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Title	Who is the populist Irish voter?
Authors	Reidy, Theresa;Suiter, Jane
Publication date	2018
Original Citation	Reidy, T. and Suiter, J. (2018) 'Who is the populist Irish voter?', Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland, Vol. XLVI, pp. 117-131. Available at: http://www.tara.tcd.ie/handle/2262/82173 (Accessed: 18 November 2021)
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
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Download date	2026-10-30 02:57:07
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/12230



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Journal of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland
Vol. XLVI

Symposium 2016-2017: Globalisation, Inequality and the Rise of Populism

Who is the Populist Irish Voter?

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(read before the Society, 20 April 2017)

Abstract Across the EU, the Great Recession begot economic and political crisis heralding a renewed march towards populism and party system fragmentation. Much commentary about Ireland remarked on the absence of a populist surge of the type seen in many other bailout states (Clifford, 2016; Pappas, 2015). But is this characterization of the Irish experience accurate? The imposition of austerity policies and the protracted recovery propelled long standing critics of the Irish economic model centre stage and in common with many other states, party system fragmentation advanced with the long dominant centrist parties suffering severe losses at general elections (Marsh, Farrell and McElroy, 2017; Kriesi et al., 2016). New and more radical political forces did emerge and general elections in 2011 and 2016 were among the most volatile in Western Europe since 1945. The traditional parties of government experienced a sharp contraction in their vote shares but they retained their hold on power and the parties which have been labelled populist, remain some distance from entering into government. The focus of research on populism in Ireland has been on the supply side to date, looking at parties and campaigns (O'Malley and Fitzgibbon, 2015; Suiter, 2017) and this paper seeks to further the debate by investigating voter attitudes. Using data from the 2016 Irish National Election Study, the paper will demonstrate that many voters hold views which are populist. Irish voters are most likely to hold anti-elite and anti system populist attitudes, sometimes labelled left-wing populism in the literature and a smaller group hold strong outgroup and national identity views, often times called nativism or right-wing populism. Anti-elite populists are most likely to support Sinn Féin, Fianna Fáil and Independents while outgroup and national identity populists lean strongly towards Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Great Recession begot economic and political crisis heralding a renewed march towards populism and party system fragmentation in many states. The severity of the crisis, the imposition of austerity and the protracted recovery propelled long standing critics of the Irish economic model centre stage and in common with many other states, party system fragmentation advanced with the long dominant centrist parties suffering severe losses at elections and new and more radical political forces emerging (Marsh et al., 2017; Marsh et al., 2018; Kriesi et al., 2016). Irish elections in 2011 and 2016 were among the top ten most volatile in Western Europe since 1945 and the traditional parties of government experienced sharp contractions in their vote shares.

Across Europe governments were punished and incumbents voted out of office. Hernandez and Kriesi (2015) demonstrated that as the crisis advanced within a country, the propensity for voters to punish the government increased. However, in many cases, the parties which achieved power frequently found themselves implementing policy platforms they had oftentimes explicitly rejected while in opposition and during the preceding election campaign. This dynamic led Muro and Vidal (2014) to argue that elections no longer fulfilled some of their essential properties, namely allowing voters to choose different parties and leaders to carry out different policies.

[1] The authors would like to thank the members of the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland for their generous and valuable comments on an earlier draft of this paper. We are also very grateful to Dr Philip Murphy (UCC) for his advice on aspects of factor analysis.

As the electoral cycles progressed, an increasing number of parties came to be rejected by electorates and there were increases in support for new parties, among them populist parties, yielding greater political fragmentation in many states. Muro and Vidal (2014) argued that this pattern was most pronounced in states with constrained governance arrangements usually arising from receipt of a financial assistance package from the Troika (European Commission, European Central Bank and the International Monetary Fund). The financial assistance packages provided, usually known as bailouts, were conditional on economic and political reforms and newly elected governments in bailout states often had little room for policy maneuver. Hobolt and Tilley (2016) argued that new challenger parties, often populist, which emerged across Europe, whether on the radical left or the radical right, projected a common populist narrative of 'take back control'. Essentially, Hobolt and Tilley argued that this unifying message worked as a catch phrase for parties of the far right opposed to open borders and immigration but equally for parties of the far left opposed to the fiscal retrenchment policies that had been implemented and, in some cases imposed, across the EU as a policy response to the recession.

While political fragmentation was a major theme in public discourse on Irish politics especially after the 2016 general election, discussion of populist politics tended to focus on the small but very vocal groups on the far left of Irish politics. The Socialist Party, which later coalesced with the Anti-Austerity Alliance, People Before Profit and a small number of independents (non-party members of parliament) were at the forefront of campaigns which opposed fiscal retrenchment and were particularly prominent in the water charges protests from 2014. However, these far left populist parties are best understood as occasionally potent protest forces but under-developed electorally. This view is informed by a long standing tendency among parties of the left to fragment and re-organise. The fragmentation dynamic has persisted. The Anti-Austerity Alliance relaunched in 2017 as Solidarity, the Left Alternative and it retained its loose coalition with People Before Profit. Independents 4 Change successfully contested the 2016 election as a left wing party but operates in practice as a collective of independents (non party TDs). Since the economic crisis, these parties have increased in electoral strength and organisational capacity but they remain some distance from influencing the composition of government. In addition to the small far left parties, O'Malley and Fitzgibbon (2015) have argued that Sinn Fein and some independent TDs also deploy populist political rhetoric and policy platforms. They point out that many parties have adopted strong anti-elite narratives, with some eschewing more hard line left-wing economic policies often associated with this type of populism. Right-wing populism of the kind associated with Donald Trump in the United States and Marine Le Pen's National Front in France is largely absent from party politics. Indeed as O'Malley (2008) discussed, Ireland does not have a history of radical right populism for many reasons including its history of emigration and the complexities of nationalist sentiment arising from the ethnic conflict in Northern Ireland.

To date, examinations of populism in Ireland have been focused on political parties, what policies they espouse, how they organise and what their relative strengths are. Until the 2016 general election, political scientists did not have the data to evaluate comprehensively how far Irish voters displayed populist values and political attitudes. Questions like, are Irish voters populist, and if yes, in what ways, were difficult to answer. This paper has three objectives. First, drawing from the literature on populism, it will elaborate a theoretical framework which can be used to identify attitudinal dimensions of populism among Irish voters. Second, using data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems module of the Irish National Election Study of 2016, it will evaluate whether Irish voters exhibit populist political attitudes. Third, it will investigate the defining characteristics of the populist Irish voter paying particular attention to the political parties that they support at elections.

