly do not directly challenge the Western geopolitical orientation of their countries (NATO and EU memberships). The criticism is usually expressed in cultural terms, often focussing on the expansion of minority rights (Buštíková 2019, 2021; Guasti and Buštíková 2020), the redefinition or weakening of traditional social and family relations (Keskinen, Norocel, and Jørgensen 2016; Buzogány and Varga 2019) or the influx of ethnic and national minorities that pluralize the hitherto rather homogeneous societies. The final specific feature of CE populism is its relationship with mainstream parties. Recent studies show that the mainstream parties are willing to acquiesce to selected populist demands or adopt populist policies significantly faster and more frequently than parties in the West (Guasti and Buštíková 2023).

Although numerous studies argue that CE populism is clearly distinct from the West, some authors argue that its specificity should not be overstated, as it shares many ideological features with populism in Western Europe, such as nationalism, Islamophobia, Euroscepticism and anti-liberalism (Styczynska and Meijer 2023). Also, the political processes that were supposed to be the cause of the regional idiosyncrasies show a number of similarities with those in Western Europe. One example is the process of political and economic transition after the collapse of communism, which contributed to the formation of a group of 'losers of transition', which many authors argue

influenced the specific discourse of CE populist parties on liberal democracy and free market economy (Haughton & Deegan-Krause 2020; Pop-Eleches & Tucker 2017). However, some authors find parallels with the post-industrial transition of Western European societies and economies that led to the emergence of a large group of disadvantaged people - the 'modernisation losers' (Ignazi 1992; Bets 1994; Kitschelt and McGann 1995) who are targeted by Western European populist parties.

1.2 Immigration, climate change, gender-related policies

Since populism is often defined as a thin-centred ideology or discourse that does not entail a comprehensive political programme but is combined with host ideologies or issues (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 1), populists cannot be easily posited along a simple left-right scale. Instead, they focus on a 'vertical' cleavage by contrasting those on the top (elites) and those at the bottom (common people). The advantage of this strategy is its ability to freely combine populism with any substantive issues in accordance with the logic outlined above. For this reason, numerous studies on populist parties seek to identify the most common topics that fill this space. Due to the long-term dominance of the liberal agenda, populists often choose topics that set them apart from the liberal elites. Among these topics, immigration, climate change, and gender equality and sexual minorities are often discussed (Guasti and Buštíková 2023; Kubicek 2022).

1.2.1 Immigration

An important branch of research on CE populism draws attention to the specific use of anti-immigration rhetoric by these parties. Although many CE countries did not experience a significant growth in immigration until the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the topic of immigration was heavily exploited by many populist parties since 2015 (Stojanova 2018). This "platonic xenophobia" (Kende and Krekó 2020, 31) arose as a consequence of a reorientation from the previous focus on anti-Semitism, anti-establishment or nationalism in the rhetoric of populist parties (Stojanova 2018; Jenne 2018).

However, there are longer-term factors that increase the attractiveness of the anti-immigrant rhetoric in CE populist parties. It can be traced back to the historically fragile national identities and a deeply rooted sense of foreign threat to the state and the nation (Minkenberg 2017). The feeling of being threatened is further exacerbated by the experience of the struggle for sovereignty, reinforcing the hostility towards minorities and immigrants (Kende and Krekó 2020). The communist period is also seen as a source of anti-immigration rhetoric. After four decades of the authoritarian rule in CE and its isolation from the rest of the world, the ideal of institutional and societal power-sharing and the pluralistic organization of social life, including minority rights, finds less support than the 'winners take all' logic of governance (Vachudova 2020).

But the reasons for the anti-immigrant attitudes are not purely cultural and historical. Exhausted by the hardships of the economic transition, CE citizens sometimes oppose the admission of immigrants not only because of cultural stereotypes but also because they feel that now 'it is their turn' to receive state support. Immigrants are seen as a threat since they take their place in the queue for employment or for social benefits (Enyedi 2020). In other words, voters redirect feelings of injustice and resentment from their own economic situation and the threat posed by globalisation to immigrants who are identified as the cause of higher unemployment and lower wages (Vachudova 2020). Populists build on these worries, describing mainstream political elites

as detached from the problems of 'ordinary citizens' and claiming that they will represent disaffected voters more effectively (Berman 2019; Lynch 2019).

Recent research introduces a new perspective on anti-immigration rhetoric in the region. In the early 2000s, populist parties identified ethnic and national minorities as the main enemy – either domestic (such as the Roma minority) or those originating in neighbouring countries (Blokker and Kovács 2015; Minkenberg 2017). The claim was based on the goal of achieving cultural (and sometimes ethnic) 'purity' of the nation, which was seen as crucial for the preservation of national identity. The migration crisis contributed to the reformulation of the nationalist narrative into an anti-immigrant narrative with a civilisational rather than national conflict at its centre (Eneyedi 2020, Ding and Hlavac 2017). Unlike ordinary nationalism, which places one's own nation and other nations at the center of its rhetoric, 'ethnopopulism' (Jenne 2018; Vachudowa 2020) employs a far more open narrative which can accommodate broader interpretations than just those concerning national issues. For ethnopopulists, 'the people' need not be defined only as a nation; they can also be discussed very broadly in terms of culture, ethnicity, religion, or even civilisation. Many Western European ethnopopulists can claim that they are critical toward the immigration from Muslim-majority countries in order to protect the rights of women and the LGBTQ community; in CE, populists often claim to defend traditional Christian family values, the cultural and national unity of the state or the heritage of European civilization (Lancaster 2020; Vachudova 2020). The racialization of the populist parties' rhetoric is particularly evident in the context of immigrants coming to work in the Visegrad states every year (Vachudova 2020) and perhaps even more strongly with the arrival of war refugees after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

The anti-Muslim immigration rhetoric of populist parties is also often incorporated into a broader frame of the 'decline of the West' and the failure of multiculturalism. Populist politicians argue that Europe has failed to integrate people with different lifestyles, values, ways of thinking, and, above all, religions (Kazharski 2018). The rhetoric on this topic is embedded in the typical CE populist 'common sense' logic, according to which Eastern Europe should not repeat the mistakes of the Western part of the continent, which is seen as having failed in its immigration policies. Opposition to immigrants also contributes to supplementing the populist agenda with a specific form of economic nationalism, which starts from neoliberal principles but in the end advocates a system founded on a conservative vision of society that emphasizes nativism and economic nationalism (Orenstein and Bugaric 2020).

1.2.2 Climate change

 Another issue that has gained significant attention in recent years is climate change and related policies. In the first years after the fall of communism, the climate issue was not widely discussed in CE. However, thanks both to the activities of mainstream political parties, which have politicized the issue, and to the European Union, which has made combating the effects of climate change one of its priorities, the discussion on the issue has also gained momentum (Chodkowska-Miszczuk 2021; Blavoukos, Pagoulatos 2008; Burke and Weiss 2011). Although research shows that populist parties have an important influence on climate policy-making once elected to legislatures and governments (Böhmelt 2021; Ćetković and Hagemann 2020), not all CE populist parties address this issue (Hubner et al. 2021). Additionally, contrary to the common view of populist parties as exclusively anti-environmental, research suggests that the policy discourses, issue positions, or specific actions they employ vary depending on the left/right 'host ideology' or contextual factors such as the characteristics of the party system (Hubner et al. 2021; Kulin et. al. 2021). If favourable contextual circumstances occur or there is general agreement on a solution to a given climate

problemc, populist parties do not oppose reforms. Often, these reforms are then justified on health grounds or to maintain national 'food sovereignty' that is threatened by climate change (Hubner et al. 2021). However, research shows that the focus of the populist parties on the imagined and idealised natural state from the past – the 'heartland' (Taggart 2000) – and its recreation, blocks them from taking innovative solutions (Selk and Kemmerzell 2021).

Despite the presence of populist parties with less critical stances on climate protection, anti-climate rhetoric is still dominant. Populists build their criticism on two types of arguments: economic and political. In the first case, they present themselves as the defenders of people who have not benefited from the process of neoliberal transformation, claiming that climate protection reforms will further impoverish the poorest segment of the society. In addition, climate reforms are said to threaten economic independence, hampering the development of national economies while favouring international business (Hubner et al. 2021).

The cultural and ideological critique of this process reveals an often-used meta-narrative that interprets the climate movement as the new Left, which represents hidden political interests linked to global, liberal elites such as George Soros (Mikecz and Boskie 2023, Żuk and Szulecki 2020). Additionally, they frame opposition to these reforms in terms of defending state sovereignty (Kuchler and Bridge 2018), the traditional order (Żuk 2022), and maintaining economic independence (Żuk and Szulecki 2020). At a more fundamental level, climate reforms are presented in an anti-progressivist way, as threatening local, indigenous people and their way of life, traditions, and almost mythologized natural resources as basis of societal wealth (Riedel 2021). In the European context, the negative attitudes towards climate protection are often linked to a general critique of the EU (for instance, its interference in domestic politics or its 'leftist' agenda) or to some concrete policies of the EU (particularly the Green Deal).

1.2.3 Gender

As Dorota Szelewa (2020) notes, top-down regulations, such as those associated with the EU accession process, have only partially contributed to the equalisation of gender relations in Central and Eastern Europe. This process started with the political and economic transformation after the collapse of communism that brought structural changes in social relations, a particularly noticeable example of which was the issue of gender equality. In the centrally planned system, the man usually had the role of breadwinner and the role of a woman, despite her professional activity, was often reduced to that of a mother and a wife. During the transformation years, on the other hand, a man's income became insufficient, and woman's work became necessary to ensure the financial security of the family. These changing perceptions of the importance of women's professional activity and their financial independence served as one of the impulses to redefine gender relations in the region.

We do not have a large amount of research on the discourses of CE populist parties on gender equality and sexual minorities. However, the articles published so far show its four main features. The first is that CE populist parties respond to changes in gender relations in strongly critical manner. They maintain a conservative vision of the social roles of both sexes, in which the position of women is usually defined through the prism of their reproductive capacity (Szelewa 2014). The role of women is strongly linked to the second important motif in the populist discourse: the traditional family which is based on marriage between a man and a woman with their rights and duties being derived from conservative, religious or nationalist cultural sources. Third, according to the populist 'retrogressive mobilization' strategy (Norcel and Băluţă 2023), women are almost

exclusively responsible for the care of children and seniors. This vision is based on the essentialist belief that they are 'by nature' more submissive, more caring, and more willing to make sacrifices.

The fourth feature is the connection with the specific opportunity structure related to the historical experience of the loss of sovereignty. So, women's reproductive rights are seen as a tool for the preservation of independence and national 'purity' (Norcel and Băluță 2023). As a consequence, feminist demands for women's reproductive rights expansion are framed as an assault on state security and especially a demographic threat (Jaskułowski et al. 2018; Mishtal, 2012). This discourse is also often embedded in a broader picture of a 'dying out' or 'declining' Europe. It is often linked to the migration crisis that they argue may cause the replacement of Europeans by culturally alien immigrants (Waterbury 2020). Additionally, in countries where the Catholic or Orthodox church still holds a strong position, feminist claims are often presented as a threat not only to the earthly social order but also to eternal moral laws (Gwiazda 2021, Shevtsova 2022).

More in-depth research notes an interesting discrepancy between feminist demands manifested in the public sphere and the private sphere (Gwiazda 2021). Most populist parties do not oppose women's professional activities. Although their 'natural' predisposition is mainly seen in the family and domestic context, populist parties are willing to support selected conservative feminist demands, e.g., on equal pay and women's access to previously male-dominated work positions. However, there is less support for feminist demands related to the private sphere, e.g., abortion or the access to the morning-after pill (Gwiazda 2021). Contrary to this thesis, there are studies showing that, despite the declarative support for higher women's participation in the labour market, populist social programmes or other types of regulations introduced by parties discourage women from taking up employment or returning to work quickly after childbirth (Bartosik 2023; Pasternak-Malicka 2019).

In addition to the long-established populist discourse against gender equality, in recent years populist parties have been expanding their agenda by referring to 'gender ideology' (Korolczuk and Graff 2018). This is a broad discursive frame used mainly by right-wing populist parties that express opposition to gender equality, sexual minority rights, reproductive rights, etc. (Graff and Korolczuk 2022; Guasti 2021; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017). This frame is used to imply that these issues pose a threat to the traditional family and to traditions (Toldy and Garralo 2020). This argument is often linked to the critique of the 'corrupt West', the 'progressivist' European Union, and radical feminists (Graff and Korolczuk 2017; Wierzcholska 2018). The Union is presented as irrational, seeking 'self-destruction' by supporting feminist demands and LGBTQI minorities. Furthermore, the very existence of gender and sexual minorities is sometimes challenged: by speaking about a 'gender ideology', populist parties suggest that minority sexual orientations and gender identifications are a result of top-down indoctrination which poses a grave danger for the society as a whole and especially children (Dragolea 2022).

1.3 An Emerging Cleavage?

Although some authors recognise that climate change policies, immigration, and gender-related issues occupy a prominent place in the discourse of populist parties (Buzogány and Klotzbach 2021; Glied 2020; Mos 2022; Stojarová 2018), especially if embedded in a logic of the conflict between corrupt elites and hard-working people, systematic research confirming the possible emergence of a new socio-political cleavage is lacking. Korolczuk (2020: 165) notes that the use of 'gender ideology' by selected parties is linked to Islamophobia and anti-EU sentiments. Żuk and Szulecki (2020) show that the populist right in Poland labels all these issues as leftist or Marxist, claiming

that socialists, social democrats, feminists, climate activists, and human rights advocates attack the traditional social order based on national and Christian values. Agius (2021) notes that populist parties use a specific anti-feminist discourse to inform the exclusionary and masculinized image of the nation against the threat of culturally alien immigrants.

Bohle argues that the source of this convergence in the populist discourse is their general opposition to the liberal hegemony (Bohle et al. 2024). Populist parties see climate protection, immigration, and the promotion of gender equality and sexual minority rights as flagship projects of the liberal social order. To oppose them, they employ a counter-hegemonic strategy with conservatism, state-centrism, and traditional family at its core. Its main goal is to preserve the sovereignty of the state and the dominance of the native majority which they interpret as being in line with Christian morality and social teaching of the church. Another direction in the interpretation of this convergence is to see it through the prism of the anti-EU rhetoric of populist parties. This hypothesis will be discussed in the next section.

1.3.1 Euroscepticism and gender, climate, and immigration in the populist discourse

The post-communist transformation brought about significant changes in institutional and political terms as well as in CE's geopolitical orientation, the most significant expression of which has been its integration with the European Union. These radical changes and the opposition to them constitute one of the main sources of the high support for populist parties in the region (Styczyńska 2017: 141). The opposition to European integration takes different forms. Szczerbiak and Taggart (2004), for instance, distinguish between "hard" and "soft" Euroscepticism. The first refers to the complete rejection of the EU project and the advocacy of an exit. The second is usually aimed at specific policies or developmental trajectories promoted by the European Union. Here, populists often argue that the asymmetric and 'imitative' logic of the post-communist political transition forced the candidate states not only to create a particular set of institutions but also to adopt a set of values (Krastev and Holmes 2019). Hence, they argue, the new EU members from the CE have lost much of their hard-won sovereignty, just as they had previously lost it to the Soviet Union (Pisciotta 2016). The European Union, and the wider West alongside it, are described as an ideological and political colonizer (Csehi and Zgut 2020; Gagyi 2018; Graff and Korolczuk 2018; Grzebalska 2015; Jarkovská 2019). They claim that the adoption of 'foreign' values has helped cementing the hierarchical relationship between the older EU member states and CE (Kováts 2021).

Often, this broader discourse about imposed values is focussed on gender-related policies. The EU's efforts at ensuring gender equality, the protection of gender and sexual minorities are seen as alien to national values (Ayoub and Paternotte 2019, 56; Grzebalska and Pető 2018). However, while being critical of the EU, populists often argue that they represent the true 'Europeanness' and that they are the last defenders of European Christian civilization (Mos 2022). Thus, populist parties can still advocate 'European values' while promoting an illiberal agenda (Abulof and Kornprobst 2017; Mos 2022).

The rhetoric of populist parties regarding the relationship between the EU and immigration is built on a similar ground. Populist parties talk about the undemocratic imposition of immigrant quotas, while sometimes also claiming that EU immigration policy will lead to a 'diluting' of Europe's Christian character by flooding the continent with Muslim immigrants (Mos 2022). The European Union is perceived here, on the one hand, as an actor who takes irrational decisions on migration policy. But it is paradoxically also seen as a devious and cunning actor that seeks to carry out a profound social transformation aimed at creating an anti-Christian and anti-national multicultural

community. Hence, by opposing EU immigration policy, populists present themselves as defenders of Europe and its roots (Kalmar 2020), framing immigrants as not only a national, but also a European 'other' (Tabora 2020:19).

A similar conclusion is confirmed by a small group of studies that analyze the policies of the EU regarding climate change. CE populists tend to identify the EU as a strong advocate of climate protection reforms. At the same time, they frequently disagree with these policies, arguing that they are elitist and that European leaders treat climate protection with the importance of a religious dogma (Huber et al., 2021). In addition, populist parties portray the move to a low-carbon economy as a foreign project aiming to undermine the economic potential of countries that benefit from traditional energy sources (Selk and Kemmerzell 2021).

2 The Supply Side of Populism: Analysis of Party Manifestos

This part of the report is based on an empirical analysis of the CE populist parties' supply side, i.e., their discourse on climate change, gender, and immigration, as presented in the political manifestos. In line with the primary objective of this report, this section was intended to answer the question about whether the three issues converge into what could become one political cleavage. However, at a preliminary stage of analysis, the convergence was ruled out (the method is discussed below). For this reason, we extended the scope of our analysis of the acquired research material and decided to explore more thoroughly the populist parties' discourses on gender, climate, and immigration separately. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first discusses the data collection and methodology. In the second, we present the results.

2.1 Data and Methods

In order to explore the CE populist parties' discourse on gender, immigration, and climate change, we analyzed their most recent party manifestos. In the party selection procedure we used PopuList Project's country reports on Czechia, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. We selected parties classified as populist only and those that supplemented populism with a right or left-wing thick ideology and exceeded 5% electoral threshold (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013). This allowed us to identify ten parties (Table A).

Table A. The list of the selected Central European populist parties

Country	Party name
Hungary	Fidesz
	Jobbik
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS)
	Sovereign Poland (SP)
Czechia	Freedom and Democracy (SPD)
	ANO
Slovakia	Slovak National Party (SNS)
	SMER-SSD
	Slovakia (previously OL'aNO)
	Sme Rodina

The study is based on the most recent manifestos of the selected political parties. Most documents were published between 2020 and 2023. However, the two Hungarian parties Jobbik and Fidesz published their most recent party manifestos in 2018 and 2010, respectively. For this reason, we decided to supplement Fidesz's 2010 manifesto with a speech by Viktor Orbán (uploaded on the Project Manifesto Data) and his interview in Kossuth Rádió 180 perc (both from 2018).

In order to identify whether gender, climate change, and immigration issues converge in the CE populist parties discourse, we conducted the pre-analysis of all party manifestos selected for the

study. We found only six examples linking two or three of them in a coherent interpretative framework (Appendix, Table ZA). In the remaining cases, these issues were discussed separately. In response to the low level of identified interconnections, we focussed on the discourses on gender, migration and climate change separately. More specifically, this part of the report uses framing analysis (Goffman 1974; Thomas 2003; Van Gorp 2007) to explore how populist parties present the three issues and what understanding they seek to bring to the political debate.

Since the report aims to understand the specificity of CE populist parties' discourses, we adopted an inductive approach based on Baldwin Van Gorp's study (2007). It allows us to identify new frames present in party manifestos and transcend the limitations of pre-defined frames. While applying the inductive approach we were looking for (1) the framing devices such as words, metaphors, exemplary cases, visuals used in talking about the three issues; (2) the reasoning instruments: which justifications, causes, consequences, and equivalences are presented; and (3) 'the implicit cultural phenomenon': what these frames tell us about the broader patterns of interpretation and social values.

The frame analysis had four phases. First, we read all the manifestos, and then, using an extensive list of codes (Table B), we searched for passages that dealt with gender, immigration, and climate change. Because we were interested in the broader interpretation of the chosen issues, we adopted a flexible unit of analysis - quasi sentences. The quasi-sentence can be equal to the natural sentence, be only part of it or consist of several sentences in which a frame is expressed. This analysis yielded 83 quasi-sentences in which gender, immigration, or climate change were discussed. In the next stage, coder 1 encoded the sentences selected for the analysis using the MAXQDA24 tool in an open coding procedure. Then, coder 2 independently coded the material based on the frames proposed by coder 1. Once both coding results were obtained, the inter-coder reliability coefficient was calculated using one of the most commonly used methods, Cohen's kappa (McHugh 2012). Both for all the coded quasi-sentences taken together and for individual frames on gender, climate change, and immigration, the coefficient exceeded 0.8, which signifies an 'excellent' reliability of the result.

Table B. Climate, gender and immigration codes.

Language	Climate	Gender	Immigration
Slovak	"Prirodzen*", „Klima* zmen*", „Klíma*", "Podnebia", "Ekológia", "Zelená", "Príroda", "životné prostred*", „prostred*", „Fit for 55"	„Sexuáln* pohlavi*", "identita", "Gender ideológia", "Rodová ideológia", „Rodi*", „Rod", „Pohlav*", "rodová", „ideológi*", "LGBT", „Feminizmus", „Identit*", "Gender", „Muž*", „žen*"	„Zahrani*", „Prisťahoval*", "Hodnoty", „Emigráci*", „Kresťanstv*", „Presvedčenia", „Imigrác*", „Prisťahoval*", „Cudzin*", „Migr*", „Islamsk*", „Náboženstv*", „Kultúr*", „Tradíc*", "Spoločenské hodnoty", „Moslimsk*",

			„Multikultúr*", „náboženst*", „kresťan*", „civiliza*", „neprispôsob*", „fanati*", „džihád*.
Hungarian	Éghajlat", "Természet", "Ökológia", "Környezet", "Zöld", „Klímaváltozás", „Fit for 55"	"Nem", "Szexuális nem", "Nemi identitás", "Gender ideológia", "LGBT", "Feminizmus", "Férfi", "Nők", "Család"	"Bevándorlás", "Külföldi", "Bevándorló", "Migráns", "Iszlám", "Vallás", "Kultúra", "Hagyományok", "Értékek", "Elvandorlás", "Kivándorlás", "Muszlim", "Kereszténység", "Hiedelmek"
Polish	„Fit for 55", „klima*", „węgl*", „emis*", „energety*", „ekolo*", „spalino*", „ocieple*", „zielony ład", „środowi*", „transforma*", „przyrod*", „dekarboni*", „zrównowa*", "natur*"	„Rodzi*", „kobiet*", „mężczyzn*", „matka", „macierzy*", „progresy*", „lgbt", „małżeń*", „femini*", „gender", „aborc*", „reprodukcyj*", „macieżyńs*", „płeć", „płc*"	„imigra*", „obcy*", „wiar*", „zamach*", „terror*", „cywiliza*", „granic*", „reloka*", „bezpieczeństw*", „multikulti*", „multikultura*", „muzułma*", „chrześcijan*", „islamsk*", „fanaty*".
Czech	„auto*", „ekolog*, „zelen*", „spalova* motory", „emis*", „klima*", „oteplová*", „uhlí**", „zelený úděl", „fosil*", „dekarboniza", „udržiteln*", „energe**", „příro*", „Fit for 55".	„Gender", „rodin*", „dět*", „pohla*", „sexuá*", „muž", „žena", „tradičn*", „manželství", „progresiv*", „potrat*", „interrupc*", „mateř*"	islám*, imigra*, nelegál*, „multikulturní ideologie", „migran*", nábožens*, „křesťan*", „civiliza*", „nepřizpůsob*", „fanati*", „džihád*", „muslim*",

16

2.2 Results and their Interpretation

The framing analysis showed that gender, climate protection and immigration have an important place in the CE populist parties' discourses. Five out of ten examined CE populist parties refer in their latest political manifestos to all three issues. In other cases, parties discussed only two of them. The only case of a mainfesto focused solely on the one of our issues is Fidesz, which frames only immigration issue. Among them, immigration was the most frequently addressed issue, followed by climate change; gender equality came last.

2.2.1 Immigration

Immigration was addressed by every populist party selected for this study. The first observation is that despite the significant migration wave following the outbreak of the full-fledged war in Ukraine in February 2022 (which particularly affected the discussed countries), the discourse on migration is almost entirely dominated by immigration from North Africa and the Middle East. The issue of refugees/immigrants from Ukraine is entirely missing in some documents (either intentionally or due to the timing of the publication - before February 2022). Where the Ukrainian issue is discussed, it is presented from the perspective of war refugees and the word immigration is almost fully absent. Immigration is, on the other hand, frequently used regarding North Africa and the Middle East, meaning that all the analyzed documents refer to immigration from Arab countries.

Table C. Central European populist parties' frames on immigration

Immigration		
Frame	Description	Occurrences
Immigration as a threat to security	Immigrants are framed as a threat to border security and the broader political order of individual states and Europe as a whole. In some cases, this threat is framed as hybrid warfare by hostile states. Words and phrases such as: "security," "border," "terrorism," "illegal migration," "smuggling," "Schengen area."	15
International immigration policies as impinging on sovereignty	Decisions regarding the acceptance of immigrants are framed as a competence stemming from state sovereignty. Imposing regulations in this area is seen as limiting sovereignty. Words and phrases such as: "sovereignty," "mandatory quotas," "imposed/dictated solutions," "relocation," "orders/directives from the EU."	11
Immigration as an integration challenge and a threat to the native culture	Immigrants are presented as different in terms of religion, language, and traditions. The arrival of immigrants is framed as a threat to national and European identities and traditions. Words and phrases such as: "invasion," "European/native way of life/identity,"	8

	"European/Western civilization," "Islamization", "integration," "maladaptive immigrants.".	
Immigration policies as a threat to national interests	Immigration is framed as a burden and an obstacle to achieving the state's goals. It is also presented from the perspective of a conflict of interests between the EU and nation-states or between Eastern and Western Europe. Words and phrases such as: "national interests," "economic burden."	8
No support for economic migration	Immigrants are categorized into those in immediate need of assistance due to war and those whose arrival in Europe is economically motivated. Words and phrases such as: "economic immigration," "helping in their own countries", "we have our problems", "burden".	2

All of the identified frames refer to immigration in a negative way, most often as a threat. However, the areas affected by this threat vary (Table C). The most common frame describes immigration as a threat to security. It occurs in 15 of the 44 quasi-sentences about immigration. In this case, the threat is often abstract and vague. The parties do not specify what kind of negative consequences immigration may bring, referring in a general way to the security and internal order of states and the EU as a whole. The quasi-sentences often invoke a sense of insecurity and use a highly emotionally charged language. This approach is well illustrated by a quote from Fidesz (2018):

But the greatest danger of all is that millions of immigrants threaten us from the south, and the leaders of Europe, together with a billionaire speculator, do not want to protect the borders, but want to let the immigrants in.

Criticism of immigration policies, framed as a threat to state sovereignty, also occupies an important place in the CE populist discourse. Populists link the decisions about immigration to sovereignty. The main object of criticism in this frame is the EU and the Migration Pact's mandatory quotas, which are seen as an attack on sovereignty and the dictate by the stronger member states. The Slovak SME Rodina (2020) applies this frame:

We are strictly against the Slovak Republic being forced to accept immigrants on its territory. It is the right of every sovereign state to decide what number and what kind of people in terms of the country of origin it wants to permanently accept on its territory.

Frames concerning the threat to the native culture and national interests also feature prominently in the discourse of CE populist parties. Here, references are made to the clash between different traditions, contrasting the moral order of a 'Christian Europe' and the culturally and religiously alien immigrants from Arab countries. This frame also includes the threat against the loss of the European way of life, but also of the values that are related to it, such as freedom and democracy. Populist parties invoke the threat of the 'Islamisation of Europe' or 'Islamic religious fanaticism'. This frame is used in the Czech SPD's manifesto (2023):

We want strict conditions for the immigration policy of the Czech Republic. We don't want maladaptive immigrants here or the arrival of Islamic religious fanatics.

Among the identified frames, the two least frequently employed criticize immigration on the grounds of its perceived damage to national interests and the economic motivation of immigrants seeking to enter Europe. The former frame highlights both the tangible and the abstract dimension of the perceived burden. On the practical level, it points to the costs associated with admitting immigrants, including expenditures related to their integration and living costs. These financial obligations are often framed as diverting resources from native citizens, thus generating zero-sum narrative of resource allocation. On the abstract level, this frame invokes the broader concept of the national interest, presenting immigration as inherently misaligned with what is deemed beneficial for the state. This abstract framing allows for a flexible interpretation of national priorities while reinforcing the perception of immigration as a threat to state sovereignty and welfare. This frame was used by Fidesz (2018):

So tell everyone that we have to support migrants. If resettlement comes, even though there will be economic growth, there will be nothing to support families and nothing to pay pensions.

The discourse on economic migrants is largely similar. Such motivation is considered unfair and an abuse of the goodwill of European countries. The populist parties distinguish between refugees from war-torn countries, seen as deserving of support and humanitarian aid, and migrants driven by economic aspirations who, according to the populists, should be assisted in their countries of origin. SME Rodina (2020) applies this frame:

But 90 percent of people arriving in Europe were not in danger. They are economic immigrants. We are therefore convinced that Slovakia should help these people in need in their home countries or in refugee camps.

In summary, immigration is framed exclusively in negative terms by CE populist parties. The identified frames focus on the threats posed by immigrants to various domains, including national security, cultural identity and traditions, citizens' welfare, development, and sovereignty. The populist parties position themselves as defenders of both the interests of citizens and the broader cultural and economic independence of the nation. This narrative allows them to present immigration as a multi-faceted challenge, while simultaneously reinforcing their role as protectors of the national heritage and guarantors of societal stability. This discursive strategy is used to mobilize voters' support by appealing to concerns about identity, security, and economic well-being.

2.2.2 Climate change
The second most frequently framed issue is climate change. We identified 29 quasi- sentences that referred to this issue which means that this topic does not occupy as strong a position in the CE populist parties' discourse as immigration. On the other hand, the study identified six interpretative frames, which is one more than on immigration and three more than on climate change. This suggests that the parties problematize this issue more than the others. This is also confirmed by the diversified content of the identified frames (Table D).

Table D. Central European populist parties' frames on climate

Climate		
Frame	Description	Occurrences
Climate protection policies (CPP) as an externally imposed threat for the state/citizens' welfare	CPP framed as externally imposed and irrational, detached from national needs, posing a threat to the development and well-being of citizens. Words and phrases such as: "disadvantageous," "expensive," "losing jobs," "threat for the industry," "competitiveness," "living standard," "unrealistic plans".	11
CPP as a way to provide high-quality food and healthy environment for citizens	CPP presented through the lens of their positive effects on citizens' quality of life. "Climate" becomes "environment". Words and phrases such as: "health of the population," "good food," "impact," "air pollution," "reducing environmental impact/emissions".	5
Good state of the environment is necessary for a well-functioning national economy	CPP presented as one of the pillars of a thriving economy. Incorporating climate protection will enable the creation of a fairer and more efficient economic model. Words and phrases such as: "economic growth," "development of the country," "people's prosperity".	4
CPP as a developmental stimulus	CPP framed as a developmental opportunity, a positive impulse for business and state institutions. Words and phrases such as: "advantage for companies", "opportunities", "public administration modernization stimulus".	4
CPP preserve the native people's way of life and natural heritage	Climate framed as the broader living environment of citizens and a natural legacy that must be cared for. Words and phrases such as: "future generations," "natural gifts," "national treasure".	3
CPP as a pragmatic task	CPP presented as a technical task that must be completed to achieve further goals. This frame posited against ideological or emotional	2

| | interpretations.

Words and phrases such as: "investment," "pragmatic," "greater efficiency," "new technologies". | |

The most frequently used frame interprets climate protection policies as an external threat to the state and citizens' welfare. Quasi-sentences that are coded in this way refer to climate protection in a negative way, portraying it both as a threat to the economy and citizens' welfare but also criticizing them as poorly designed; beneficial for some states but risky for others. This excerpt from the Slovak SME Rodina manifesto (2020) can serve as an example of this type of frame:

This creates a paradox: since Slovakia lacks suitable locations for building wind farms or photovoltaic installations, Slovak electricity consumers will bear the costs of developing such resources in other member states without directly benefiting from them.

Interestingly, the next four frames present climate protection policies in a positive light. The most prevalent positive frame presents climate protection policies through their beneficial effects on citizens' quality of life. This includes access to high-quality food and a healthy living environment. An illustrative example of this framing can be found in OL'aNO party manifesto:

A neglected environment has a negative impact on the health of the population. Air pollution alone causes more than 5,000 premature deaths a year in our country.

Another group of frames presents climate protection policies as necessary for the good functioning of the national economy. In this perspective, climate protection is not in conflict with economic development, but an indispensable part of it. Efficient and sustainable use of raw materials will bring about economic growth and the establishment of a fair economic model. This excerpt from the PiS political manifesto (2023) is an example of such a frame:

The (climate protection) transformations aim to improve the quality of life in rural areas and effectively utilize the available resources for the sustainable development of the country, resulting in economic growth, essential for ensuring peoples' prosperity, while considering social justice and the conditions necessary to preserve resources and the value of the natural environment.

This is also echoed by other parties, which define such a model as an eco-social national economy (Jobbik 2018), which would combine good environmental conditions with decent living standards for the nation and the protection of national identity. Environmental protection is, in this case, not a side effect, but one of the three pillars of an economic model that is more beneficial to the nation.

The next frame goes even further in its CPP support. While the previous ones emphasised the benefits of climate protection for individuals and the economy, this frame refers to pro-climate policies themselves, presenting them as a developmental stimulus. According

to this frame they pose an opportunity for the state and businesses. In contrast to the critical frames on climate policies, in this case the EU is not seen as imposing regulations, but as a platform where policy goals are negotiated. Law and Justice (2023), among others, used such a frame:

We want the transformation to become a developmental stimulus for our country. We will strive for Polish companies to take advantage of the opportunities arising from the necessity of transformation to the greatest extent possible.

An interesting group of frames presents climate protection policies as a way to preserve native peoples' way of life and their natural heritage. The environment is interpreted here in a broad way - as a natural heritage that is part of what the state needs to protect. Natural resources and the environment are presented as gifts for which people are responsible. The environment is also interpreted as a witness to the nation's existence and as a source from which future generations will draw inspiration. This is how the Slovak party OL'aNO (2023) justifies its support for continuing work on climate protection:

We are proud of our efforts in environmental protection so far and we are determined to continue to ensure that these natural gifts serve as a source of life, inspiration, and well-being for us and future generations. (…) Water, air, forests and the whole nature form an irreplaceable national treasure that we value and actively try to protect.

The last frame presents climate policies as a pragmatic task. This frame contrasts the populists' rationality with the irrationality of their opponents. The populists argues that they approach climate change policies in a non-ideological and unemotional way, as a method to achieve concrete tasks. The pragmatic frame is presented by PiS (2023) in the following way:

We will treat coal as an energy resource in a pragmatic, rather than ideological, way, and we will also support investments in modern, low-emission coal technologies.