Section two provides an overview of the most significant contributions to the literature on populism and it pays particular attention to the idea that populism is a 'thin' ideology which is only meaningful when combined with other sets of political ideas from the economic spectrum, nationalism or conservatism. The section identifies key attitudinal features of populist ideology and pinpoints recent contributions on measuring populist political attitudes. Section three is focused on the growing consensus that crises provides a structural opportunity for populist political parties to emerge and this argument is elaborated with reference to developments during the Great Recession in Ireland. Section four presents the Irish National Election Study of 2016 and details the method used to develop two populism scales. Section five applies the two scales to the 2016 general election demonstrating that there are significant numbers of populist voters in Ireland before going on to present a more detailed analysis of who these voters are, what beliefs they hold and who they vote for. The findings are evaluated with reference to the most recent research on the evolving political environment in Ireland.

2. EXACTLY WHAT IS POPULISM AND HOW DO WE MEASURE IT?

Populism is an especially contested concept. Defining it in a meaningful way is a particular challenge and as Akkerman et al. (2013: 1326) argue, a 'thin' core is required in any definition so as to account for the wide variation in the manifestation of populism and also to provide for the fact that populism is frequently combined

with other ideological orientations, most especially on the far right and the far left. Kriesi and Pappas (2015: 4) operationalise this 'thin' definition of populism as:

> the existence of two homogenous groups – 'the people' and 'the elite', that an antagonistic relationship exists between the two and embedded in the narrative is the idea of popular sovereignty.

They go on to argue that populism has a "'Manichean outlook' which combines positive valorisation of the people with denigration of the elite" (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). Simply put, populists view the people as good and often project the elite as essentially corrupt or untrustworthy in some way (Akkerman et al., 2013). They are distrustful of normal forms of political organisation and display specific hostility to politicians and political parties. The idea of popular sovereignty is very important. Populists argue that democracy is constantly being eroded and the will of the people ignored while a common theme within the ideology is that direct democracy provides for decision by the people and therefore, presents the only pure form of decision making. Referendums, citizen initiatives and other forms of direct decision making (repeal of politicians) are frequently part of the populist agenda. But as Pappas (2013; 2014) argues, populism is positing an essentially illiberal form of democracy. Kriesi and Pappas (2015: 4-6) list the illiberal features as:

> 1) Government by the people is understood literally and 'checks and balances' of the constitutional system are rejected;
>
> 2) It is hostile to intermediaries between the people and decision-makers; most particularly political parties and it wants more direct linkages between decisions makers and elites;
>
> 3) The people are singular, pluralism is not part of the picture.

It is for these reasons that populism is usually decried by the political centre. In most European states, populism is considered to be hostile to the pluralist version of modern liberal democracy.

So far, we have explored the 'thin' core of populism. More robust evaluation of populism is possible when this populist core is combined with an economic (left, right), political system or social (conservative, liberal, nationalist) ideology. Then it becomes possible to present a more substantive framework. Non-ideological populism is often associated with hostility to elites and the political system. Corruption and hostility to politicians and political parties is usually a prominent feature. It exists in many Central and East European countries where there are high levels of distrust in the political system and a great deal of antipathy to political parties.

Anti-system populism is also sometimes categorised as left-wing populism in that the economic and political systems are often seen as intertwined and left-wing economic populism often seeks a complete redefinition of the economic order. Furthermore, de Vreese et al (2017: 14), building on the Jagers and Walgrave (2007) definitions of populism, have also argued that anti-elitist populism is closer to left-wing populism pointing out that this type of populism 'does not typically engage in the exclusion of minorities'. Populism combined with an explicit far left economic orientation is prominent in Latin America and has surged in several European countries during the economic crisis. Usually associated with a rejection of market capitalism, it is hostile to globalisation. More recently among advanced industrial democracies, the winners and losers of globalisation hypothesis has emerged as a prominent explanation for the rise of left-wing populism (and sometimes also right-wing populism). This thesis is predicated on the proposition that globalisation has been driving increases in economic insecurity for decades. Skilled manufacturing jobs have re-located to low labour cost locations leaving behind economic deprivation, declining living standards and insecurity for communities that had previously been economically advantaged (Kriesi et al., 2008; Kriesi, 2014; Teney et al., 2014).

Populism combined with a far right economic ideology often manifests with a focus on identity politics and is exclusionary in nature (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007). Cultural backlash theory is at the centre of explanations of this variant of populism and posits that sections of society are rejecting the progressive value changes that have become more established in recent decades. Kriesi et al. (2008; 2012) emphasise that cultural values have been shown to be more robust in underpinning support for populists than economic factors and point that this explains some of the early successes of the populists (see also Ingelhart and Norris, 2016). Kriesi has proposed a new political cleavage, the integration – demarcation divide while Ingelhart and Norris argue that the new divide is best encapsulated as a populism (anti-establishment, nativist) – cosmopolitan (liberal, pluralist) cleavage. This view builds on a longer term strand of analysis which has emerged from the field of EU studies looking at how EU integration has emerged as a dimension of competition but in this case, the demarcation is usually defined as GAL TAN, corresponding to Green/alternative/libertarian on one side with Traditional/authoritarian/nationalist on the other.

Interestingly, Hobolt and Tilley (2016) argue that populists on the far left and on the far right have more in common than is sometimes acknowledged and they demonstrate that the new challenger parties which have emerged across Europe, whether on the radical left or the radical right, often project a common populist narrative of 'take back control'. Essentially, this unifying message works as a catch phrase for parties of the far right opposed to open borders and immigration but equally for parties of the far left opposed to the fiscal retrenchment policies that have been advocated across the EU as a policy response to the recession.

The focus of a great deal of research on populism has been on the supply side (Mudde, 2010). There have been extensive studies of the policy platforms of populist parties (Wagner and Meyer, 2017), their campaigning and communication strategies, more recently social media strategies (Engesser et al., 2016) and the role of leaders within parties (Akkerman et al., 2013). It is only since the most recent surge in support for populist parties that it has been possible to develop good measures of populism on the demand side. Sufficient numbers of voters are now exhibiting attitudes and values so that they can be detected in large scale election studies. In a bid to tap this from 2016 to 2021, many election studies will include module five of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), Democracy Divided? People Politicians and the Politics of Populism.