Three conclusions emerge from the analysis of the CE populist discourses on the CPP. First, the populists address climate protection in a dual manner—emphasizing the opportunities and benefits for citizens' well-being and national economic development, as well as threats related to the externally imposed regulations forcing the peoples' change of lifestyle. The second is that when talking about climate change, the populist manifestos produced the highest number of frames; with most parties employing several of them. Both the observations suggest that CE populist parties approach the issue of climate protection in a multidimensional and complex manner. A final observation is that the majority of the investigated CE populist parties are involved in a process of shifting the dominant narrative form 'climate' as a global phenomenon to the more localized notion of 'environment'. This leads to the construction of the conflict line between transnational, externally imposed policies aiming at climate protection and the populist-supported local actions, aiming at improving the quality of life of citizens. This localized framing of climate protection aligns with the people-centered rhetoric of the populist parties, which present themselves as advocates for the welfare, prosperity, and representation of the common people living within a single nation-state.

2.2.3 Gender

In comparison to the two issues discussed above, gender equality occupies the least prominent position in the latest manifestos of CE populist parties. It is addressed only in three frames, making it the least diverse in terms of interpretative approaches. Furthermore, out of the ten political parties, only five make any reference to gender equality policies (GEP). Among the three frames, two discuss gender equality policies in a predominantly negative light, while one adopts a more nuanced perspective (Table E).

Table E. Central European populist parties' frames on gender equality

Gender		
Frame	Description	Occurrences
GEP as a threat to the traditional family and to society	GEP framed as an ideology that aims at a shift in values, bringing the decline of the traditional Western model of life. Words and phrases such as: "gender experiments", "gender ideology", "natural/traditional family", "threat to the upbringing of children".	4
Modern-traditional approach to the gender roles	In this frame populist parties support gender equality. The state should combat manifestations of discrimination, primarily in professional life. This principle is not transferred to the gender roles in the family/private life. Words and phrases such as: "supporting women's entrepreneurship", "acting against the exclusion", "strengthening women's position in the society", "reducing inequalities".	4
GEP as a way to interfere in national politics	GEP presented externally imposed, limiting the freedom to decide on the functioning of society and the nation. Words and phrases such as: "interference", "Istanbul Convention dictum", "intervention into the policy formation process".	2

Two frames have dominated the discourse of the surveyed parties on gender equality. The first presents it as a threat to the 'traditional family' and social relations. The proposed reforms regulating the relations between genders are interpreted in a broad historical and cultural horizon, as an alien ideology that is hostile to the natural evolution of gender roles. Their introduction is seen as an 'experiment' or social engineering, that may well culminate in the collapse of Western civilisation. PiS political manifesto (2023) follows this direction:

The Law and Justice Party will vigorously defend the natural family — in the form and understanding that has characterized Western civilization for centuries. Today's world

promotes many ideologies aimed at destroying this fundamental social unit. We have opposed these efforts, and we will continue to do so, while simultaneously taking action to strengthen the family, defend parenthood, uphold the special role of the mother, and respect motherhood.

The second most common frame is the modern approach to gender roles. Here, populist parties address the female electorate as well, presenting themselves as defenders of equal opportunities for women in professional life, supporting their entrepreneurship and combating violence against women. Usually, these demands are of a general nature, without specifying how the parties intend to promote equality between the sexes and they are silent on the equalisation of gender roles in the family and private life. An example of such a statement is an excerpt from the Slovak party OL'aNO political manifesto (2023):

We will implement policies aimed at reducing inequality between men and women and eliminating discrimination against women.

In the last frame GEP are presented as regulations imposed from the outside, e.g. by the West, liberal intellectuals or the European Union, as regulations that 'interfere' with state sovereignty and the right of the state to decide for itself on the nature of social relations. The SPD (2023) is an example of such a frame:

We reject the ratification of the Istanbul Convention. We will reject any interference by the European Union authorities in the Czech social policies, especially in the maternity care policy and parental leave in the Czech Republic.

In conclusion, analyzing the frames used by CE populist parties on immigration, climate change, and gender reveals that they share many similarities: They are often linked to externally imposed dictates, such as those by the European Union or the West, and they are framed as threats to traditional lifestyles or the existing political and cultural order. However, contrary to the dominant academic perspective, the analysis also uncovered instances of a positive approach to these topics, particularly regarding climate issues and gender equality policies. CE populist parties, while opposing the dominant liberal discourse, utilize these issues to expand their electoral appeal (in the case of gender) and to challenge the mainstream perspective with their own framing (in the case of climate change).

3 The Demand Side of Central European Populism: Analysis of Survey Data

3.1 Introduction

This section of the report is based on an empirical analysis of voter attitudes, focusing on the demand side of CE populist parties. The alignment of the voters' attitudes on three key issues (i.e., immigration, climate change, and gender equality) could constitutes the societal dimension of a potential socio-cultural cleavage. To determine whether the three issues converge and form a cohesive societal dimension from the perspective of voters' attitudes in Central Europe, we conducted a comparative analysis of two public opinion surveys: the European Values Survey (EVS) dataset released in 2017 and a new dataset compiled in 2024 within the ActEU project.

The chapter presents the results from the two surveys in the chronological order (first the EVS 2017, then the ActEU 2024 survey). It is structured in this way for two main reasons: First, presenting the datasets separately is more logical due to differences in country coverage, sampling and data collection methods. Second, showcasing the analysis of the most recent dataset in the second part of the chapter highlights changes and shifts in citizen attitudes between 2017 and 2023–2024 more effectively.

3.2 Data and methods

The two selected surveys, EVS 2017 and ActEU 2024, conducted seven years apart, offer a comparative, temporal perspective that would be unattainable if we solely relied on the ActEU 2024 survey. While immigration has long been politicised and is considered the primary driver of public support for CE populist parties, recent years have seen gender equality and environmental issues gain political prominence. For instance, there has been an increase in populist rhetoric, politicised claims, and confrontational decisions shaping climate action (Marquardt and Lederer 2022, 735). Similarly, recent studies document the rise of anti-gender agendas with transphobic elements and the vocal defence of gender equality and social justice by certain political actors and civil society movements (e.g., Lombardo et al. 2022). Therefore, despite differences in samples and included questions across the two surveys, a comparative analysis of the EVS 2017 and ActEU 2024 surveys can reveal whether populist supporters' attitudes on these issues have evolved over time and have become part of a transnational dimension.

The EVS is the only available and most recent survey released before the ActEU 2024 dataset, which includes questions on gender equality, immigration, and the environment (even though it is not particularly focused on climate change) and which features all the four Central European countries (Czechia, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). The ActEU 2024 survey, on the other hand, reflects the most recent situation regarding the voters' attitudes on the three issues. However, since this survey does not include data from Slovakia and Hungary, our analysis of the 2024 situation is limited to the findings from Czechia and Poland.

3.3 The EVS 2017 analysis

Our analysis of the EVS 2017 data consists of two main steps. In the first, to determine whether supporters of CE populist parties converge on the issues of immigration, gender equality, and climate change, we conducted a factor analysis on variables related to their attitudes on these three issues. In the second step, we estimated several regression models to examine the relationship between these attitudes and the support for populist parties.

We measured the dependent variable, the support for populist party, based on Q49 of the survey, 'which political party appeals to you most' taking it as a dichotomous measure (1 = populist party appeals the most). We included parties identified as populist within the country reports of the PopuList Project both from the left and right of the ideological spectrum and those that have support exceeding five percent (see Table F). Approximately 33 per cent of the total sample were supporters of these populist parties. In total there were 2,035 supporters (more details can be found in Tables ZC and ZD of descriptive statistics in the Appendix). Nevertheless, due to missing data, the samples of populist party supporters are slightly different in each analytical step. The sample sizes of populist party supporters are always reported at the relevant place.

Table F. The List of Populist Parties per Country included in the EVS
Czechia
Action of Dissatisfied Citizens (ANO)
Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)
Poland
Law and Justice (PiS)
Slovakia
Slovensko
Direction – Slovak Social Democracy (SMER)
Slovak National Party (SNS)
Hungary
Fidesz
Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik)

Table ZB in the Appendix provides a list and description of our independent variables. Given the absence of a specific question on climate change in the survey, we focused on questions assessing attitudes towards the environment or environmental threats. The list also includes questions related to our control variables. We controlled for traditional socio-demographic characteristics such as age, sex, and education. Additionally, as suggested by the literature, we included attitudinal variables such as self-declared position on the left-right scale, attitudes on the economic left-right spectrum, trust in political institutions (Zhirkov 2014), social trust (Schübel and Willer 2015; Berning and Ziller 2017), interest in politics (Leone et al. 2014), and whether the respondent was born in the respective country. Given the strong association between support for populist parties and Euroscepticism (Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2013; Pirro et al. 2018), we also controlled for attitudes towards the EU through a question on confidence in the EU.

3.3.1 Factor analysis

We start by discussing the results from the factor analysis. We use Cattell's scree test to establish how many factors to retain (Preacher and MacCallum 2003). The results of the rotated factor analysis with a Kaiser normalisation specification are contained in Table G. In the pooled dataset, the four issues do not load on the same factor. The migration items all, except for one (the 'cultural' question on migrants' customs), load solely on one factor (*factor 2*). The environmental items all, except for one (give part of my income to protect environment) load on one factor too (*factor 3*). Gender-related items load onto two factors, which are both independent of the 'environmental' and 'migration' factors. One is created by items capturing the role of women at home (*factor 1*) and the other relates to broad societal, economic, and political aspects of gender roles (*factor 4*).

We also include a battery of questions capturing economic left-right attitudes. These items do not load onto any of the four previous factors capturing migration, gender, and environmental attitudes. Interestingly, they do not load jointly on one factor (*factor 5*). Only one aspect of left-right economic attitudes (right to refuse job) loads on that factor. The results of our exploratory factor analysis, therefore, suggest that on the demand side in the eight countries analysed, migration, gender, and environmental attitudes do not form a single coherent dimension in the year 2017 for supporters of CE populist parties. In other words, we do not see a bundling of the attitudes on these three issues in a common dimension, according to EVS 2017 data.

We cross-validate these results using confirmatory factor analysis, which can help uncover whether a single latent underlying dimension is consistent with the data. Confirmatory factor analysis shows that if the three issues are bundled as belonging to one underlying factor, the model fit is poor with a Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual of 0.123 and hence above the acceptable level of 0.08 for model fit. Using the Satorra–Bentler scaled chi-squared statistic to estimate the underlying structural equation model, which unfortunately does not allow to use population and/or country weights and thus may bias the results towards larger countries, the values of the Comparative Fit Index (0.367) and Tucker–Lewis Index (0.297) suggest highly poor model fit as well (Pituch and Stevens 2016). In other words, confirmatory factor analysis does not suggest a single underlying latent dimension that fits the data well. This supports our findings from the exploratory factor analysis.

Table G. Rotated factor analysis of the pooled dataset

Variance

Factor	Variance	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	2.27014	0.21357	0.3184	0.3184
Factor2	2.05657	0.39112	0.2885	0.6069
Factor3	1.66546	0.03775	0.2336	0.8405
Factor4	1.62771	1.22837	0.2283	1.0688
Factor5	0.39934	.	0.0560	1.1248

Loadings

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Factor5	Uniqueness

Priority to nationals over immigrants	0.3032		0.8509
Impact of these immigrants on the development of a country	0.5829		0.6455
Immigrants take jobs away	0.5706		0.6566
Immigrants and crime problems worse	0.7548		0.4151
Immigrants as a strain on a country's welfare system	0.7840		0.3728
Immigrants and their distinct customs			0.9567
Give part of my income to protect environment			0.9081
Too difficult to do much about the environment		0.4740	0.7069
More important things than protect the environment		0.5844	0.6350
No point in doing what I can unless others do the same		0.6813	0.4987
Claims about environmental threats are exaggerated		0.5587	0.6647
Protecting environment vs. economic growth		0.3696	0.8613
Mother works for pay, the children suffer	0.7701		0.3929
Most women really want is a home and children	0.5821		0.6309

Family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job	0.8070			0.3386
A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family	0.6609			0.4754
Men make better political leaders than women do		0.6506		0.5570
A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl		0.5955		0.6200
Men make better business executives than women do		0.6777		0.5226
Men have more right to a job than women		0.4285		0.6815
State responsibility				0.9017
Right to refuse a job			0.4141	0.8123
Incentives for individual effort				0.9447
Government ownership of business and industry				0.9309

Note: Factor loadings below 0.3 are represented by blank cells for better readability of the underlying dimensionality. N = 11,452.

3.3.2 Regression analysis: predicting populist party support

In addition to the factor analysis, we conduct a regression analysis to detect whether the populist party supporters' attitudes on immigration, gender equality, and the environment are associated with their support for these parties. We construct an additive index for these three issues based on the corresponding EVS questions. The index is then normalised to range between 0 and 10. Low values on the indexes represent sceptical views (towards gender equality, migration, and environment), while high values present positive attitudes. Table H below shows the results of a series of regression models in which preference for the populist parties is regressed on the individual migration, gender, and environment attitudes as well as indexes summing up the attitudes towards the three issues. Below, we also graphically examine these associations through predicted probability plots. We employ country-fixed effects to avoid a potential inconsistency due to unobserved country heterogeneity as well as country-clustered heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. Models 1, 2, and 3 show the association of each index (migration, environment,

and gender respectively) with the support for the populist parties in the absence of the other two indexes. Model 4 shows the association between each index and the preference for populist partiers when we also control for the other two attitudinal indexes. Model 4 is eventually our baseline model, which we use to substantively interpret results. We provide the descriptive statistics of our variables in Tables ZC and ZD in the Appendix. Figure A presents predicted probability plots for the three attitudinal indexes (migration, gender, environment) and the socio-economic left-right index. Figure B presents the coefficient plot of populist party support based on Model 4.

Table H. Covariates of populist party support: attitudinal indexes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Migration index	0.789***			0.777***
	(0.032)			(0.055)
Environment index		0.919***		0.960*
		(0.016)		(0.019)
Gender index			0.899	0.970
			(0.062)	(0.049)
EU confidence	0.624***	0.552***	0.544***	0.643***
	(0.075)	(0.050)	(0.053)	(0.057)
Left-right self-placement	1.191*	1.199*	1.215*	1.182*
	(0.090)	(0.091)	(0.097)	(0.085)
Economic left-right index	0.898***	0.897*	0.879***	0.911**
	(0.023)	(0.039)	(0.030)	(0.026)
Medium income	1.114	1.037	0.955	0.973
	(0.181)	(0.117)	(0.070)	(0.072)
High income	1.250	1.185	1.104	1.188
	(0.272)	(0.254)	(0.150)	(0.278)
Sex (=women)	1.063	1.039	0.964	0.990
	(0.115)	(0.078)	(0.049)	(0.061)
Native-born	1.962*	2.139*	1.743+	3.198*
	(0.674)	(0.748)	(0.503)	(1.472)
Medium education	0.674*	0.711*	0.688*	0.598*
	(0.117)	(0.121)	(0.118)	(0.137)
High education	0.363***	0.391***	0.399***	0.370***
	(0.067)	(0.076)	(0.091)	(0.087)
Age	1.082*	1.068+	1.065*	1.074*
	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.029)	(0.033)
Age^2	0.999*	0.999	1.000+	0.999*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Social trust	0.751***	0.713***	0.686***	0.751***
	(0.063)	(0.065)	(0.062)	(0.051)
Trust in parliament	1.407	1.340	1.374+	1.277
	(0.369)	(0.307)	(0.258)	(0.241)
Trust in parties	0.767***	0.826**	0.920	0.851***
	(0.017)	(0.049)	(0.073)	(0.017)
Trust in government	1.745***	1.716***	1.515***	1.594***

	(0.102)	(0.095)	(0.139)	(0.109)
Political interest	1.023	0.948	0.913	0.969
	(0.175)	(0.175)	(0.179)	(0.178)
Satisfaction political system	1.181***	1.212***	1.182***	1.193***
	(0.029)	(0.042)	(0.039)	(0.045)
Democracy importance	0.995	0.984	1.006	1.005
	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.036)
Democratic governance	1.115	1.115	1.119	1.115
	(0.088)	(0.101)	(0.092)	(0.084)
_cons	0.010*	0.016*	0.031*	0.016*
	(0.023)	(0.028)	(0.051)	(0.026)
N	2704	2608	2602	2317
Pseudo-R squared	0.333	0.330	0.321	0.332

Odds ratios; Robust standard errors in parentheses. $^+ p < 0.1$, $^* p < 0.05$, $^{**} p < 0.01$, $^{***} p < 0.001$

Figure A. Predicted probabilities of populist party support (based on Model 4)
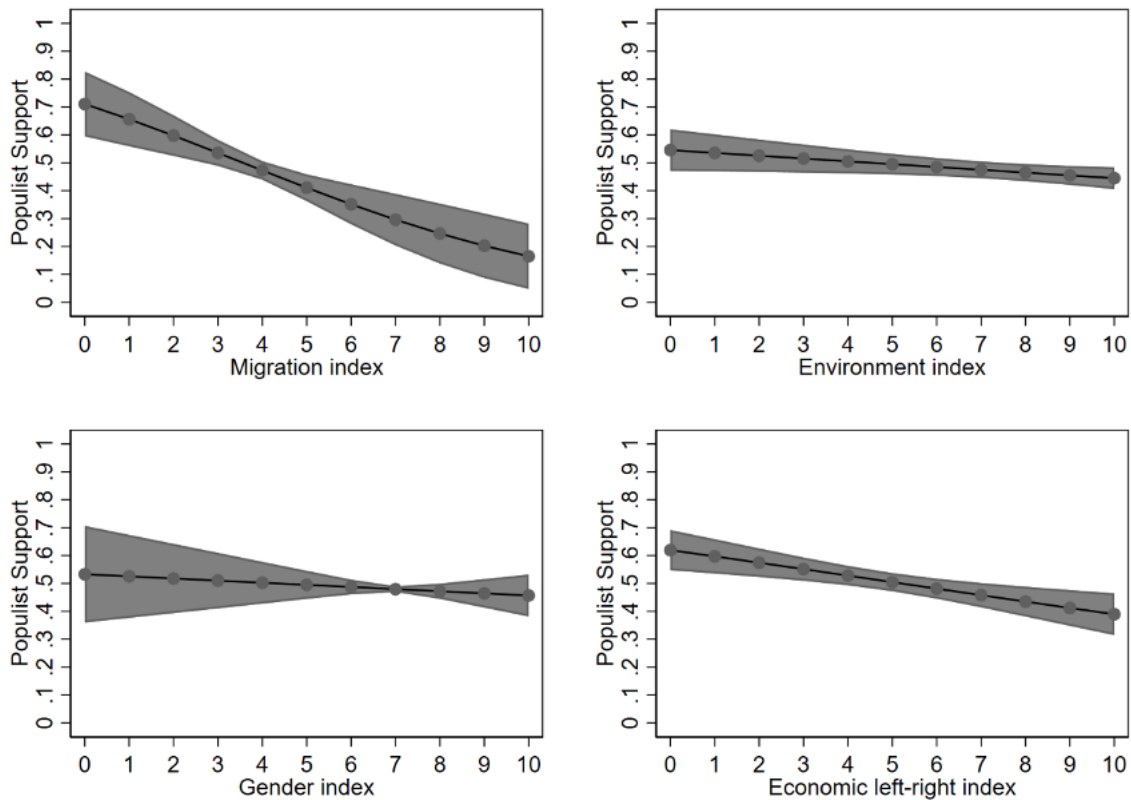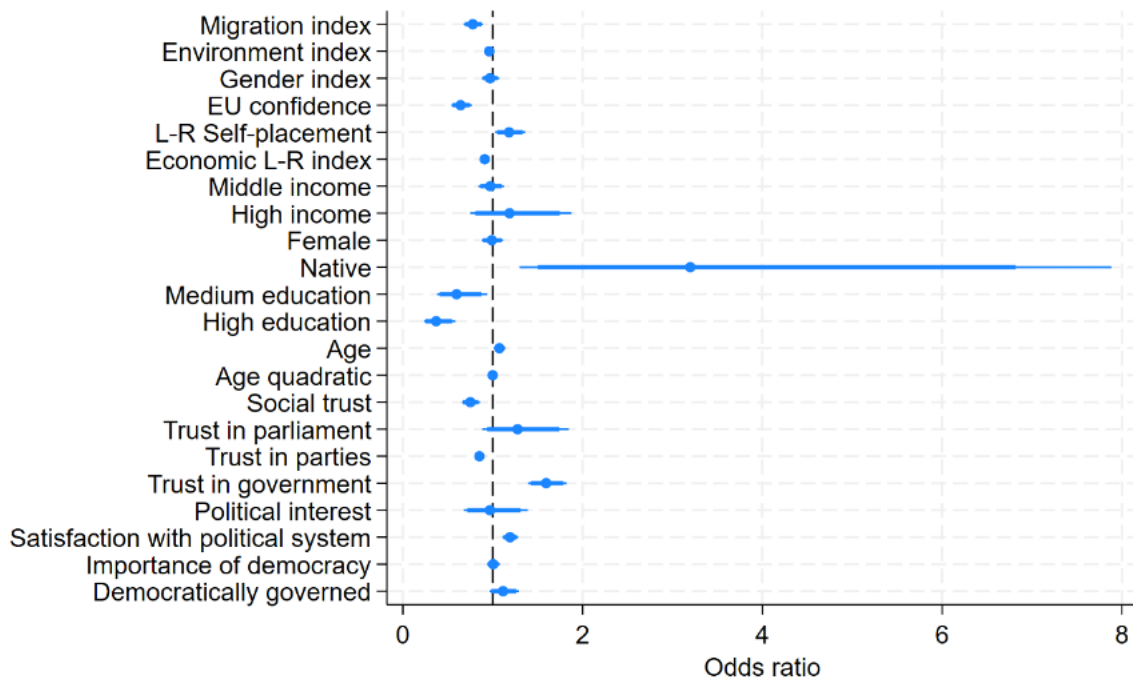
Figure B. Coefficient plot of populist party support (based on Model 4)

Note: Horizontal lines represent 95 and 90 per cent confidence intervals, respectively. Odds ratios.

Our regression analysis (according to both Model 1 and Model 4) shows that anti-immigrant attitudes were among the top three strongest factors influencing support for populist parties in CE (along with the lack of trust in parties and being on the right of centre). This is in line with the general knowledge that after the 2015 refugee crisis, populist ideas were increasingly combined with nationalist ideologies, mainly due to the populists' targeting of immigrants of Muslim background. These groups were often portrayed as a threat to public and economic safety, a theme that became prominent in such parties as Fidesz, SMER, the PiS as well as the then Czech President Miloš Zeman (Stojarova 2018). The EVS data from the year 2017 speak to this new emerging context. It is important to highlight that our migration index is comprised both of the economic and cultural perspectives on migration, asking respondents questions such as whether immigrants take jobs from nationals or strain the country's welfare system (economic concerns), and whether their distinct customs are perceived as problematic by the native population (cultural concerns). When we combine the findings from our factor analysis with the results of our regression analysis, it becomes evident that anti-immigration attitudes among populist party supporters are more strongly driven by economic concerns than by cultural ones. Therefore, while the support for populist parties was driven by anti-immigrant agendas by 2017, there is no evidence that this support was linked to these parties' emphasis on the Muslim background of immigrants, or more specifically, on the cultural differences rooted in the perceptions of Islam as alien.

In contrast to the migration index, our regression analysis based on Model 4 does not indicate any significant influence of the gender index on the support for populist parties, while the environmental index seems to have only a very minor influence. This suggests that when all three attitudinal indexes are considered in a single model, attitudes toward the environment and gender equality lose their significance in comparison to immigration-related attitudes. This finding is unsurprising, as immigration became a highly politicized issue in Central European public debates during 2017 (Kovář 2023, Navrátil and Kluknavská 2022). It is also worth noting that when the

32

effect of each index is examined independently, without the influence of the other two, we see quite similar results. For instance, Model 2 isolates the effect of the environmental index on populist party support by excluding the gender and immigration indexes. Here, we observe that the influence of the environmental index on populist party support reaches statistical significance at the 0.001 level (unlike at the 0,05 level in Model 4), but the size of its effect remains small. This finding provides some limited support for the importance of anti-climate rhetoric prevalent among the populist parties discussed in our literature review. While climate and environmental issues were not particularly salient in 2017, economic concerns—such as the belief that climate protection reforms could damage national economies or disadvantage poorer segments of society (Huber et al. 2021)—may have implicitly influenced respondents when confronted with questions about the environment. Indeed, our Factor Analysis, which highlights the bundling of certain environmental attitudes (e.g., the views that 'there are more important issues than environmental protection' or that 'environmental threats are exaggerated by politicians'), showcases the logic underpinning populist supporters' stance on environmental matters. It reveals that they are not especially interested in addressing environmental concerns, prioritizing instead solutions to immigration and socio-economic issues.

When examining the influence of the gender index independently (Model 3)—without the environment and migration indexes—its effect becomes apparent, though its statistical significance is comparatively lower. As discussed in our literature review, populist parties in Central Europe often promote traditional or essentialist views of women's roles (Grzebalska and Pető 2018), even though this issue did not carry the same weight in public debates as immigration in 2017. Similar to the pattern we observe with environmental attitudes, supporters of populist parties may respond in a particular way when confronted with questions on gender equality. However, as with environmental attitudes, traditional views on gender—which are bundled in our factor analysis— do not appear to be the main motivation for supporting populist parties. At the same time, as again indicated by our factor analysis, these traditional attitudes are not necessarily linked to opposition to women's education or leadership roles. In other words, while traditional views on gender equality exist, populist party supporters may not fundamentally oppose women's professional participation, much like the parties themselves, as some previous studies have noted (Gwiazda 2020).

The study was controlled for several variables, which can be divided into four groups: socio-economic, political trust, satisfaction with the political system, and the voters' systemic positioning. The socio-economic variables included age, income, sex, nativity (being native-born), and education level. Among these, age, nativity, and medium or high education levels were statistically significant. Being native-born and age increased the likelihood of voting for populist parties, while middle and high education levels showed a negative correlation, indicating that more educated individuals are less likely to vote for populist parties. Although these results align partially with the branch of research that describes the typical populist voter profile as a 'middle-aged, low-educated man', the lack of a strong gender differentiation suggests that populist parties are broadening their voter base beyond the traditional male electorate (Weeks et al., 2022; Stockemer and Normandin, 2022). Similarly, the finding that income does not influence populist support challenges the long-standing argument that post-transition economic deprivation drives populist support in Central Europe (Dvořák et al., 2022; Ágh, 2015).

Left-right self-placement has some but not very strong effect, which may reflect the phenomenon described in the literature that the left-right dimension is much less relevant in Central Europe than in established democracies (Jahn, 2022), or that the polarization of society makes the divide between mainstream politics and populism in some countries more prominent than the left-right

dimension (Noury and Roland, 2020). On the other hand, the economic left-right index has strong statistical significance, showing that economically left-oriented voters are more likely to vote for populist parties.

Because we also wanted to understand the sources and impact of decreasing political trust, the regression analysis also included variables measuring the relationship between trust and voting for populist parties. We selected a wide range of variables to shed more light on this question. We found a positive relationship between support for populist parties and trust in government. This contrasts with the majority of research, which claims populist voters are sceptical of liberal democratic institutions and political establishment. However, this result might be related to the fact that populist parties have been present on the Central European party scene for many years, including participating in governments, which has diminished their anti-establishment image. Moreover, during the EVS fieldwork, populist parties were in power in three of the examined countries—Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary—and in the Czech Republic, the populist ANO had won the election and was forming the government. Building on the current literature (Enyedi, 2020; Hajdinjak, 2022), we expect that trust in government is likely an extension of trust in the populist parties in power rather than trust in government in general. Conversely, trust in political parties, though highly statistically significant, decreases voting for populist parties. We also examined the impact of trust in parliament, the EU (EU confidence), and social trust. The results confirmed the 'tribal logic' of populist voters' trust, as they showed no effect for trust in consensual and pluralistic institutions such as parliament, and a negative relationship between EU trust and populist voting intentions. This aligns with the highly statistically significant finding that people with low levels of social trust are more likely to vote for populist parties.

Building on the literature that highlights the specificity of CE populism in the experience of democratic transition, this study also included three control variables measuring the relationship between attitudes towards the current political regime and voting for populist parties: satisfaction with the political system, the belief that it is important to live in a democratically governed country, and support for the democratic political system. Only the satisfaction with the political system increased the likelihood of support for populist parties. While some research claims that CE populist parties capitalize on disappointment with systemic transition (Peng 2024), we show that voters who evaluate the current political system positively are more likely to vote for populists. However, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, we expect that this result may reflect satisfaction with populist parties being in government rather than pro-democratic attitudes among populist voters.

3.4 ActEU Survey

Similar to the analysis of EVS 2017 data, our analysis of the ActEU 2024 survey seeks to address two interrelated questions. First, we aim to determine whether the attitudinal indices on immigration, gender equality and climate change converge in the form of a societal cleavage. To this end, we have employed a combination of exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. It is important to remember that, unlike the EVS 2017, the ActEU survey includes data only for Czechia and Poland, and the environmental questions are more specifically focused on the issue of climate change.

Second, we have run a regression analysis to assess the explanatory weight of each attitudinal index along with the other variables discussed in our EVS 2017 analysis (i.e., Euroscepticism, economic left-right divide, education level, income level, political interest, social trust, political trust, age). Yet the measures used for our dependent and independent variables differ slightly from

those of the EVS 2017 due to the different structuring of the ActEU survey questions. Most importantly, we measure the dependent variable of our study, the support for a populist party, as the party with the highest probability of voting based on a scale of 0 to 10, using the question no. 32 'How probable is it that you will ever vote for the following parties?' (see Table ZE) since there are multiple populist parties that respondents can select from the list of parties in the ActEU survey. To ensure the most robust results, we selected the strongest populist party from each country—ANO in Czechia and PiS in Poland. Both parties have gained significant public support and have served as governing parties. Table ZE in the Appendix provides a list and description of our independent variables used in our analysis.

4.4.1 Factor analysis

We start by discussing the results from the factor analysis. As in the EVS analysis, we use Cattell's scree test to establish how many factors to retain (Preacher and MacCallum 2003). The results of the rotated factor analysis with a Kaiser normalisation specification are contained in Table I. In the pooled dataset, the four issues do not load on the same factor. The migration items all load solely on one factor (factor 2). The gender items also all load on one factor (factor 1). The environmental items load onto two factors, independent of the 'environmental' and 'migration' factors. One factor (factor 4) is composed of two economic questions related to climate change, which concern (a) the willingness to decrease the personal level of consumption and (b) the implementation of climate protection measures regardless of cost. The other three items loading together (factor 3) are more concerned with the socio-political aspects of climate change. One environmental question (the implementation of climate protection measures regardless of cost) loads on both factor 3 and factor 4, but it has much higher loading on the latter factor related to the economic aspects of climate change/environment. Like in the previous analysis of the EVS 2017, the results of the exploratory factor analysis based on the ActEu survey suggest that on the demand side in Czechia and Poland, migration, gender, and environmental attitudes are not bundled within a single dimension In Central Europe.

We cross-validate these results using confirmatory factor analysis, which can help uncover whether a single latent underlying dimension is consistent with the data. Confirmatory factor analysis shows that if the three issues are bundled as belonging to one underlying factor, the model fit is poor, with a Standardised Root Mean Squared Residual of 0.133, which is above the acceptable level of 0.08 for model fit. Using the Satorra–Bentler scaled chi-squared statistic to estimate the underlying structural equation model, which unfortunately does not allow the use of population and/or country weights and thus may bias the results towards larger countries, the values of the Comparative Fit Index (0.537) and Tucker–Lewis Index (0.451) suggest poor model fit as well (Pituch and Stevens 2016). In other words, confirmatory factor analysis does not suggest a single underlying latent dimension that fits the data well. This supports our findings from the exploratory factor analysis.

Table I. Rotated factor analysis of the pooled dataset

Variance				
Factor	Variance	Difference	Proportion	Cumulative
Factor1	2.70795	0.83926	0.4323	0.4323
Factor2	1.86869	0.09837	0.2983	0.7305

Factor3	1.77032	0.90151	0.2826	1.0131	
Factor4	0.86880	.	0.1387	1.1518	

Loadings

Variable	Factor1	Factor2	Factor3	Factor4	Uniqueness
Bad or good for economy that people come to live here from other countries?		0.8034			0.3000
Made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?		0.7984			0.3015
Extent of allowing people of a different race or ethnic group to come and live here?		0.5782			0.6282
Measures that ensure equal pay for men and women	0.7247				0.4663
Measures against sexual harassment in the workplace	0.6386				0.5627
Measures to ensure parity between men and women in politics	0.7357				0.4298
Measures that target gender-based violence	0.6092				0.5449
Measures that target the distribution of household chores and childcare (e.g. paternal leave)	0.6251				0.5919
Measures that ensure access to the voluntary interruption of pregnancy	0.4930				0.7198
Claims that human activities are changing the climate are exaggerated.			0.7269		0.4529

Willing to decrease my personal level of consumption to actively fight climate change.		0.5809	0.4638
Climate protection measures need to be implemented, regardless of cost.	0.3240	0.5972	0.3985
There are other, more pressing issues in [country] than environmental protection.	0.6210		0.5539
Climate change is just an excuse for politicians to further restrict our freedom.	0.7672		0.3700

3.4.2 Regression analysis: Predicting populist party voting intentions

In addition to the factor analysis, we conduct a regression analysis to detect whether the citizens' attitudes on immigration, gender equality, and the environment are associated with their intention to vote for a populist party. To do this, we construct an additive index for each of these three issues based on the ActEU questions on each issue. The index is then normalised to range between 0 and 10. Low values on the indexes represent sceptical views (towards gender, migration, and environment), while high values present positive attitudes. Table J below show the results of a series of regression models in which voting intention for the populist parties is regressed on the indexes summing up attitudes towards the three issues. Below, we graphically examine these associations through adjusted means plots. We employ country-fixed effects to avoid a potential inconsistency due to unobserved country heterogeneity and country-clustered heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors. All models are linear regressions estimated by the ordinary least squares technique. Models 1, 2, and 3 show the association of each index (migration, environment, and gender, respectively) with the voting intention for the PFRPs in the absence of the other two indexes. Model 4 shows the association between each index and the voting intention for a populist party when we also control for the other two attitudinal indexes. Model 4 eventually becomes our baseline model, which we use to interpret results substantively. Table ZF and ZG in the Appendix provides the descriptive statistics of our dependent and independent variables. Figure D presents adjusted means plots for the three attitudinal indexes. Figure C also presents the coefficient plot of populist party voting intention based on Model 4. Figure D presents the adjusted means of populist party voting intention based on Model 4.