Using data from the CSES module at the 2016 general election, this article will evaluate whether populist political attitudes are in evidence among Irish voters. Following the literature, the research will seek to test for two specific dimensions of populism; left-wing and right-wing populism. Left-wing populism will include anti-system and anti-elite attitudes and right wing populism will include attitudes towards outgroups such as immigrants and minorities as well as attitudes toward national identity.

3. THE CASE FOR POPULISM IN IRELAND

Both long term and short term factors are put forward to explain why populist political attitudes manifest among voters. The long term factors are well rehearsed and include growing distrust and disillusion with politics. Mair (2013:1) opens with concerns for the 'fracturing politics of popular democracy'. Declining membership of political parties and concerns that political parties have lost their connection with voters (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002) have been gaining ground for some time and have led to claims that there may be a crisis of representation in western democracies. The growing dis-connect between the governed and the government or what Peter Mair termed the balance between representative and responsive government (Mair, 2009) is identified as providing open space for the emergence of a populist surge.

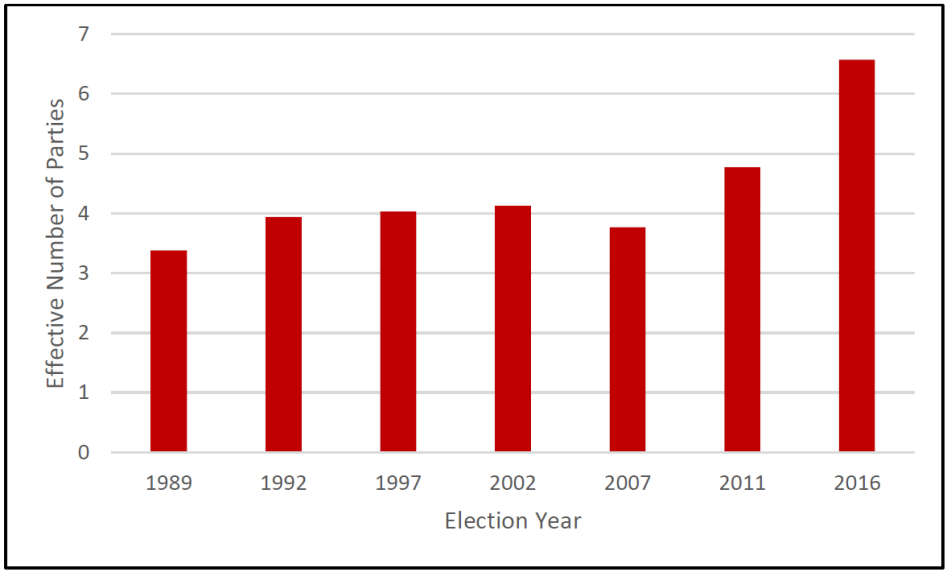
There is also a collection of more short term factors specifically related to the economic crisis in Europe which are used to explain the most recent growth in support for populist parties. Economic crises are often identified as delivering turbulence and uncertainty and providing a space within which populists can emerge (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 2005; Moffitt, 2014). Kriesi and Pappas (2015) argue that the Great Recession produced economic crisis in many states and as a consequence laid the foundations for a surge in populism. They emphasise that political crisis is also an important dimension and specifically on the political front that the crisis must mean more than a problem of governance. Following Runciman's (2015) distinction between political scandal and political crisis provides a useful point of reference here. Political scandal is part of the normal news cycle. Policy problems are parsed and analysed and politicians held to account. Political crisis is of a different order and refers to a deep fracture in the normal functioning of the political system. Kriesi and Pappas (2015) identified three components of the 2008 economic crisis which led to the Great Recession; competitiveness, banking and public debt. In many cases these economic problems caused severe political reverberations. Several countries experienced party system transformation and for a number of years, there were widespread protests and street demonstrations across Europe. Generally, the cases explored in Kriesi and Pappas (2015) confirmed that populism was a stronger force in countries that experienced severe crises. But Ireland was something of an outlier in this work (O'Malley and Fitzgibbon, 2015). Ireland had all three dimensions of the economic crisis and also a deep political crisis.
Consequently, one might expect a surge in support for populist parties in Ireland. But the populist response was somewhat more muted than in many other EU states (Suiter, 2017).

The global economic crisis which began in 2008 had a catastrophic impact on the Irish economy and resulted in a bailout from the troika in 2010. Macro-economic indicators during the crisis all speak to the severity of the collapse; GDP fell sharply, the debt to GDP ratio exploded and unemployment jumped by 10 points in just a few years. The bailout programme required fiscal retrenchment over a short period and the social costs of expenditure cuts and revenue increases were very considerable (Roche et al., 2017). Poverty and inequality jumped sharply and emigration increased again very quickly (Reidy and White, 2017).

The 2011 election is often discussed as a ballot box revolution (Gallagher and Marsh, 2011) and of course the election has been widely noted as the third most volatile election in Western Europe since 1945 (Mair, 2011). That the 2016 was also a top ten electoral volatility event has received less attention (Gallagher and Marsh, 2016). Taking the two elections together, there is no doubting that the political landscape in Ireland witnessed considerable electoral transformation and party politics is more fragmented than it has been since the very early years of the state. To illustrate these points, data on the party system and electoral volatility are presented in figures 1 and 2.

The effective number of parties was developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979) and it provides a measure of the number of parties in the system weighted by their size. Principally, it provides a snapshot of the level of fragmentation in a party system. Figure 1 shows that fragmentation in the Irish party system has been increasing for some years but there was a sharp increase in the effective number of parties in 2016 to 6.57, an increase from 4.77 in 2011.