Table J. Covariates of populist voting intention: attitudinal indexes

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Migration index	-0.019			0.028
	(0.025)			(0.046)
Gender index		-0.033		-0.051
		(0.020)		(0.019)

Environment index			-0.114[+]	-0.131
			(0.011)	(0.021)
EU support	-0.071	-0.057	-0.058	-0.041
	(0.031)	(0.043)	(0.024)	(0.049)
Trust in EU index	0.208	0.202	0.222	0.232
	(0.231)	(0.231)	(0.207)	(0.252)
Left-right self-placement	0.338	0.348	0.325	0.325
	(0.345)	(0.332)	(0.338)	(0.337)
GAL-TAN placement	0.042	0.016	0.001	-0.008
	(0.065)	(0.075)	(0.070)	(0.085)
Social trust	0.101	0.098	0.086	0.094
	(0.038)	(0.048)	(0.052)	(0.042)
Trust in parliament	0.211	0.187	0.195	0.178
	(0.110)	(0.123)	(0.111)	(0.118)
Trust in government	-0.054	-0.050	-0.070	-0.051
	(0.158)	(0.122)	(0.141)	(0.153)
Trust in government parties	-0.540[+]	-0.534[+]	-0.546[+]	-0.534[+]
	(0.059)	(0.071)	(0.062)	(0.082)
Trust in opposition parties	0.074	0.094	0.084	0.097
	(0.064)	(0.068)	(0.073)	(0.080)
Political interest	0.502[*]	0.551[+]	0.497[*]	0.499[*]
	(0.023)	(0.061)	(0.026)	(0.017)
Sex (=women)	0.529	0.544	0.528	0.535
	(0.194)	(0.213)	(0.169)	(0.227)
Age	0.014	0.017[+]	0.015	0.025
	(0.019)	(0.002)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Age^2	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000	-0.000[**]
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Medium education	-0.976[*]	-0.987[*]	-0.949[+]	-0.832[*]
	(0.055)	(0.050)	(0.083)	(0.032)
High education	-1.493[*]	-1.536[*]	-1.420[+]	-1.457[*]
	(0.089)	(0.051)	(0.137)	(0.096)
Income level	-0.127[*]	-0.137[*]	-0.134[*]	-0.124[*]
	(0.005)	(0.007)	(0.010)	(0.002)
Satisfaction political system	0.102	0.065	0.106	0.049
	(0.139)	(0.150)	(0.144)	(0.148)
Democracy importance	-0.037	-0.031	-0.044	-0.034
	(0.087)	(0.094)	(0.088)	(0.100)
Democratic governance	-0.230	-0.193	-0.198	-0.164
	(0.082)	(0.080)	(0.086)	(0.085)
_cons	3.098	3.144	3.793	3.560
	(1.859)	(1.264)	(1.761)	(1.082)
N	1871	1791	1917	1710
adj. R^2	0.299	0.305	0.313	0.299

Robust standard errors in parentheses; [+] $p < 0.1$, [*] $p < 0.05$, [**] $p < 0.01$, [***] $p < 0.001$

Figure C. Coefficient plot of populist party voting intention (based on Model 4)
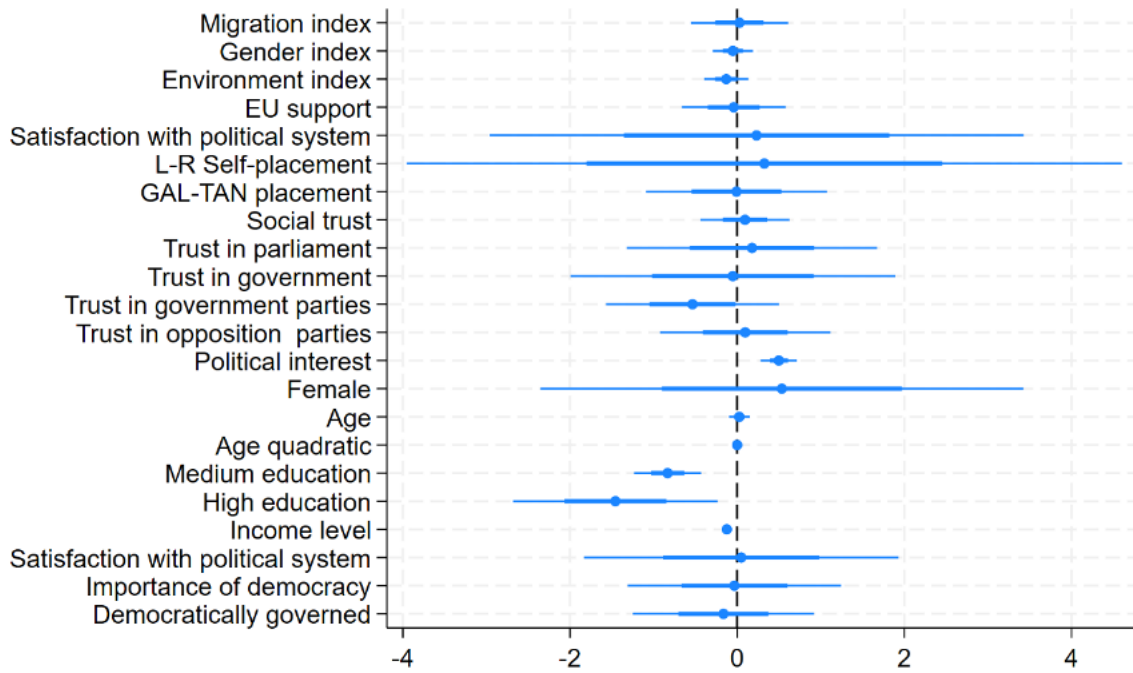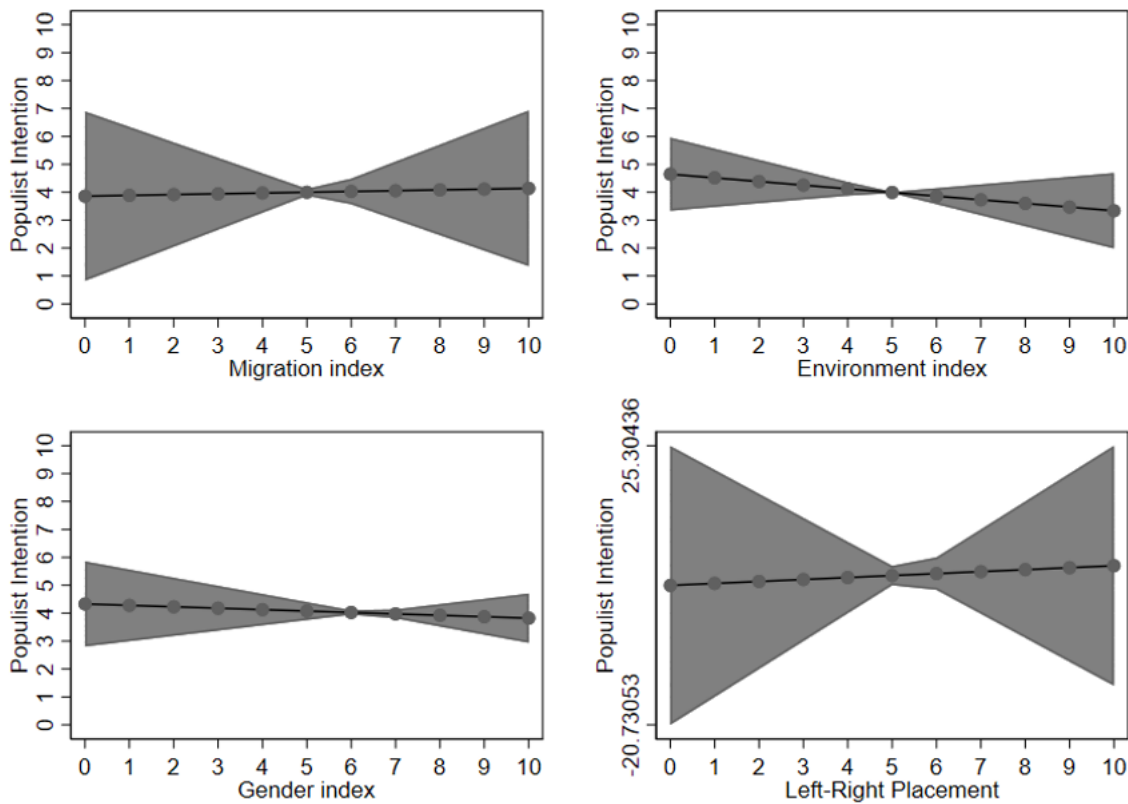

Figure D. Adjusted means of populist party voting intention (based on Model 4)

The results of our ActEU survey analysis reveal no statistically significant relationship between populist voting intention and attitudes toward gender equality, immigration, or climate change. This holds true whether these three attitudinal indexes are considered together (Model 4) or

examined individually (Models 1, 2, and 3). Consequently, the survey suggests that positions on immigration, climate change, and gender equality do not notably influence people's intention to support populist parties.

A substantial body of literature has previously evidenced that the populist voting in Central Europe originates from the linkage between anti-establishment sentiments and growing concerns about immigration. In other words, voters in this region are known to have redirected their frustrations of economic injustice toward supranational immigration policies (e.g., Dvořak 2022; Kende and Krekó 2020; Vachudova 2020). However, our analysis of the ActEU 2024 survey does not confirm this trend, diverging from our findings from the EVS 2017 survey. It is important to remember that the PiS and ANO have both held government roles for an extended period prior to 2024, which may have moderated their "anti-establishment" appeal to some extent. Additionally, respondents' perceptions of "immigration policies" may have shifted following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent influx of Ukrainian refugees into Central European countries (Duszczyk 2023; Pędziwiatr and Magdziarz 2023). The ActEU survey does not differentiate immigrants by origin, so it is unclear if the type or origin of immigrants influences respondents' views. Nonetheless, our results align with recent surveys that also show anti-immigration sentiments have less influence on populist voting in Central Europe compared to Western Europe (Lenik 2024).

The absence of any impact from the gender equality and climate change indexes on populist voting intention is also interesting, given the growing prominence of these issues in the European public sphere. Populist parties in Central Europe typically exhibit lower levels of trust in EU institutions (Petrović and Fila 2023), which would lead us to expect a backlash against EU-driven agendas like the European Green Deal or the gender equality strategy. However, our findings indicate that other factors, such as trust in governing parties and political interest (see below), hold greater importance for these voters than these issues in Central Europe.

We include into our study several traditional control variables (see the regression table above). Among these, socio-economic variables—specifically age, education level, and income—achieved statistical significance. The analysis reveals that individuals with medium to high levels of education are less likely to vote for populist parties than those with only primary education. This result aligns with studies suggesting that the simplified language of populist messaging (Bischof and Senninger 2017), the topics addressed by populists (Kittel 2024) and their programmes resonate less with medium and higher education people than with those possessing primary education (Aalberg et al., 2017). Similarly, our findings indicate a negative relationship between high income and support for populist parties. This pattern corroborates the well-established finding about the relationship between voting for populist parties and experiences of economic deprivation (Dvořák and Zouhar 2022; Tóth and Lantos 2024). Age also emerged as a statistically significant socio-economic indicator. However, its size effect is too small to draw firm conclusions about its influence on populist voting behaviour. To sum up the results about this group of variables, it aligns with the literature suggesting that the core of the populist voter base represents a coherent economically and socially deprived group, often described in the Central European context as "the losers of the transition" (Rupnik 2007:25).

As political trust is an important theme of this report, our study included a range of control variables measuring trust in the EU, national parliament, government, ruling parties, and opposition parties. However, only trust in ruling parties proved statistically significant. The results show that individuals who trust ruling parties are less likely to vote for populist parties. This is consistent with the research indicating the anti-establishment nature of populist parties as well as the prevailing political situation at the time of our fieldwork as the populist parties under

examination were not in power. On the other hand, this pattern is not reflected in trust in opposition parties, which is not statistically significant.

The last variable with a significant impact on voting for populist parties is political interest. This finding supports recent research suggesting that, contrary to earlier assumptions that populist party voters tend to be less knowledgeable about politics and more easily demobilized, their supporters are increasingly politically engaged, often driven by the engaging communication style (Nemčok et. Al. 2022) and charismatic leadership of populist figures.

Finally, given that the study area comprises countries that have undergone systemic transformation—a process the outcome of which is often viewed as a motivation for populist support—we examined the relationship between support for the political system, views on living under a democratic regime, and preference for democratic governance. However, none of these variables achieved statistical significance. Similarly, EU support, left-right self-placement, and GAL-TAN placement (Green, Alternative, Libertarian – Traditional, Authoritarian, Nationalist) scale did not impact populist voting behaviour in Central Europe. All of these findings open a new path for further investigation as these variable were in the past seen as important predictors for the populist voting intentions.

4 Web-Scraping Analysis: Polish and Czech populists on X/Twitter

The final part of our report complements the above demand- and supply-side analyses of CE populist parties and their voters by the analysis of X/Twitter data for four selected populist parties from the region (for more about the reasons for this selection, see below.) In this section, the report sheds light on two major aspects of CE populism. Firstly, we look into the ways through which the populist attitudes of these parties are expressed in their tweets. Similarly as in other parts of the report, we understand populism as a thin-centred ideology the core of which is a sharp distinction between the people and the elites. Hence, we focus on 'people-centric' and 'anti-elitist' codes as used in the four parties' discourses. Secondly, we explore the extents to which these four parties focus on the three issues of interest – immigration, climate change, and gender.

4.1 Data collection

ActEU project created a dataset of politically relevant web-scraped data from various sources which ranged from official authorities and political parties to traditional media and data-accessible social media. The ActEU team first drew a list of relevant actors from all the analysed countries. The dataset that was subsequently collected consisted of 26.9 million tweets (and millions of other posts, websites and articles, which are, however, not of interest for us in this report.[3] The time period covered was 1 July 2023 to 14 February 2024. In the following step, human coders marked segments related to the three topics of our interest – migration, climate change and gender; each segment was marked independently of the context. This led to the development of a machine-learning model that allowed for the analysis of discourses in multiple languages (using Pangeanic's PECAT platform).

Subsequently, a subset of tweets from populist parties for Poland and the Czech Republic was created. We identified accounts based on mentions of a populist party's name or acronym in their profile descriptions. These accounts were then ranked according to decreasing PageRank, ensuring

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[3] The data will be made public by the ActEU consortium, together with GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences.

prominence within the dataset. The lists were manually curated, resulting in the selection of under a hundred accounts per populist party, from which tweets were extracted for further analysis. The collected dataset captured tweets from identified actors, but it also contained tweets from other users who were linked to those actors, which means that additional politicians were included who did not originally feature in the seed list. However, the analysis in this report is based only on those collected tweets that were associated with the populist parties (and not those reacting to them). We increased the reliability of the coding by manually checking the tweets and also by checking whether the codes (migration, climate change, and gender) were correctly applied.

As the ActEU dataset of web-scraped data covered only selected countries, we could include only Poland and the Czech Republic in our analysis. We focused on four populist parties from these countries which we also analysed in the previous sections of this report (cf. Table A). These four parties were the ANO Movement and Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD) from the Czech Republic and Law and Justice and Sovereign Poland for Poland (see Table K). The overall number of tweets that we collected and analysed was 1337 (for the distribution of the tweets, see Table N).

Table K. CE populist parties selected for web-scraping

Country	Party name
Poland	Law and Justice (PiS)
	Sovereign Poland (SP)
Czechia	Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD)
	ANO

Table L. People-centric codes

Original language Polish	English translation	Original language Czech	English translation
Chrześcijańscy patrioci	Christian patriots	Obyčejní lidé	Ordinary people
Zwykli ludzie	Ordinary people	Obyčejní Češi	Ordinary Czechs
Zwykli Polacy	Ordinary Poles	Rozumní lidé	Reasonable people
Rozsądni ludzie	Rational people	Normální lidé	Normal people
Normalni ludzie	Normal people	Slušní lidé	Decent people
Przyzwoici ludzie	Decent people	Obránci tradic	Defenders of traditions
Obrońcy tradycji	Defenders of tradition	Obránci Česka	Defenders of Czechia
Obrońcy Polski	Defenders of Poland	Normální rodiny	Normal families
Normalne rodziny	Normal families	Obránci rodiny	Defenders of the family
Obrońcy rodziny	Family defenders	Patrioti	Patriots

Katolic*	Catholics	Praví vlastenci/ Skuteční vlastenci	True patriots
Patrio*	Patriots	Obránci vlasti	Defenders of the homeland
Prawdziwi patrioci	True patriots	Poctiví lidé	Honest people
Obrońcy ojczyzny	Defenders of the homeland	Poctiví občané	Honest citizens
Obrońcy polskości	Defenders of Polish identity	Hlas národa	Voice of the nation
Uczciwi ludzie	Honest people	Duše národa	Soul of the nation
Strażnicy tożsamości	Guardians of identity	Naši předkové	Our ancestors
Lokalni bohaterowie	Local heroes	Většina	The majority
Uczciwi obywatele	Honest citizens	Hlas lidu	Voice of the people
Głos narodu	Voice of the nation	Praví Češi	True Czechs
Dusza narodu	Soul of the nation	Sůl země	Salt of the earth
Nasi przodkowie	Our ancestors	Mlčící většina	Silent majority
Patriotyczna większość	Patriotic majority	Zrazen*	Betrayed
Głos ludu	Voice of the people	Zapomenut*	Forgotten
Prawdziwi Polacy	True Poles	Vydan* na pospas	Abandoned
Obrońcy wsi	Defenders of the countryside	Spravedliv*	The righteous
Sól ziemi	Salt of the earth	Umlčen*	Silenced
Milcząca większość	Silent majority	Bojující	Fighting
Zdradz*	Betrayed	Trpící	Suffering
Zapomnian*	The forgotten	Strážci tradic	Guardians of traditions
Zostawieni sami sobie	Left to themselves	Praví patrioti	True patriots
Sprawiedliw*	Righteous	Hlasatelé pravdy	Preachers of truth
Uciszen*	Silenced	Strážci hodnot	Guardians of values
Walczącˮ	Fighting	Moudrost venkova	Wisdom from the countryside

Cierpiąc*	Suffering	Pracující většina	Working majority
Strażnicy tradycji	Guardians of tradition	Tradiční Češi	Traditional Czechs
Prawdziwie wierzący	True believers	Z lidu	Citizens "from the people"
Prawdziwi patrioci	True patriots	Češi	Czechs
Mówcy prawdy	Truth-tellers	Lidov*	Popular
Strażnicy wartości	Guardians of values		
Mędrcy wsi	Wise villagers		
Pracująca większość	The working majority		
Polska wieś	Polish countryside		
Polacy/Polki	Poles		