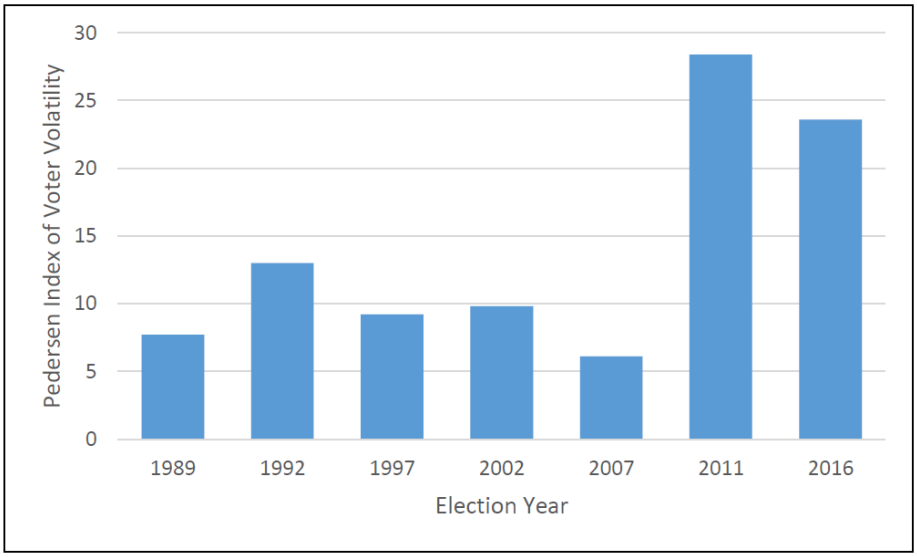
Figure 1: Effective number of parties at general elections (1989-2016)



Data Source: Prof Michael Gallagher Election, TCD.
http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/

The Pedersen index is a measure of net change in the party system from individual level vote switching (Pedersen, 1979). Index data for recent Irish elections are included in figure 2 and the pattern shows that there has been a sharp increase in electoral volatility.

Figure 2: Pederson Index at general elections (1989-2016)



Source: Dassonneville, Ruth (2015). *Net Volatility in Western Europe: 1950-2014*. Dataset. KU Leuven: Centre for Citizenship and Democracy.

The political volatility evident at the most recent elections in figures 1 and 2 was a manifestation of the deep political crisis which beset the Irish state following the economic collapse. Failures of governance became a central part of the crisis narrative and data from several surveys pointed to sharp falls in trust in parliament, political parties and politicians (Reidy and White, 2017). The widespread acceptance of serious political failure led to a programme of political reform by the Fine Gael and Labour government elected in 2011 (Lynch et al., 2017). The critical point is that Ireland experienced a deep political crisis which following insights from the populism literature suggests that a surge in populist attitudes was likely.

Despite the severity of the political and economic crises, the old parties in the political system retained their position in government. In 2011, Fianna Fáil, the long dominant party of government was replaced by Fine Gael and Labour. This pattern of alternation in power is replicated across the decades albeit, 2011 presented the largest swing away from Fianna Fáil in its history. The party made a small recovery in 2016 but Fine Gael managed to stay in government through a confidence and supply arrangement with Fianna Fáil and the support of independent TDs. To an extent, the centre has held and control of government rests with the parties that have always governed Ireland. The populist surge witnessed in other states which experienced similar political and economic conditions did not arise, at least at the level of party politics. To this extent, Ireland presents a mixed picture, it experienced deep economic and political crisis; electoral fragmentation has been increasing; voter volatility is high but the centre's hold on power remains. But all of the preceding analysis has been focused on the political system; parties and institutions. To date, the views of voters have not received much attention, mostly due to a paucity of data. We now proceed to the demand side and look in more detail at the values and attitudes of Irish voters. Our analysis considers both left-wing and right-wing populism.

4. DATA AND METHOD

Data for this research are drawn from the 2016 wave of the Irish National Election Study. In 2016, the INES was conducted using three discrete surveys; a nationwide exit poll of voters as they left polling stations on election day (the RTE/INES exit poll); and two separate post-election telephone polls of representative samples of Irish voters (one of which applied a battery of questions from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project; several of which measure aspects of populism (www.cses.org)).[2] The data presented in this paper are taken from the post election survey which included the CSES module. The survey was conducted by RED C and the sample size for the survey was 1000.

To understand whether there were latent factors we undertook a Kaiser-Meyer Olkin test, that is, an estimate of the proportion of variance among our variables that might be common across the variables. This indicated that the data had an overall MSA ('Measure of Sampling Adequacy') value of 0.78 which is regarded as 'Middling' to 'Meritorious', that a factor analysis would produce factors that accounted for a substantial amount of the overall variance. Our initial statistical analysis of eigenvalues and the proportion of the variance explained suggested that two factors were optimal as follows:

> The first factor may be described as anti-system and anti-elites populism (left wing) based on not trusting politicians and elites and had an eigen value of 2.6.
>
> The second factor is anti-outgroup and national identity populism (right wing) based on a belief that immigrants have harmed Ireland and various features are important considerations in national identity and had an eigen value of 1.4.

Because the factor loadings are similar to one another we created an additive scale for each of these factors and variables from the CSES populism module with a loading above 0.3 were included in each scale. The composition of the scales aligns with the main conclusions of research on populism in Ireland (O'Malley and Fitzgibbon, 2015; Suiter, 2017; Tinney and Quinlivan, 2017).

There are seven variables in the anti-system and anti-elites scale and six variables in the outgroups and national identity scale. Likert scales were used in the questions with strongly agree to strongly disagree applied for the questions on elites and outgroups; very widespread to it hardly happens at all for the question on corruption; and very important to not important at all in the questions on national identity. Where necessary, variables were recoded to create the additive scales. The variables included are listed in table 1.

[2] The unusual design for the INES in 2016 was due to funding limitations.

Table 1: Variables in the anti-system and anti-elites and outgroups and national identity populism scales

Anti-system and Anti-elites	Factor Loading
Most politicians do not care about the people	*.7095*
Most politicians are trustworthy	.4654
Politicians are the main problem in Ireland	.6539
The people, not the politicians, should make our most important decisions	.4095
Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful	.7195
Poor people should have a greater voice in politics	.3568
How widespread is corruption?	.5293
Outgroups and National Identity	
Immigrants are generally good for Ireland's economy	.3809
Ireland's culture is generally harmed by immigrants	.5009
To have been born in Ireland	.3896
To have lived in Ireland for most of one's life	.2411
To be Roman Catholic	.3241
To have Irish ancestry	0.3642

For both of the populism factors, we use a five-point additive scale where we measure populism among voters with few populist attitudes at point one (a little) to voters that hold a lot of populist attitudes at point five. The Cronbach's Alpha measure for each scale is reported in table 2. A score greater than 0.7 is recorded for each scale and hence we conclude that they are reliable.