Table M. Anti-elitist codes

Original language Polish	English translation	Original language Czech	English translation
Antypolacy	Anti-Poles	Služebníci Bruselu	Servants of Brussels
Służalcy Niemiec	Servants of Germany	Zrádci vlasti	Traitors to the homeland
Zdrajcy ojczyzny	Traitors to the homeland	Agenti	Agents
Rosyjscy agenci	Russian agents	Cizí agenti	Foreign agents
Niemieccy agenci	German agents	Levičácká ideologie	Left-wing ideology
Obcy agenci	Foreign agents	Obránci zahraničních zájmů	Defenders of foreign interests
Lewacka ideologia	Left-wing ideology	Agenti Bruselu	Agents of Brussels

Obrońcy interesów zagranicznych	Defenders of foreign interests	Bruselské elity	Brussels elites
Tęczowa ideologia	Rainbow ideology	Kariérista	Careerist
Agenci Brukseli	Agents of Brussels	Ničitelé tradice	Destroyers of tradition
Brukselskie elity	Brussels' elites	Ničitelé kultury	Destroyers of culture
Pionki brukseli	Brussels' puppets	Liberálové	Liberals
Karierowicz	Careerist	Liberální elity	Liberal elites
Niszczyciele tradycji	Destroyers of tradition	Soudcovská kasta	Judicial caste
Niszczyciele kultury	Destroyers of culture	Soudcovské elity	Judicial elites
Liberałowie	Liberals	Kasta	Caste
Elity liberalne	Liberal elites	Morální degeneráti	Moral degenerates
Kasta sędziowska	Judicial caste	Neomarxisté	Neomarxists
Elity sędziowskie	Judicial elites	Pokrokáři	Progressives
Elity III RP	Elites of the Third Republic	Elity odtržené od reality	Elites detached from reality
Układ	Deal	Zkorumpované elity	Corrupt elites
Salon	Salon	Zkažené elity	Decayed elites

Targowica	Traitors/Targowica	Zájmové skupiny	Interest groups
Zdrajcy narodu	Traitors of the nation	Privilegovaní	Privileged
Zdrajcy	Traitors	Velkoměstská elita	Urban elite
Kasta	Caste	Technokraté	Technocrats
Moralni degeneraci	Moral degenerates	Padlé elity	Fallen elites
Neomarksiści	Neo-Marxists	Nemorální elity	Immoral elites
Postępowcy	Progressives	Egoistické elity	Egoistic elites
Oderwane od rzeczywistości elity	Elites detached from reality	Brusel	Brussels
Skorumpowane elity	Corrupt elites	Establishment	Establishment
Zepsute elity	Decayed elites	Pětikoalice	Five-party coalition
Grupy interesu	Interest groups	Fialova vláda	Fiala's government
Uprzywilejowani	Privileged		
Wielkomiejska elita	Urban elite		
Technokraci	Technocrats		
Upadłe elity	Fallen elites		

Niemoralne elity	Immoral elites
Egoistyczne elity	Egoistic elites
Bruksela	Brussels
Establishment	Establishment
Platformersi	Civic Platform politicians

4.2 Populists in Czechia and Poland: web-scraping results

This section will analyze the four parties and their tweets in the order as they are presented in Table N, which also shows the distribution of the tweets across the three policy domains (with the fourth category representing the tweets about other topics).

Table N. The distribution of web-scraped tweets

Party	Climate	Gender	Migration	Other tweets
ANO	8	2	1	46
SPD	38	18	117	237
PiS	15	17	73	685
SP	6	8	18	48

4.2.1 ANO (Czechia)

During the examined period, the ANO party was the strongest opposition party, and so its tweets mainly focus on the criticism of the government (the so-called 'five-party government'). This focus is evident from the overwhelming presence of the 'anti-elites' tweets which constitute the vast majority of all collected ANO tweets (see Table O). ANO does not make much use of 'people-centric codes' (see Table P), with just occasional references to 'Czechs' and 'majority'. Compared with the other three parties that we studied, ANO has the weakest focus on the three policy domains. Unlike PiS, SP, and SPD, ANO did not focus most on migration – climate-related tweets were significantly more present in their discourse (see Figure F). The Green Deal was sometimes the target and "progressive green Eurofederalists" were blamed for the related problems (ANO-tweet1). At the same time, consistently with the analysis of political manifestos above, ANO does insist on its efforts to help the environment: "We wanted to reduce emissions, adapt to climate change. But @P_Fiala did not manage to negotiate such a climate package that would address the details of the Green Deal." (ANO-tweet2)

Figure F. References to climate, gender, and migration in ANO tweets
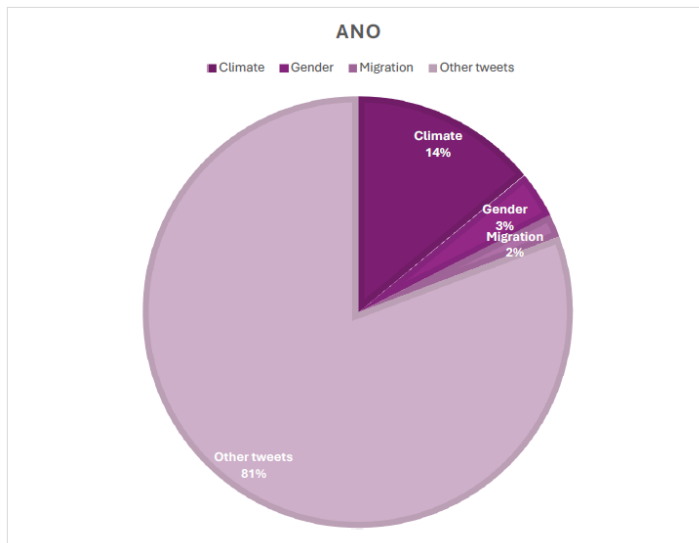
Gender-related issues are largely absent from ANO's tweets and when they appear, they are mostly ambivalent. For instance, the government was criticized in one of them for failing to support the rights of same-sex couples more vigorously: "We have straightened out the rights for same-sex couples... The fractured five-party coalition would have sunk it." (ANO-tweet3) At the same time, ANO took a cautious position in terms of the same-sex marriage, arguing that the currently existing partnership is sufficient, and that marriage is not needed (ANO-tweet4). Similarly, unlike in the previous period, migration does not seem to be a major issue for ANO, with only an occasional critique of the government in this regard.

Table O. Anti-elites codes in ANO tweets

ANO		
Anti-elites codes		
English translation	Original language	Occurences
five-party (centre-right) coalition government	['pětikoalice']	19
Fiala's government	['Fialova vláda']	15
Brussels	['brusel']	3
agents	['agenti']	1

Table P. People-centric codes in ANO tweets

ANO		
People-centric codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
´Czechs´	['Češi']	3
´majority´	['většina']	3
'decent people'	['slušní lidé']	1
'fair'/ 'just-´	['spravedliv']	1

4.2.2 Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD, Czechia)

Freedom and Direct Democracy is a Czech populist far-right party with a strong nationalist focus. In comparison to ANO, its tweets are sharper, and they focus on the three topics significantly more frequently. Almost three in ten SPD tweets are related to migration, with climate-related tweets constituting 9% and gender 4% (Figure G).

Figure G. References to climate, gender, and migration in SPD tweets
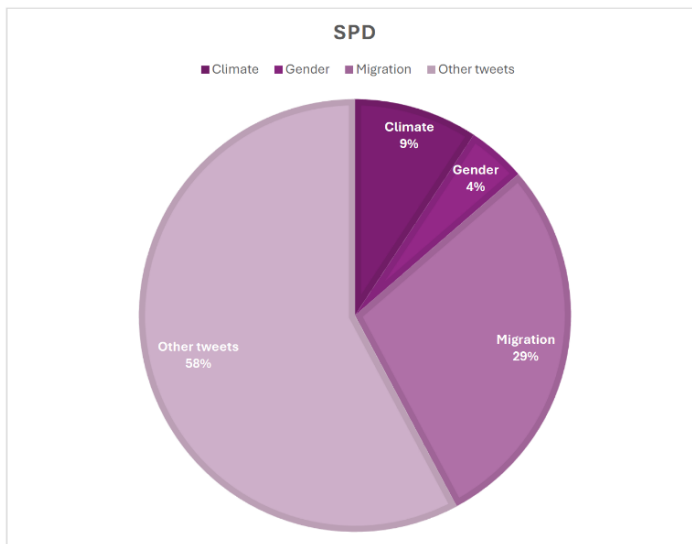
Migration is undoubtedly the central topic for SPD, which is often presented as a grave security threat. Comparisons with the 'failed' migration and integration policies of Western European countries are plentiful: "We do not want to end up like Islamized Western Europe. We do not want to be afraid to go out on the street in our own country! But Fiala's government supports migration." (SPD-tweet1) Cases of violence which are related to migration or perpetrated by people of migrant origin are often discussed (France, Italy); Sweden is depicted as an "Islamized and Africanized country" (SPD-tweet2). The topic is then often linked to the Ukrainian diaspora in the Czech Republic and the government's acceptance of refugees (SPD-tweet3). Not a single collected tweet presented migration in a positive light.

Climate change is another important topic and the scientific consensus on human-caused climate change is denied. Climate-related policies are often connected to high energy prices, leading to the criticism of both Czech government and the EU. The Green Deal in particular is seen as the cause of Czech socio-economic problems: "The crazy Green Deal is destroying the Czech energy sector, the economy and the financial situation of Czech households" (SPD-tweet4). The demand to withdraw from the Green Deal appeared repeatedly in the tweets.

Although less attention is dedicated to gender-related issues, gender and 'gender ideology' are virtually always seen negatively. The government is accused of planning to introduce the EU's gender quota (SPD-tweet5), the "Marxist genderistic planning" of the EU is ridiculed (SPD-tweet5), etc. Although the topics are typically addressed separately, sometimes a linkage is created, for instance by pointing to the sexual violence perpetrated by migrants (SPD-tweet6).

The SPD also uses both 'people-centric codes' and 'anti-elitist codes' much more frequently than ANO. Among the people-centric ones, 'majority', 'Czechs', and 'people' appear most often (see Table

R). Anti-elitist rhetoric is almost omnipresent, and the critique of the ruling elites is the most dominant feature of SPD's tweets. The references to 'Fiala's government' and 'five-party government' appear 374 times out of 410 tweets (see Table S). 'Brussels' is present as well, but Czech government is targeted significantly more often.

Table R. People-centric codes in SPD tweets

SPD		
People-centric codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
´majority´	['většina']	34
´Czechs´	['Češi']	26
´people´	['lidov']	20
'decent people'	['slušní lidé']	6
'fair'/ 'just´	['spravedliv']	4
'our forefathers'	['naši předkové']	2

Table S. Anti-elites codes in SPD tweets

SPD		
Anti-elites codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
Fiala's government	['Fialova vláda']	208
five-party (centre-right) coalition government	['pětikoalice']	166
Brussels	['Brusel']	17
globalists	['globalisté']	2
traitors	['vlastizrádci']	1
'do-gooders', 'multiculturalists', 'neo-Marxists'	['sluníčkáři', 'multikulturalisté', 'neomarxisté']	1

4.2.3 Law and Justice (PiS, Poland)

Law and Justice is a major right-wing populist Polish party. During the examined period, it was first the strongest ruling party, and, after the October 2023 parliamentary election, it became oppositional. Out of the three analyzed issues, migration is dominant (with 9% of tweets), but overall, the party is less focused on these issues than the Czech SPD or the Polish SP (see Figure H).

Figure H. References to climate, gender, and migration in PiS tweets
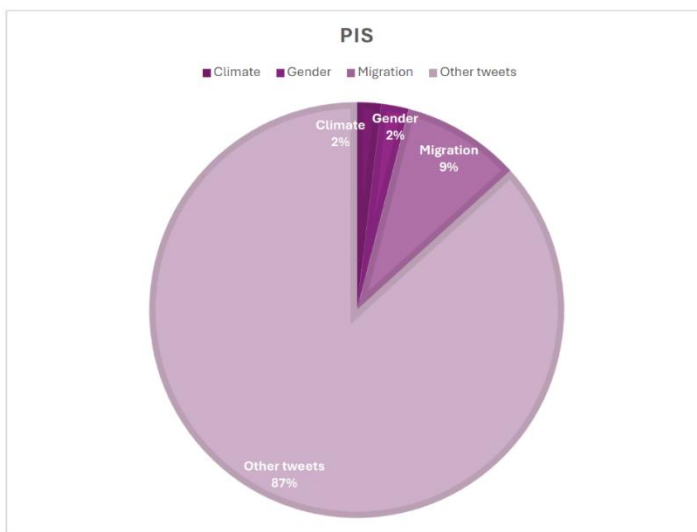
Migration is never framed as a positive issue and PiS' criticism targets both the EU ("We do not accept the migration policy of the EU!!" [PiS-tweet1]) and the government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk: "Because of Tusk, the reforms that Brussels wants to see are being set in motion: the migration pact and the relocation of illegal migrants; the Green Deal and further restrictions on agriculture..." (PiS-tweet2). Climate policies are also seen in a critical light, typically as harmful for Polish farmers and the fight against climate change is framed as leftist: "We disagree with the EU's leftist climate policy, i.e. the 90% reduction in CO2 emissions proposed by the current government, the fallowing, flooding of farmland!!" (PiS-tweet3)

Gender is often discussed in connection with the PiS' focus on the family. But families are typically linked to socio-economic issues, such as employment or economic aspects of human dignity. The references to family are typically positive, outweighing negative references to gender/gender ideology: "Polish families [...] are our foundation. Polish women and men want a life of dignity and over the years of our government we have shown how much can be done for Polish families - many social programmes" (PiS-tweet4). But there are sharply gender-critical statements among the tweets as well. For instance, the Argentinian President Javier Milei is cited criticizing "the unnatural struggle between men and women" and "the radical feminist agenda" (PiS-tweet5).

The PiS-produced tweets are strongly people-centric, but the vast majority of all references are to a single code ('Poles'), 'ordinary Poles' are second, but they are mentioned significantly less commonly (see Table T). Anti-elites codes are much less frequent, which may be tied to the participation of PiS in government in one half of the analyzed period. However, it is noteworthy that the most common anti-elites code is 'Brussels' which seems to indicate that the EU is a more common target of attack than the domestic liberal elites (see Table U).

Table T. People-centric codes in PiS tweets

PiS		
People-centric codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
'Poles'	['polacy']	602
'ordinary people',	['zwykli ludzie']	5
'ordinary Poles', 'Poles'	['zwykli polacy', 'polacy']	4
'patriots'	['patrioci']	3
'honest people'	['uczciwi ludzie']	2
'fighting'	['walczący']	2
'Catholics'	['katolicy']	1
'our ancestors'	['nasi przodkowie']	1
'righteous'	['sprawiedliwi']	1

Table U. Anti-elites codes in PiS tweets

PiS		
Anti-elites codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
Brussels	['bruksela']	33
deal	['układ']	10
liberals	['liberałowie']	9
Interest groups	['grupy interesu']	3
elites of the third republic	['elity iii rp']	1
establishment	['establishment']	1
caste	['kasta']	1
traitors	['zdrajcy']	1
progressives	['postępowcy']	1
traitor	['targowica'][4]	1

4.2.4 Sovereign Poland (SP, Poland)

Sovereign Poland was a Catholic, far-right party with a strong nationalist focus that split from Law and Justice in 2012, only to form the alliance called United Right with PiS again, and finally merge with PiS in October 2024. The share of references to climate, gender, and migration in the tweets associated with Sovereign Poland was significantly higher than in the case of PiS: almost a quarter of them was related to migration, 10% to gender and another 7% percent to gender (see Figure I). Overall, SP often combines several issues in a single tweet. It also links more than others the critique of the EU, domestic liberal forces, and Germany.

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[4] The term "Targowica" refers to a place where a historical event took place, but it is often used by politicians as a metaphor for a "traitor".

Figure I. References to climate, gender, and migration in SP tweets
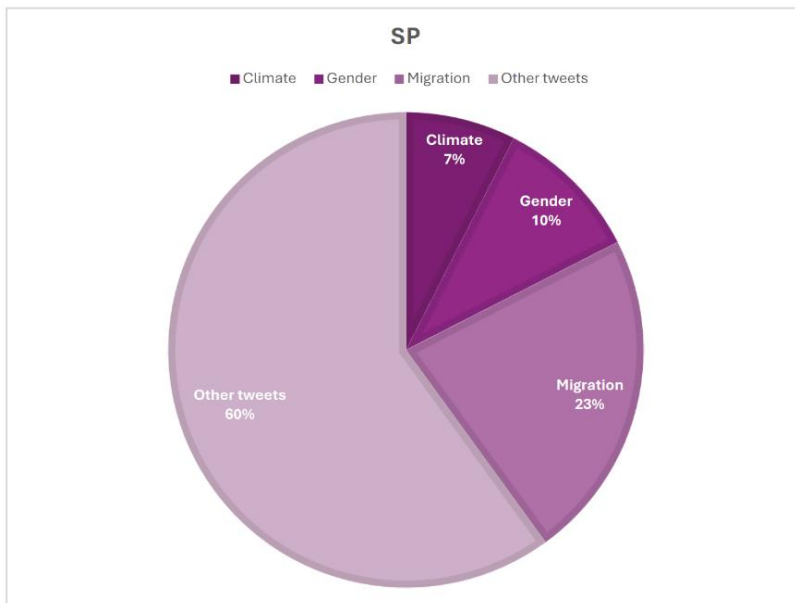
Migration is without a doubt the dominant topic and anti-migration attitudes are typically linked not only to Prime Minister Donald Tusk, but also the EU and Germany: "Tusk will bring immigrants to Poland at Germany's behest, just as he raised the retirement age at Merkel's command." (SP-tweet1) Positive references to migration are not common, but the Polish acceptance of Ukrainian refugees is such a case; yet that does not preclude the party from criticizing President Zelensky (SP-tweet2).