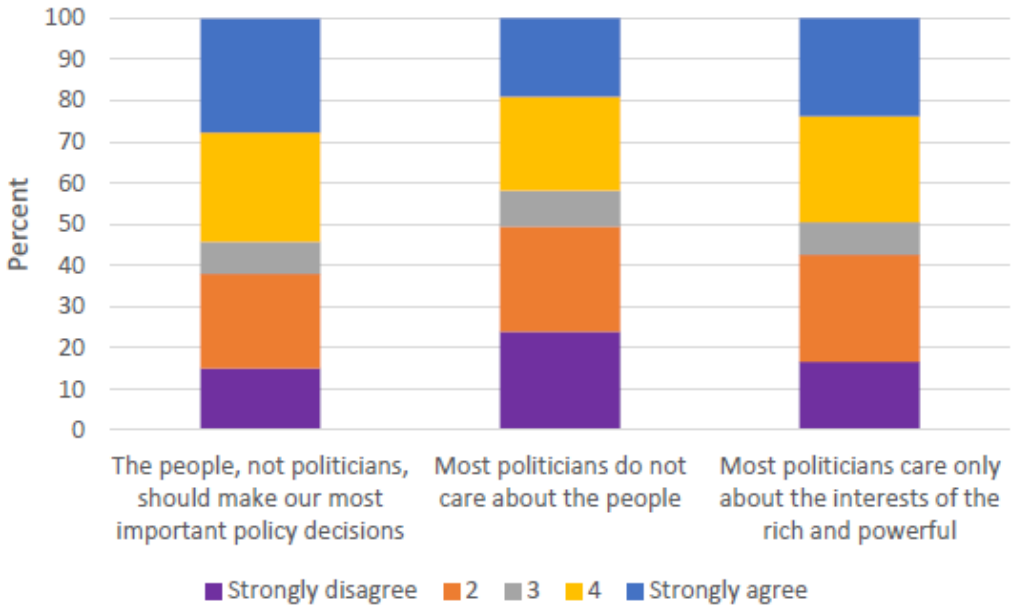
Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha test of reliability

Anti-system and anti-elites	0.7941
Outgroups and national identity	0.7125

5. DOES IRELAND HAVE POPULIST VOTERS?

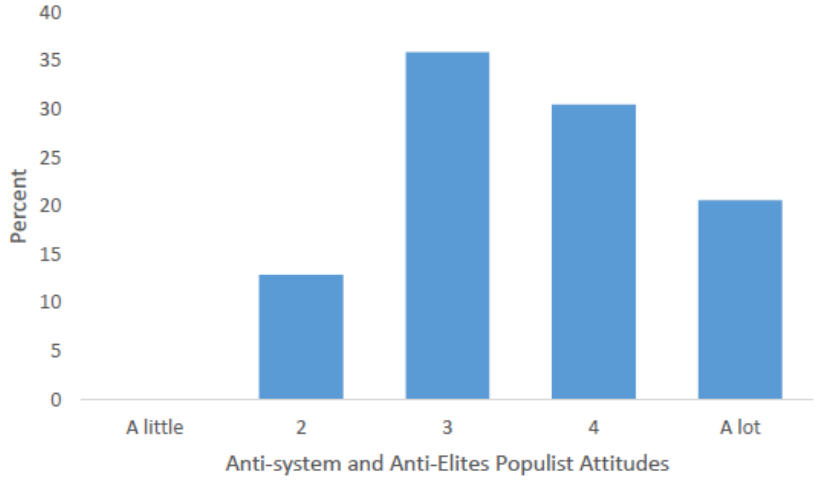
We begin by looking at attitudes towards the political system and elite groups in Ireland. There are seven variables included in the scale and the distribution of attitudes on three of the variables are included in figure 3 to highlight the distribution of voter attitudes. Voters who strongly agree or agree with each statement are exhibiting the more populist political attitudes. Hostility to politicians is a common aspect of anti-elite populism and we can see this view is held by a significant proportion of Irish voters. The purity of 'the people' is an important part of the definition of populism and populist parties frequently advocate for greater use of referendums and other forms of direct democracy as mechanisms for making political decisions. More than half of respondents agreed with this proposition as can be seen from the first column in figure three.

Figure 3: Attitudes towards the political system and elites



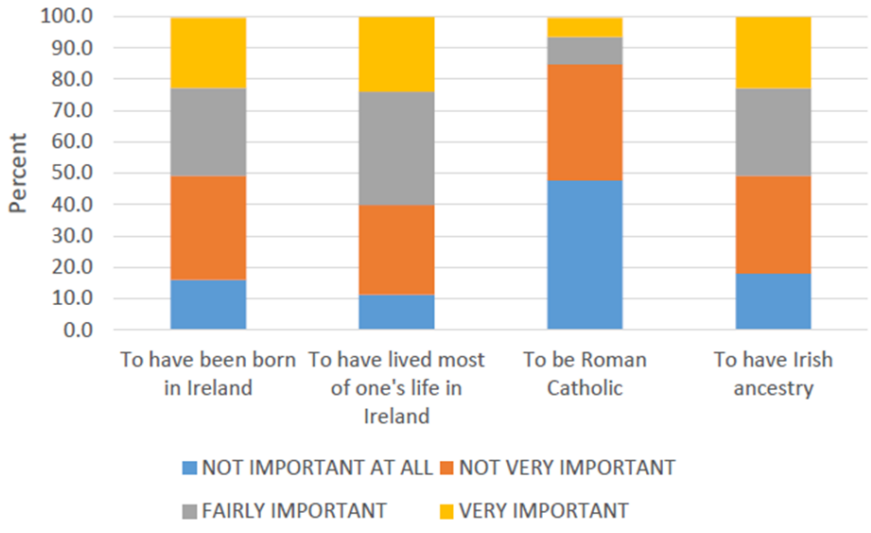
The anti-system and anti-elites additive scale is presented in figure 4. The data clearly skew to the right and we conclude that there are quite strong anti-system and anti-elite attitudes to be found among voters in 2016. Indeed, only a very small number of voters fall into the first position (so small that they are not visible on the figure). This finding aligns with data from successive waves of the European Values Survey and the European Social Survey which all show that trust in politicians, political parties and political institutions has been in decline for some time and that the period of the economic crisis contributed to an acceleration on some of these dimensions (O'Sullivan et al., 2014). The data are also consistent with the theoretical propositions from the populism literature that political and economic crisis lay the foundations for populism which in the Irish case has clearly manifested among voters in strong anti-system and anti-elites attitudes.[3]

Figure 4: Anti-system and anti-elites populism



Outgroup and national identity populism received considerable attention at recent European elections including the French presidential election in 2017 and the Dutch general election earlier in the same year. Hostility towards immigrants and minorities is often at the core of this type of populism and is frequently combined with nativist political attitudes which emphasise exclusionary aspects of national identity, such as heritage and language. Figure 5 presents the distribution of voter attitudes on four of the national identity propositions included in the outgroups and national identity scale. The pattern in figure 5 is different to the distributions presented for the anti-system and anti-elites variables with a smaller proportion of respondents holding populist attitudes about national identity. Unsurprisingly, the Roman Catholic dimension is quite small given the scandals of recent decades and collapse in attendance at religious services (see Fahey et al., 2005 for data from earlier decades). But 20 per cent of voters consider being born in Ireland, having lived in Ireland for most of one's life and having Irish ancestry to be very important aspects of national identity.

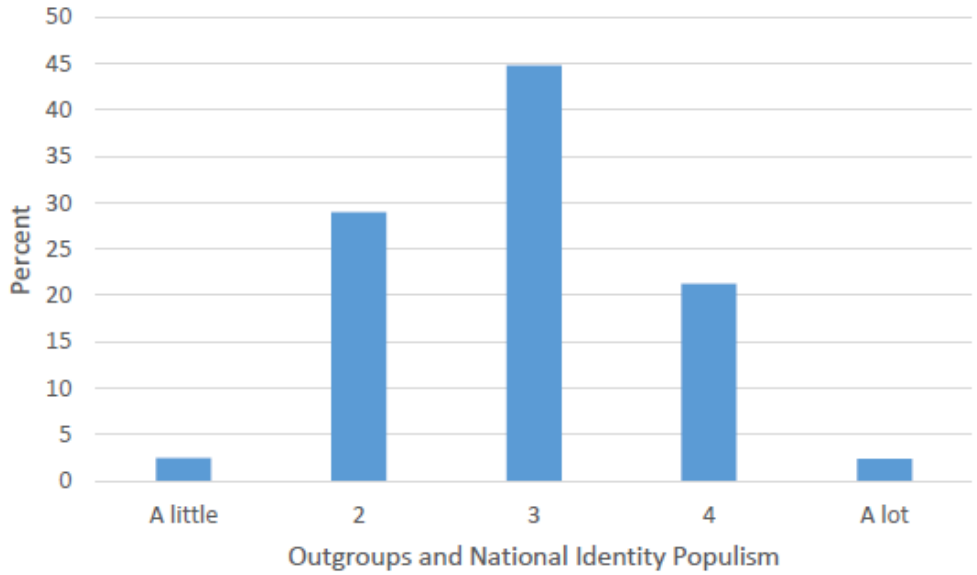
Figure 5: National identity attitudes



[3] Variables on redistribution were also included in the Irish National Election Study and included in the preliminary factor analysis for this paper but they did not load as a scale with any other variables and hence are excluded from the analysis.

A much lower percentage of voters exhibit high levels of outgroup and national identity populism as is clear from figure 6. There is a normal distribution in evidence and most particularly, only a very small number of voters display strong outgroup and national identity populism at point five of the scale. The largest cohort of voters is clustered in the mid-point position.

Figure 6: Outgroups and national identity populism

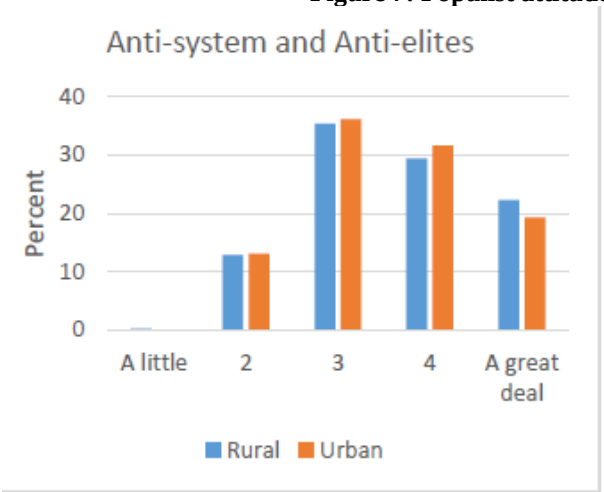


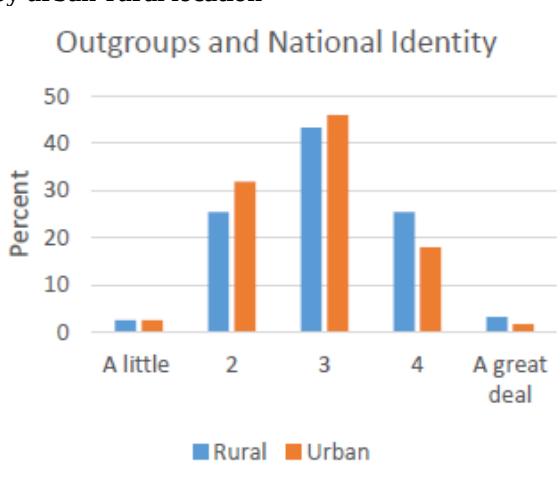
From these figures, we conclude that Irish voters do display populist attitudes but that anti-system and anti-elites attitudes are more prevalent than outgroups and national identity populism. Having established that Ireland has populist voters, it is useful to know a little bit more about who these voters are and from a political perspective which parties are supported by populist leaning voters.

6. WHO IS THE POPULIST IRISH VOTER?

We proceed by developing a demographic profile of populist voters in Ireland looking at the two distinct dimensions of populism. In the figures which follow, we present urban/rural, age, education and gender profiles for both anti-system and anti-elite populism and outgroups and national identity populism. A focal point of post-election debates in many recent elections has been who among the electorate supports populist political parties. Political science has sought to understand what characteristics unite populist voters and the figures attempt to begin this work for Irish voters. In both anti-system and anti elites populism and outgroups and national identity populism, rural voters are more likely to display the most populist attitudes (point 5) but overall the differences are small and the numbers for outgroups and national identity are quite low.