Climate-related policies are also harshly criticized and the actions taken by the EU in this regard are regularly linked to high energy costs: "In December 2020 M. Morawiecki agreed to Fit for 55 and he himself gave the green light to the damaging target of 55% CO_2 reduction by 2030, not 40%! As a result of this decision, the price of CO_2 allowances rose by several hundred percent between December 2020 and December 2021, and Poles are still paying high prices for energy and heat" (SP-tweet3). Again, the critique targets Germany as well: "The Green Deal is Germany's plan to strengthen Germany's economic position in the EU - boosting German RES exports and shifting the economy from coal to Russian gas with Nord Stream" (SP-tweet3). Overall, climate action is described as "green communism" of the EU (SP-tweet4).

Gender-related issues are framed differently from the other parties. The SP-associated tweets present the party as protecting Polish citizens from EU policies regarding LGBTQ+ rights and gender equality: "Poles very often say that they want their religion, their identity, their family to be what it is. It is not at all that they all want 'modernity'" (SP-tweet5). SP also taps the fear of the criminalization of LGBTQ+-critical attitudes: "We didn't want EU 'prosecutors' who have not even been to Poland to decide what constitutes hate speech, regardless of our laws, and to prosecute Poles as guilty of thought crimes; - behind bars, Poles who say there are only two sexes and marriage is just a union between a woman and a man." (SP-tweet6)

Similarly, as PiS, Sovereign Poland often uses the expression 'Poles' which clearly dominates the people-centric codes. Anti-elites codes also follow a similar pattern, with 'Brussels' being the most common code, with 'caste' and 'traitor' occupying the second and third place (but with very few references – see Tables W and X).

Table W. People-centric codes in SP tweets

SP		
People-centric codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
'Poles'	['polacy']	59
'Catholics'	['katolicy']	1
'ordinary Poles'	['zwykli polacy']	1
'patriots'	['patrioci']	1

Table X. Anti-elites codes in SP tweets

SP		
Anti-elites codes		
English transl.	Original language	Occurences
Brussels	['bruksela']	10
caste	['kasta']	4
traitors	['targowica']	2
Interest groups	['grupy interesów']	1
liberals	['liberałowie']	1
deal	['układ']	1
traitors	['zdrajcy']	1

4.3 Conclusion

Overall, our analysis of the populist tweets revealed two major patterns: First, less surprisingly, some differences run along national lines. For instance, Czech populist parties do not use national(ist) expressions in the tweets as often as the Polish parties do ('Czechs' vs. 'Poles'). Both Czech and Polish populists often resort to anti-elites rhetoric, but Czechs are less inclined to use people-centric expressions. Another difference is the threatening external actor: In the Czech cases, it is virtually always the EU as a whole whereas in the Polish tweets, Germany also plays a significant role (especially in the tweets associated with Sovereign Poland).

However, a more interesting finding pertains to the difference between the bigger populist parties (PiS and ANO) and the smaller ones. The bigger parties employ less radical rhetoric, and their critique is more nuanced. One possible explanation for the difference may be the experience of government responsibility of the bigger parties. A related explanation can be that the bigger parties need to attract a more diversified segment of voters and hence they need to avoid overly radical rhetoric, which can be contrasted with the more extreme niche of the two smaller parties (SPD and SP).

It is also striking that the two bigger parties are significantly less focused on the three issues. The total share of climate-, gender- and migration-related tweets is 19% for ANO, 14% for PiS, but 40% for Sovereign Poland and even 42% for Freedom and Direct Democracy. The likely explanation for this difference is the need for the bigger parties to cover a whole array of diverse political issues. The smaller, more radical parties, on the other hand, can focus only on the topics that they deem centrally important.

Finally, ANO should be singled out as it often does not comply with the pattern which is typical for the other three parties. For instance, its positions about LGBTQ+ issues are fundamentally different from the other three and so is its cautious and ambivalent position regarding gender-related issues. All these findings show that while ANO is rightly considered a populist party, it should not be classified as far right. These findings also indicate that what matters is the ideology with which the parties' populism is combined. The national-conservative, Catholic-conservative or far-right ideologies of PiS, SP, and SPD respectively lead to a substantially different political positioning than ANO's technocratic orientation.

5 Conclusion

Populism in the CE region was born under historically specific conditions. The post-communist transformation made the leftist critique of the transition to market economy more difficult as the process of Westernization and Europeanization became an unquestioned goal of both foreign policies and domestic politics of all the four post-communist countries under consideration. As a result, the stress on regained sovereignty and novel forms of nationalism was not only combined with the process of ever more intense integration with the European Union, but this process faced only limited criticism. With the accession of the four countries to the EU, however, voices started to be heard more loudly of those who criticized the slow pace of economic convergence as well as the continued dependence of the new EU member states on the EU's economic core. Although the national pathways varied (different extents to which alliances between post-communist and liberal elites were forged), the imitative nature of the reforms and the perception of the external imposition of the changes were shared by the critics of the process across the region.

CE populists exploited this criticism, tapping the frustration of a certain part of the population. They did so, however, in different ways in different countries. In some, a stronger stress was put on ethnic nationalism (that was seen as a counterweight to the elites from Brussels), religious conservatism was sometimes added to the mix, and in other countries, such as the Czech Republic, a more technocratic version of populism, based on the contrast between 'dirty politics' and expertise and 'common sense', became dominant. Nonetheless, in all these cases, the region's populists expressed Eurosceptic attitudes. The migration crisis of 2015 constituted a watershed moment. The populist critique of immigration, especially the 'migration quotas' transformed the abstract argument into a tangible, easy-to-understand question of 'imposed migration', which could be smoothly connected to other sensitive cultural issues, such as LGBTQ+ rights, gender equality policies, and, last but not least, political action to counter climate change.

This study explored these exact issues – immigration, climate change, and gender. It was interested in what roles these three issues play in the region's populist movements, whether the three issues are linked, and based on this, whether a potential political cleavage is emerging around them.

Firstly, we approached these questions from the supply side, by analysing political manifestos of ten CE populist parties. Here, the findings regarding each of the three issues were different. In terms of immigration, our conclusions are not particularly surprising: CE populists frame migration virtually always in negative terms, seeing it as a threat to national security, cultural identity as well as economic wellbeing. Populist can thus present themselves as those protecting their countries from external threats, while also portraying themselves as economically sensitive to the problems of 'ordinary people' and defending national heritage.

The attitudes of CE populists regarding climate change show a higher level of complexity. CE populists rhetorically distinguish between the external imposition of climate change measures that are mostly seen as dangerous (but sometimes also as an opportunity) and the more locally situated protection of environment, which is typically seen as positive. As a consequence, concrete policies can be supported or accepted depending on their framing by the populist parties.

Gender equality policies play the least important role in the populist parties' political manifestos, but they are not uniformly rejected as one might assume. Sometimes, especially in the conservative or religious-nationalist populist discourses, gender equality is seen as a threat to traditional values. Here, gender ideology is an external imposition, one based on values that are alien to local cultures and the 'normal' way of life of ordinary citizens. At the same time, CE populists employ a modern-

traditional approach to gender which is critical of gender-based discrimination, and supportive of a greater involvement of women in the labour market.

The results of the demands side analysis were based on two public opinion surveys: the European Values Survey (EVS) dataset from 2017 and the ActEU survey conducted in 2024. The analysis intended to determine: (a) whether voter attitudes on immigration, climate change, and gender equality form a cohesive societal dimension, and (b) whether attitudes towards the three issues associate with populist party support. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis reveals that migration, gender, and environmental attitudes do not form a single coherent dimension for supporters of populist parties in Central Europe, indicating that these attitudes are not bundled into a common dimension.

However, the results of the regression analysis are not consistent across the two surveys. In 2017, anti-immigrant attitudes were among the key factors predicting support for populist parties in Central Europe, and environmental attitudes mattered as well, while attitudes towards gender did not play role. The analysis of the ActEU 2024 survey shows no statistically significant relationship between populist voting intention and attitudes toward gender, immigration, or climate change. The diminished influence of anti-immigrant attitudes on populist party support in 2024 compared to 2017 may be explained by shifting perceptions of 'immigration policies' following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the resulting influx of Ukrainian refugees into Central Europe. Findings from the ActEU 2024 survey highlight the importance of other factors such as lower education levels, low income, and political interest in shaping populist party support, suggesting that these parties are increasingly attracting politically active individuals.

The results of the web-scraping analysis add two additional insights to our study. Firstly, they show that versions of populism differ both across parties and across countries. Smaller parties tend to use sharper vocabulary and target a smaller, more radicalized segment of the citizenry while larger parties moderate their rhetoric, likely in order for them to remain acceptable for larger swaths of the population. This finding is in line with the claim that the participation in national decision-making can have a moderating effect on populist parties. Across countries, populist parties differ in terms of their people-centric and anti-elites attitudes as well as their critique of the 'other' (including, for instance, Germany in the Polish populist discourses, and omitting it in the Czech ones). Secondly, the smaller parties' critique of the three issues (migration, climate change, and gender) is significantly more central, constituting a larger segment of their public communication. Although sharing the general sentiment, the bigger parties dedicate less attention to these issues and cover a whole plethora of other topics.

5.1 Policy relevance

- Immigration, climate change, and gender equality remain on the agenda of Central European populist parties, albeit to different degrees and in different forms. If mainstream parties decide to emulate the populist agenda, such a strategy will likely have two consequences: On one hand, it can diminish the influence of populist parties over voters, but it can also reinforce the populist framing of these issue in the public sphere.
- Out of the three issues, immigration continues to be the key driver of populist success in Central Europe. The populist ownership of the issue cannot be successfully contested by other parties unless they develop their own programmatic roadmaps and policy proposals, fostering a broader public debate.
- In relation to climate change and gender, the discourse of CE populist parties tends to be more nuanced than in the case of migration. For instance, the populist narrative on environment contains both a highly critical element, which primarily focuses on EU regulations perceived as restrictions of national sovereignty, and a positive framing that emphasizes the locally understood environmental protection and the quality of life for native citizens. If the linkage between the environment and local conditions is stressed, the populists' nativist rhetoric may be moderated, and the conditions may become more favourable for a broader consensus on this issue.
- In the discourses of some CE populists, immigration from North Africa and the Middle East is distinguished from the migration wave caused by the war in Ukraine. In such cases, Ukrainians are presented as war refugees rather than immigrants. This distinction is highly political relevant due to the strongly negative connotations that the term immigrant carries in the discourse of CE populist parties. The changing framing seems to have a significant impact on the voter attitudes as well.
- Gender equality policies occupy the least space in the discourse of CE populist parties. The political manifestos analysis shows that these parties often combine anti-feminist rhetoric and discursive frames that support gender equality in professional life and the public sphere. However, the latter frame omits other issues, such as reproductive rights, which has far-reaching political consequences.
- Large CE populist parties like ANO have a different dynamic than smaller, more radical entities. Hence, it is wrong to assume that all populist voters share similar attitudes. In many areas, CE societies are less polarized than usually assumed.
- Overall, our research suggests that many of the divisive issues are driven by top-down framing rather than firm voter attitudes. This pertains even to highly politicized issues such as immigration.

Appendix

Party Manifestos

Poland

Law and Justice: https://pis.org.pl/dokumenty

Sovereign Poland https://suwerennapolska.pl/

Czechia

ANO https://www.anobudelip.cz/file/edee/2021/ano-volebni-program.pdf

SPD https://www.spd.cz/program-vypis/

Slovakia

SMER https://www.strana-smer.sk/aktuality/blogy/post/volby-2023

SNS https://www.sns.sk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/VP_Web.pdf

SME Rodina https://hnutie-smerodina.sk/program/

Slovakia https://www.obycajniludia.sk/volebny-program-2023/

Hungary

Jobbik https://blob.jobbik.hu/programs/magyar_szivvel_jozan_esszel_tiszta_kezzel.pdf

Fidesz: downloaded from the Manifesto Project Data.

List of tweets quoted in the report

ANO-tweet1: Knotek, O. (22 August 2023). "Stejně tak se chovají progresivní zelení eurofederalisti [...]". KnotekOndrej, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/KnotekOndrej/status/1693973306024530344

ANO-tweet2: Knotek, O. (19 October 2023). "Další vládní blamáž. Vláda akceptovala, že Česko jako průmyslová země bude dovážet elektřinu. [...]". KnotekOndrej, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/KnotekOndrej/status/1715033441597538573

ANO-tweet3: Kolovratník, M. (28 February 2024). "Tak se to povedlo! Narovnali jsme práva pro páry stejného pohlaví a nakonec to ve Sněmovně zachránilo hnutí ANO [...]". kolovratnikm, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/kolovratnikm/status/1762882946724209010

ANO-tweet4: Kolovratník, M. (28 February 2024). "Klasika. Vnitřně rozložená pětikoalice předvedla, že nemá šanci shodnout se na zásadních věcech. O budoucnosti stejnopohlavních párů rozhodlo hnutí ANO. A férově. Nikoli manželství, ale partnerství a přiznání naprosté většiny práv jako heterosexuálním párům." kolovratnikm, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/kolovratnikm/status/1762914537269764276

SPD-tweet1: Okamura, T. (29 September 2023). "Přes Středozemní moře se letos dostalo do Evropy zatím zhruba 186 tisíc migrantů. [...]". tomio_cz, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/tomio_cz/status/1707710264416538657

SPD-tweet2: Okamura, T. (4 October 2023). " Přes Středozemní moře se letos dostalo do Evropy zatím zhruba 186 tisíc migrantů. [...]". tomio_cz, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/tomio_cz/status/1709556217020809243

SPD-tweet3: Okamura, T. (29 October 2023). "Já jsem placený českými občany, proto budu hájit české občany! Jestli Fialova vláda hájí na prvním místě Ukrajince a migranty z Afriky a islámských zemí, ať jsou dělat politiku tam!". tomio_cz, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/tomio_cz/status/1718587596274532777

 SPD-tweet4: Okamura, T. (25 November 2023). "Lidé kvůli Fialově vládě pocítí další zdražování. Až 1 700 000 domácností si může od nového roku výrazně připlatit za odebírané teplo. [...]". tomio_cz, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/tomio_cz/status/1728395168326255051

SPD-tweet5: Okamura, T. (7 February 2023). "To je neuvěřitelné. „Pravicová" „konzervativní" Fialova vláda plánuje zavádět unijní genderové kvóty na ženy [...]". tomio_cz, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/tomio_cz/status/1755150840107556950

SPD-tweet6: Okamura, T. (10 November 2023). " Imigranti znovu řádili. Ženu v Hamburku znásilnili arabsky mluvící muži, když šla vyzvednout děti do školy [...]". tomio_cz, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/tomio_cz/status/1722936284283334723

PiS-tweet1: Telus, R. (10 February 2024). "WOLNI POLACY! [...] Nie ma naszej zgody na oddawanie suwerenności Polski na rzecz Brukseli !! Nie godzimy się na politykę migracyjną UE !!". RobertTelus, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/RobertTelus/status/1756284662660431968

PiS-tweet2: Malecki, M. (23 February 2024). "Dzisiejsza zapowiedź @vonderleyen dot. uruchomienia środków z KPO to dowód na to jak Tusk wspólnie z zagranicznymi politykami oszukiwali Polaków [...]". malecki_m, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/malecki_m/status/1761070808116392220

PiS-tweet3: Telus, R. (10 February 2024). "WOLNI POLACY! [...] Nie ma naszej zgody na lewacką politykę UE w zakresie polityki klimatycznej, tj. ograniczenia emisji CO2 o proponowane przez obecny rząd 90 proc., ugorowania, zalewania gruntów rolnych !!". RobertTelus, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/RobertTelus/status/1756285520391327798

PiS-tweet4: Maląg, M. (11 December 2023). "Premier @MorawieckiM w Sejmie: Dbamy o Polskie rodziny ponieważ rodzina jest fundamentem [...]". MarlenaMalag, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/MarlenaMalag/status/1734152962644046142

PiS-tweet5: Poreba, T. (20 January 2023). "Zachód jest w niebezpieczeństwie. Przemówienie Prezydenta Argentyny Javiera Milei [...]". TomaszPoreba, Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/TomaszPoreba/status/1748746983244775763

SP-tweet1: Warchol, M. (4 October 2023). "Tusk pod dyktando Niemiec sprowadzi imigrantów do Polski, tak jak podniósł wiek emerytalny na rozkaz Merkel [...]". marcinwarchol, *Twitter/X.* https://twitter.com/marcinwarchol/status/1709447333807640624

SP-tweet2: Suwerenna Polska (29 September 2023). " Minister @ZiobroPL w @RadioLublin: Polacy otworzyli swoje domy i serca dla milionów ukraińskich kobiet i dzieci. Przekazaliśmy też Ukrainie gigantyczne wsparcie finansowe. Atakowanie nas na forum ONZ przez prezydenta Zełenskiego to coś niesłychanego." Suwerenna_POL, *Twitter/X.* https://twitter.com/Suwerenna_POL/status/1707667204987293730

SP-tweet3: Kowalski, J. (3 February 2024). "Tusk pod dyktando Niemiec sprowadzi imigrantów do Polski, tak jak podniósł wiek emerytalny na rozkaz Merkel [...]". JKowalski_posel, *Twitter/X.* https://twitter.com/JKowalski_posel/status/1753715227252641981

SP-tweet4: Suwerenna Polska (18 February 2024). "Europoseł @PatrykJaki w @RMF24pl: Polacy wkrótce poczują skutki zielonego komunizmu w UE." Suwerenna_POL, *Twitter/X.* https://twitter.com/Suwerenna_POL/status/1759194974099239351

SP-tweet5: Suwerenna Polska (12 October 2023). "@BeataBialowas w @TV_Trwam: Polacy bardzo często mówią, że chcą, aby ich religia, ich tożsamość, ich rodzina była taka, jaka jest. Wcale nie jest tak, że wszyscy chcą „nowoczesności". Suwerenna_POL, *Twitter/X.* https://twitter.com/Suwerenna_POL/status/1712355114747379735

SP-tweet6: Warchol, M. (1 March 2024). "Nie musi się Pani @Gasiuk_Pihowicz domyślać - przyznam się od razu. Nie chcieliśmy, aby: - unijne „osoby prokuratorskie", które nawet w Polsce nie były, decydowały, co jest mową nienawiści niezależnie od naszego prawa i ścigały Polaków jako winnych myślozbrodni [...]". marcinwarchol, *Twitter/X. https://twitter.com/marcinwarchol/status/1763516694469697795*

Table ZA. The interconnections between gender, climate and immigration in the CE populist parties manifestoes.