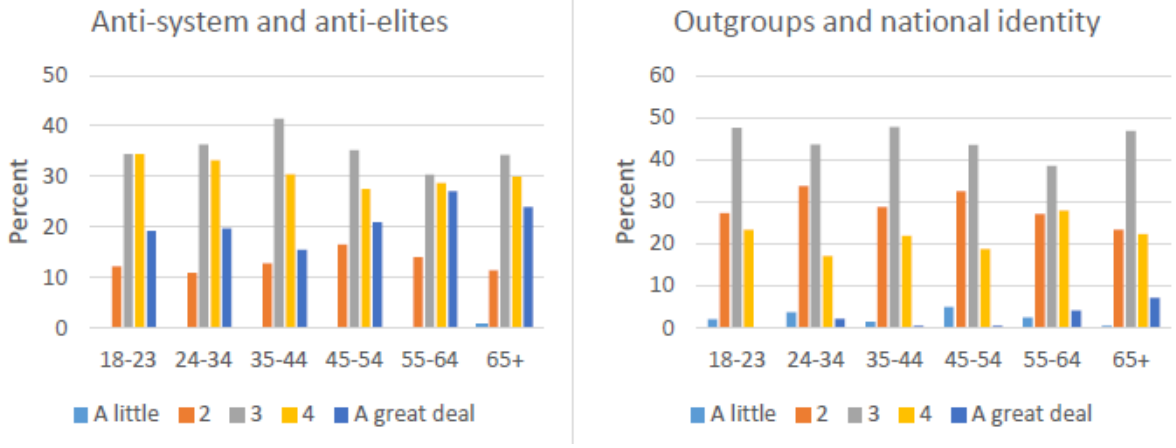
Figure 7: Populist attitudes by urban-rural location





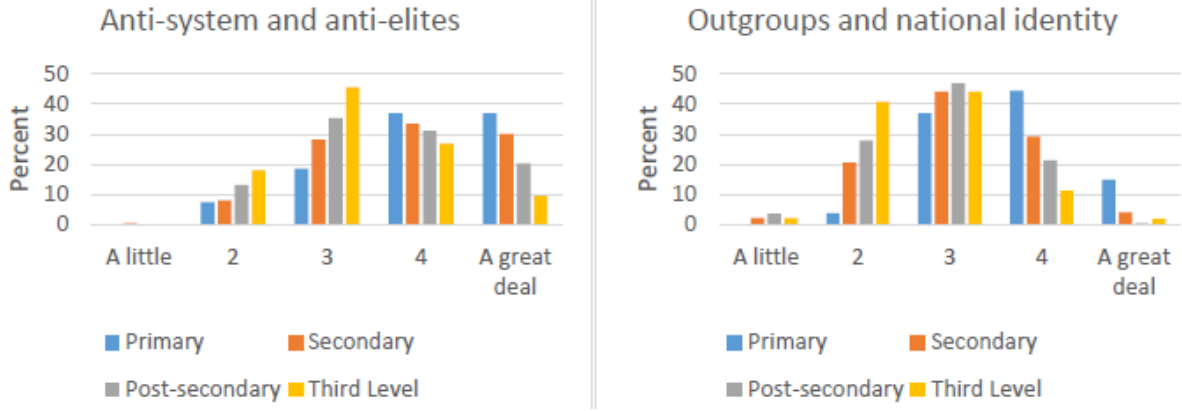
Anti-elites and anti-system attitudes are distributed across the age cohorts with small evidence of an increase in these attitudes with age. The mid-point of the scale is greatest for all age cohorts across both types of populism. Respondents aged 55 and over are more likely to hold the most populist anti-system and anti-elite attitudes and the same is true for outgroups and national identity populism, although the numbers are a good deal smaller for the latter.

Figure 8: Populist attitudes by age cohort



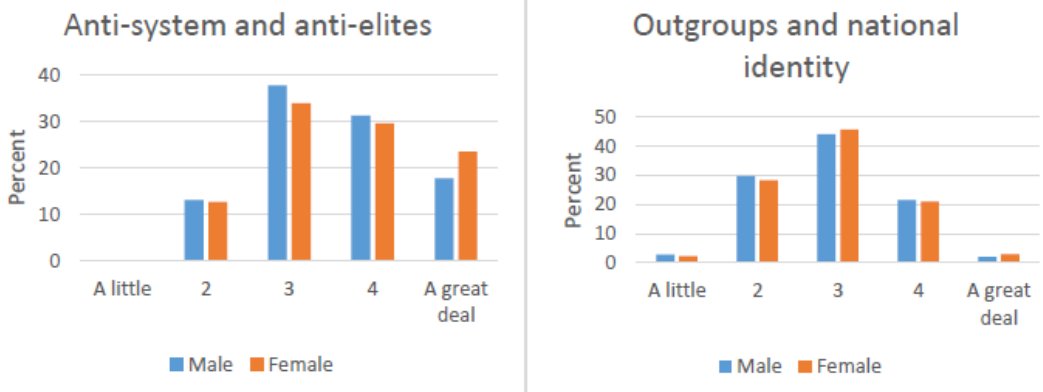
Education also matters when it comes to populism. Voters with primary level education only are more likely to hold strong anti-system and anti-elite attitudes and this pattern is also in evidence for outgroups and national identity populism albeit with a small proportion in the most populist position of point five. The data skew in the opposite direction for those with third level education with smaller proportions holding the most populist attitudes. Thus education appears to be protective against populist attitudes.

Figure 9: Populist attitudes by education



The final demographic that we look at is gender and from figure 10 we can see that women are more likely to display the most populist attitudes for both anti-system and outgroup populisms but the differences are very small across both scales.

Figure 10: Populist attitudes by gender



Finally, we are interested in knowing which parties are supported by populist voters at elections. Tables 3 and 4 present crosstabulations of the two populism scales and vote choice at the 2016 general election. There are a number of striking trends. Among anti-system and anti-elites populists, of the older parties, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin are much more likely to receive support. The pattern is particularly strong for Sinn Féin with 41.7% of its voters exhibiting the most anti-system and anti-elite attitudes (point five). Independent candidates also draw strong support from the most anti-system and anti-elite voters, although this is not entirely surprising as to some extent, in running as a non-party candidate, these individuals are already eschewing the system in a way.

In contrast, Fine Gael and the Green Party draw only small amounts of support from the most populist voters; 7.2% for Fine Gael and 9.6% for the Green Party. Data for some of the smaller parties are not included in this table for ease of interpretation but also because there may have only been a small number of voters supporting these groups and considerable caution should then be applied in inferring any relationships.

Although overall numbers are much lower for the most populist voters on the outgroups and national identity scale, we can see that Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin secure more support from this cohort than other parties, although Sinn Féin also has a higher proportion of those who score much lower on this populist scale than Fianna Fáil which is an interesting contradiction and one which has also been highlighted in Costello (2017). The figure for Renua is also high. Parties on the far left, independent candidates, Fine Gael and the Green Party receive quite small amounts of support from the most populist on this scale.

Table 3 Anti-system and anti-elites populism by voting preference[4]

	FF	FG	LAB	SF	GN	IND	AW-SP	PBP	DD	AAA	IA	R	SD	Total
1	0.00	0.43	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.11
2	12.63	22.13	19.18	4.63	9.62	11.20	0.00	11.11	0.00	0.00	0.00	14.29	9.76	14.01
3	38.42	46.38	49.32	18.52	55.77	25.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	9.09	0.00	28.57	46.34	37.31
4	33.68	23.83	20.55	35.19	25.00	32.00	0.00	33.33	0.00	63.64	66.67	42.86	24.39	29.51
5	15.26	7.23	10.96	41.67	9.62	31.20	100	55.56	100.00	27.27	33.33	14.29	19.51	19.06
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4: Outgroups and national identity by voting preference

	FF	FG	Lab	SF	GN	Ind	AW-SP	PBP	DD	AAA	IA	R	SD	Total
1	0.53	1.70	4.11	3.70	5.77	3.20	0.00	0.00	0.00	18.18	0.00	0.00	4.88	2.64
2	21.58	30.64	42.47	29.63	50.00	21.60	0.00	33.33	50.00	36.36	33.33	4.76	36.59	29.16
3	43.68	46.81	41.10	41.67	40.38	51.20	0.00	55.56	50.00	27.27	66.67	61.90	3.90	45.35
4	29.47	20.00	9.59	20.37	3.85	22.40	100	11.11	0.00	18.18	0.00	28.57	12.20	20.32
5	4.74	0.85	2.74	4.63	0.00	1.60	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	4.76	2.44	2.53
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

To investigate these effects further, we carried out a regression analysis on each of the populism variables. In relation to anti-system and anti-elites populism, in table 5, we can see that education and gender are both significant. In relation to party support, several important features are confirmed. Fine Gael voters are less populist that Fianna Fáil voters while Sinn Féin and independent voters are more populist that Fianna Fáil voters in terms of anti-system and anti-elite populism. Parties of the far left (People Before Profit, Anti-Austerity Alliance and Direct Democracy) also attract support from more populist voters.

[4] Owing to the large number of parties for which data is available, the information is presented in a table.

Table 5: Anti-system and anti-elites regression

N = 855
Prob > F = 0.0000
R-squared = 0.1976
Adj R-squared = 0.1823

Anti-system/Anti-elites	*Coefficient*	*Std. Err.*	*P>t*
Education	-.2400218***	.0355952	0.000
Age	.0184259	.0200044	0.357
Rural/Urban	.0080063	.0615182	0.896
Gender	.1769033**	.0604838	0.004
vote			
FF			
FG	-.347497***	.0852461	0.000
Lab	-.2065987	.1221537	0.091
SF	.6018282***	.1077066	0.000
Gn	-.1088997	.1380282	0.430
Ind	.3138038**	.1008606	0.002
AWT-SP	1.134599	.8692071	0.192
PBP	.6697472*	.3152986	0.034
DD	1.513141*	.6147934	0.014
AAA	.5566458*	.2730062	0.042
IA	.8187267	.5037493	0.104
R	.0725881	.1995689	0.716
SD	.1027844	.1518487	0.499
_cons	3.86507	.1933134	0.000

Similar patterns emerge from the regression analysis of the outgroups and national identity populism scale. Education is significant and people with lower levels of education are more likely to exhibit populist attitudes confirming the patterns evident in figure 9. Fianna Fáil attracts the largest support levels from outgroup and national identity populists and among the old parties, Fine Gael, Labour Sinn Féin and the Greens all receive less support from these populists, as do independent candidates.

Table 6: Outgroups and National Identity Regression

N = 855
Prob > F = 0.0000
R-squared = 0.1220
Adj R-squared = 0.1052

	Coef.	Std. Err.	P>t
Education	-.2062768	.0323911	0.000
Age	.0064579	.0182037	0.723
Rural/Urban	-.087264	.0559806	0.119
Gender	.0364028	.0550393	0.509
vote			
FF			
FG	-.2674431**	.0775725	0.001
Lab	-.4824063***	.1111579	0.000
SF	-.3120883**	.0980113	0.002
GN	-.6665893***	.1256035	0.000
Ind	-.1803991*	.0917815	0.050
AWT-SP	.6594082	.7909645	0.405
PBP	-.5714238*	.2869167	0.047
DD	-.6436008	.5594521	0.250
AAA	-.7936316**	.2484313	0.001
IA	-.4673809	.4584037	0.308
R	.2042246	.1816045	0.261
SD	-.3551036	.1381799	0.010
_cons	3.81612	.1759121	0.000

7. CONCLUSION

Ireland experienced a severe economic crisis and party system transformation from 2008. There has been significant fragmentation of the political landscape; elections have been especially volatile, the effective number of parties has increased and trust in politics and the political system has dropped sharply. The theoretical literature on populism suggests that Ireland should be a fertile ground for populist political attitudes and populist political parties. The major conclusion of this paper is that there are two dimensions to populism in Ireland: anti-system and anti-elites populism; and outgroups and national identity populism. Furthermore, a significant number of Irish voters exhibit the attitudinal features of both types of populism with anti-system and anti-elites being the more prevalent of the two.

There are few distinguishing demographic characteristics to these populists but gender is significant for anti-system and anti-elites populism with women the more populist of the genders. Education stands out for both types of populism and those with lower levels of education are more likely to hold the most populist attitudes. Fianna Fáil, Sinn Féin and independent candidates attract substantial support from anti-system and anti-elites populists while Fianna Fáil and to a lesser extent Sinn Féin stand apart as attracting support from the outgroups and national identity populists, although at relatively low levels.

The research throws up several interesting lines of inquiry for future research. Interestingly, both Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin attract support from voters with strong outgroup and national identity views. While the national identity focus is consistent with the priorities advocated by both parties, neither party has sought to advance policy positions or use rhetoric at national level which is hostile to minorities or immigrants. The connection between these voters and the parties they support merits further consideration as it is likely to be unstable over time. Longitudinal study of populist attitudes will also prove fruitful in understanding how far the economic crisis of the Great Recession was a causal factor populism among Irish voters.

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