Name of the party	Quote	Interconnection	Country
SMER-SSD	"SMER – SSD will support ambitious European policies for climate and environmental protection, provided they do not drastically threaten the competitiveness of the EU or lead to a decrease in the standard of living for citizens of EU member states. Taking Slovak national interests into account is crucial when proposing European migration policy."	**Climate change and immigration.** SMER presents EU immigration and climate protection policies as similar in their potential to harm or threaten the interests of the Slovak nation.	Slovakia
Fidesz	"Mass migration is associated with an increasing threat of terrorism. It is clear as day: where there is mass migration, women are at risk of violent attacks."	**Gender and immigration.** Fidesz presents itself as a defender of women's safety, which is threatened by migrants. The party also participates in the broader discussion about protecting the achievements of European culture and lifestyle, particularly concerning women's position in society, in contrast to the role of women in Arab countries.	Hungary
Fidesz	"The quality of their lives (Brussels bureucracy) does	**Gender and immigration.**	Hungary

	not change dramatically and directly with migration and immigration. They do not travel by subway, they do not live in the neighborhoods where migrants are settled. There are no no-go zones in their area, and their wives and children are probably not in danger to the same degree as the families of ordinary Western European citizens."	Immigration as a threat to the safety of woman and children presented by applying anti-elite discourse.	
SME Rodina	"We reject experiments with the family and with children. We will fight against threats to our families from the outside (Islamic invasion of Europe) and from the inside (oligarchic system of society, gender experiments, juvenile justice, gambling, drug addictions, intolerable social situation, executions, stolen healthcare, inefficient education, poor demographic development)."	**Gender and immigration.** Immigration as one of many negative political and social phenomena that poses a threat to traditional gender roles and families.	Slovakia
OL'aNO/Slovensko	"Our vision is to adapt public institutions to new trends and expected changes and challenges, be it demographic, technological, climate change, or changes in the spatial movement of the population."	**Gender and immigration.** Both of them are factors that challenge the resilience of public institutions.	Slovakia
Law and Justice	"The spread of gender ideology is also dangerous for the family and parenthood in Poland. [..] We are convinced that today it is necessary to protect not only the climate and the natural	**Gender and climate.** The climate, as the natural environment in which humans live, is compared to social institutions	Poland

environment, but also human institutions and existing forms of life."	such as the family and gender roles, considering them to have their source in the natural order. In this interpretation, both of these values should be particularly protected from interference and modification.	

Table ZB. Description of the independent variables (EVS)

Variable	Question number	Type	Question
Migration_attitudes_1	Q26 V80	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-immigration	For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? *When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to the [native] people over immigrants.*
Migration_attitudes_2	Q51 V184	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-immigration	Now we would like to know your opinion about the people from other countries who come to live in [your country] - the immigrants. How would you evaluate the impact of these people on the development of [your country]?
Migration_attitudes_3	Q52 V185	1-10 (interval) 10=pro-immigration	Please look at the following statements and indicate where you would place your views on this scale? / "Immigrants take jobs away from the [native] / Immigrants do not take jobs away from the [native]"

Migration_attitudes_4	Q52 V186	1-10 (interval) 10=pro-immigration	Please look at the following statements and indicate where you would place your views on this scale? "Immigrants make crime problems worse / Immigrants do not make crime problems worse."
Migration_attitudes_5	Q52 V187	1-10 (interval) 10=pro-immigration	Please look at the following statements and indicate where you would place your views on this scale? "Immigrants are a strain on a country's welfare system / Immigrants are not a strain on a country's welfare system."
Migration_attitudes_6	Q52 V188	1-10 (interval) 10=pro-immigration	Please look at the following statements and indicate where you would place your views on this scale? "It is better if immigrants maintain their distinct customs and traditions / It is better if immigrants do not maintain their distinct customs and traditions."
Environment_attitudes_1	Q56 V199	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-environ	How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution.
Environment_attitudes_2	Q56 V200	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-environ	How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? It is just too difficult for someone like me to do much about the environment.
Environment_attitudes_3	Q56 V201	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-environ	How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? There are more important things to do in life than protect the environment.
Environment_attitudes_4	Q56 V202	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-environ	How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements? There is no point in doing what I can for the environment unless others do the same.
Environment_attitudes_5	Q56 V203	1-5 (interval) 5=pro-environ	How much do you agree or disagree with each of the statement? "Many of the claims

			about environmental threats are exaggerated."
Environment_attitudes_6	Q56 V204	0/1 (dichotomous) 1=pro-environ	Here are two statements people sometimes make when discussing the environment and economic growth. Which of them comes closer to your own point of view? "1/ Protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs." "2/ Economic growth and creating jobs should be the top priority, even if the environment suffers to some extent."
Gender attitudes_1	Q25a V72	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? When a mother works for pay, the children suffer.
Gender attitudes_2	Q25b V73	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? A job is alright but what most women really want is a home and children.
Gender attitudes_3	Q25c V 74	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? "All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job."
Gender attitudes_4	Q25d V75	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? " A man's job is to earn money; a woman's job is to look after the home and family."
Gender attitudes_5	Q25e V76	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? "On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do."
Gender attitudes_6	Q25f V77	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? A university education is more important for a boy than for a girl
Gender attitudes_7	Q25g V78	1-4 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? On the whole, men make better business executives than women do.

Gender attitudes_8	Q26 V81	1-5 (interval) 1=gender stereotyping	For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree? When jobs are scarce, men have more right to a job than women.
Left Right self-placement	Q31 V102	1-10 (interval) 1=left	In political matters, people talk of 'the left' and 'the right'. How would you place your views on this scale, generally speaking?
EU confidence	Q38 V124	1-4 (interval) 4=confidence in EU	For each item listed, how much confidence you have in them? A great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? - European Union.
Education	Q81 V243	1-3 (interval) 3=high	Highest level of diploma attained
Social Trust	Q7 V31	0/1 (dichotomous) 1=can be trusted	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
Trust in Parties	Q38 V130	1-4 (interval) 4=distrust	Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? Political Parties
Trust in Parliament	Q38 V121	1-4 (interval) 4=distrust	Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? Parliament
Trust in Government	Q38 V131	1-4 (interval) 4=distrust	Please look at this card and tell me, for each item listed, how much confidence you have in them, is it a great deal, quite a lot, not very much or none at all? Government
Income level	Q98 V261	1-3 (interval) 3=high	Here is a list of incomes and we would like to know in what group your household is, counting all wages, salaries, pensions and other incomes that come in. Just give the letter of the group your household falls into, after taxes and other deductions.

Political Interest	Q29 V97	1-4 (interval) 4=very interested	How interested would you say you are in politics?
Economic Left-Right_1	Q32A V103	1-10 (interval) 10=individual responsibility	On this card you see a number of opposite views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? Individuals should take more responsibility for providing for themselves VS The state should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for.
Economic Left-Right_2	Q32B V104	1-10 (interval) 10=have to take any job	On this card you see a number of opposite views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? People who are unemployed should have to take any job available or lose their unemployment benefits VS People who are unemployed should have the right to refuse a job they do not want
Economic Left-Right_3	Q32D V106	1-10 (interval) 10=incentive to individual effort	On this card you see a number of opposite views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? Incomes should be made more equal VS There should be greater incentives for individual effort.
Economic Left-Right_4	Q32E V107	1-10 (interval) 10=private ownership	On this card you see a number of opposite views on various issues. How would you place your views on this scale? Private ownership of business and industry should be increased VS Government ownership of business and industry should be increased.
Income level	Q98 V261_r	1-3 Trichotomous 1=low	Here is a list of incomes and we would like to know in what group your household is, counting all wages, salaries, pensions and other incomes that come in. Just give the letter of the group your household falls into, after taxes and other deductions.
Native-born	Q65 V227	0/1 (dichotomous)	Were you born in [COUNTRY]?

		0=born in the country	
Sex	Q36 V225	0/1 dichotomous 0=male	Sex of respondent
Age	Q64 V226	continuous	Age of respondent (constructed)

Table ZC. Descriptive statistics of the independent variables from the EVS

	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Min	Max
migration_index	5,261	3.150	.0270433	0	10
environment_index	5,057	5.633	.0287394	0	10
gender_index	5,106	5.633	.026919	0	10
eu_confidence	5,771	2.284	.0113857	1	4
left_right_self	4,920	5.816	.0328769	1	10
economic_LR_index	5,525	5.513	.0225728	0	10
trust_in_parliament	5,869	2.028	.0109459	1	4
trust_in_parties	5,796	1.766	.0094897	1	4
trust_in_government	5,866	2.050	.0113276	1	4
political_interest	6,065	2.307	.0119353	1	4
age	6,043	50.439	.2264683	18	82
income_category	4,702			1	3
Low	1,619	34.4%			
Middle	1,611	34.3%			
High	1,472	31.3%			
sex	6,109			0	1
Male	2,526	41.3%			
Female	3,583	58.7%			
native_born	6,103			0	1
Foreign	137	2.2%			
Native	5,966	97.8%			
education	6,068			1	3
lower	1,045	17.2%			
medium	3,687	60.8%			
higher	1,336	22.0%			
social_trust	5,948			0	1

Cant be trusted	4,494	75.6%
Can be trusted	1,454	24.4%

Table ZD. Descriptive statistics of the dependent variable (support of populist parties) from the EVS

	Czechia	Hungary	Poland	Slovakia
Number of respondents	1,811 (29.6%)	1,514 (24.8%)	1,352 (22.1%)	1,432 (23.4%)
Populist party support				
0	884 (64.4%)	364 (35.4%)	429 (50.3%)	767 (62.6%)
1	488 (35.6%)	664 (64.6%)	424 (49.7%)	459 (37.4%)

Table ZE. Description of the independent variables (ActEU Survey)

Variable	Question number	Type	Question
Migration_attitudes_1	Q18	Interval, 0-10	Would you say it is generally bad or good for [country]'s economy that people come to live here from other countries?
Migration_attitudes_2	Q19	Interval, 0-10	Is [country] made a worse or a better place to live by people coming to live here from other countries?
Migration_attitudes_3	Q20	Interval, 1-4	To what extent do you think [country] should allow people of a different race or ethnic group from most [country] people to come and live here?
Gender_attitudes_1	Q21_1	Interval, 0-10	Do you think that each of the following measures has gone too far or not far enough in your country? Measures that ensure equal pay for men and women
Gender_attitudes_2	Q21_2	Interval, 0-10	Do you think that each of the following measures has gone too far or not far enough in your country? Measures against sexual harassment in the workplace
Gender_attitudes_3	Q21_3	Interval, 0-10	Do you think that each of the following measures has gone too far or not far enough in your country? Measures to ensure parity between men and women in politics

Gender_attitudes_4	Q21_4	Interval, 0-10	Do you think that each of the following measures has gone too far or not far enough in your country? Measures that target gender-based violence
Gender_attitudes_5	Q21_5	Interval, 0-10	Do you think that each of the following measures has gone too far or not far enough in your country? Measures that target the distribution of household chores and childcare (e.g. paternal leave)
Gender_attitudes_6	Q21_6	Interval, 0-10	Do you think that each of the following measures has gone too far or not far enough in your country? Measures that ensure access to the voluntary interruption of pregnancy
Environment attitudes_1	Q22_1	Interval, 0-10	Opinions on climate change and environmental protection differ widely. Please tell us how much you personally agree or disagree with the following statements. Claims that human activities are changing the climate are exaggerated.
Environment attitudes_2	Q22_2	Interval, 0-10	Opinions on climate change and environmental protection differ widely. Please tell us how much you personally agree or disagree with the following statements. I would be willing to decrease my personal level of consumption to actively fight climate change.
Environment attitudes_3	Q22_3	Interval, 0-10	Opinions on climate change and environmental protection differ widely. Please tell us how much you personally agree or disagree with the following statements. Climate protection measures need to be implemented, regardless of cost.
Environment attitudes_4	Q22_4	Interval, 0-10	Opinions on climate change and environmental protection differ widely. Please tell us how much you personally agree or disagree with the following statements. There are other, more pressing issues in [country] than environmental protection.
Environment attitudes_5	Q22_5	Interval, 0-10	Opinions on climate change and environmental protection differ widely. Please tell us how much you personally agree or disagree with the following statements. Climate change is just an excuse for politicians to further restrict our freedom.
EU_attitudes	Q_23	Interval, 0-10	Now thinking about the European Union, some say European unification should go further. Others say it has already gone too far. What number in this scale best describes your position?

Social_trust	Q_26	Interval, 0-10	Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
Political interest	Q_28	Interval, 1-4	How interested would you say you are in politics
Trust_in_parliament	Q_38_3	Interval, 0-10	How much do you trust the following institutions and actors? Your country's parliament
Trust_in_government	Q_38_4	Interval, 0-10	How much do you trust the following institutions and actors? Your country's government
Trust_in_government_ parties	Q_38_8	Interval, 0-10	How much do you trust the following institutions and actors? Political parties currently in government (national level)
Trust_in_opposition_pa rties	Q_38_9	Interval, 0-10	How much do you trust the following institutions and actors? Political parties currently in opposition (national level)
Age	Q_1	Continuous	Please provide your date of birth
Education	Q_3	Categorical, 1-3	What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed?
Income_group	Q_4	Interval, 1-10	Country specific income questions.
Native	Q_13	Dichotomous, 0/1	Were both of your parents citizens of [country] since birth?
Left_right_placement	Q_16	Interval, 0-10	In politics people sometimes talk of "left" and "right". Where would you place yourself on this scale?
GAL_TAN_placement	Q_17_1 Q_17_2 Q_17_3		To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? 1. The government should increase taxes on fossil fuels, such as oil, gas and coal to reduce climate change. 2. Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same rights to adopt children as straight couples. 3. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn.
Sex	Q_10_2	Dichotomous, 0/1	And what was the sex assigned to you at birth?

Table ZF. Descriptive statistics of the independent variables from the ActEU survey

	Obs	Mean	Std. Err.	Min	Max
migration_index	2,320	5.084	.0474625	0	10
environment_index	2,386	4.869	.0455294	0	10
gender_index	2,162	6.351	.0385944	0	10
eu_support	2,434	5.099	.060761	0	10
left_right_self	2,363	5.304	.0513372	0	10
trust_in_parliament	2,455	4.136	.0555488	0	10
trust_in_govparties	2,481	3.971	.0614262	0	10
trust_in_opoparties	2,481	5.672	.2649794	0	98
trust_in_government	2,472	3.899	.0605541	0	10
political_interest	2,566	2.741	.0165679	1	4
age	2,600	45.352	.292741	18	75
gal_tan_placement	2,405	6.076	.044483	0	10
social_trust	2,554	4.350	.0527472	0	10
income_level	2,450	5.495	.0523646	1	10
sex	2,593			0	1
Male	1,320	50.9%			
Female	1,273	49.1%			
education	2,600			1	3
Low	96	3.7%			
Medium	1,681	64.7%			
High	823	31.7%			
native_born	2,586			0	1
Foreign	163	6.3%			
Native	2,423	93.7%			

Table ZG. Descriptive statistics of the dependent variable (voting intention for populist parties) from the ActEU survey

	Czechia	Poland
N	1,300 (50.0%)	1,300 (50.0%)
0	365 (29.6%)	602 (49.2%)
1	76 (6.2%)	96 (7.8%)
2	50 (4.1%)	54 (4.4%)

3	63 (5.1%)	38 (3.1%)
4	39 (3.2%)	29 (2.4%)
5	143 (11.6%)	60 (4.9%)
6	62 (5.0%)	48 (3.9%)
7	60 (4.9%)	53 (4.3%)
8	95 (7.7%)	53 (4.3%)
9	88 (7.1%)	59 (4.8%)
10	191 (15.5%)	132 (10.8%)

3   63 (5.1%)   38 (3.1%)

4   39 (3.2%)   29 (2.4%)

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About ActEU

How can we conceptualize and empirically measure political trust and legitimacy beyond the usual survey question 'How much trust do you have in the parliament?'? Does the multi-level nature of European representative democracies require an identical level of citizen support at the regional, national and EU levels? How does social polarization on key policy issues of our times – immigration, climate change, and gender inequality– challenge the political trust in, and legitimacy of, democratic political systems? And what can policymakers and civil society do to master these challenges? ActEU aims at finding answers to these questions pursuing two overarching goals: In phase 1, we map and investigate persistent problems of declining trust, legitimacy and representation in Europe with a particular attention to the polarization of societies and the EU's multi-level structures. Providing an innovative conceptual framework on political attitudes, behavior and representation across Europe, we establish an original empirical infrastructure based on an innovative combination of methods and newly collected quantitative and qualitative empirical data (focus groups, experimental surveys, web scraping). In phase 2, these results will flow directly into the creation of a toolbox of remedial actions to enhance political trust in and legitimacy of European representative democracies. In cooperation with a newly created Civil Society Network, Youth Democracy Labs across 13 European cities and in exchange with political cartoonists 'Cartooning for democracy', we will develop context-sensitive solutions for all polity levels and some of the most polarizing policy areas, and craft tailor-made toolkits for both policymakers and civil society and the educational sector. Finally, we deploy a differentiated dissemination strategy to maximize ActEU's scientific, policy and societal impact in activating European citizens' trust and working towards a new era of representative democracy.

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