

6 APRIL 2021



PODEMOS AND IMMIGRATION

LEFT-WING POPULISM IN EUROPE

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Word count: 10.513

Bachelor Thesis 15 EC

GE3V18001

Abstract

In Europe, populist right-wing parties have gained significant popularity in the political sphere. The populists of these right-wing parties claim to speak for ‘the people’, while they are xenophobic, racist and exclusionary towards immigrants. On the other side of the political spectrum left-wing populist parties portray much less xenophobic, racist and exclusionary rhetoric towards immigrants. Especially the Spanish populist party Podemos maintains pro-immigrant policies and has an inclusionary attitude towards immigrants. This thesis investigates how the left-wing populism of Podemos has resulted in a more inclusionary political discourse towards immigrants. This is done by using the discursive approach to populism and analysing the political discourse of Podemos on immigration from 2014 until 2018. Populism is often perceived as a threat to democracy. In contrary, some scholars argue that populism can also have a positive effect on democracy. This thesis substantiates that argument by showing that more democratic forms of populism actually contribute to a more inclusive form of democracy by including groups of people who have been excluded from the democratic processes. To achieve this, the populist party Podemos is used as a case study.

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Introduction

In contemporary politics and academics there is almost no subject that receives as much attention as populism.¹ Various new radical populist parties and leaders emerged in many different countries in the 21st century. In Europe, right-wing populists like the Dutch politician Geert Wilders of the anti-Islam Freedom Party, the Prime Minister Viktor Orbán of the Fidesz Party in Hungary and politician Marine Le Pen of the French Front National are examples that are most prominent in the media. These populists claim to speak for ‘the people’, while they are xenophobic, racist and exclusionary towards immigrants. For instance, Viktor Orbán is strongly anti-immigrant and sees immigrants as a huge threat. He stated: ‘Every single migrant poses a public security and terror risk’.² The Hungarian government displayed strong nationalism with campaign slogans saying: ‘if you come to Hungary you have to respect the culture of the Hungarians.’³

On the other side of the political spectrum populist parties like SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the French La Insoumise have also gained more popularity in Europe. These parties similarly claim to speak for ‘the people’ but defend immigrants and other excluded social groups. For example, Podemos stated during the election campaign of 2015 that they wanted to give immigrants voting rights to increase their political participation.⁴ These several examples of populist parties show that right and left-wing populists both argue to represent the people but have different relationships with immigration. Why do all these populists claim to speak for all the people but have different attitudes towards minority groups such as immigrants?

The exclusionary attitude of right-wing parties is most prominent in Europe because right-wing populists have gained much more political popularity in recent years than the left-wing populists. Many academics have researched these right-wing populist parties and have

¹ Matthijs Rooduijn, ‘Why is populism suddenly all the rage?’ (November 20, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/political-science/2018/nov/20/why-is-populism-suddenly-so-sexy-the-reasons-are-many> (accessed March 22, 2021).

² Cynthia Kroet, ‘Viktor Orbán: Migrants are ‘a poison’’ (July 27, 2016), <https://www.politico.eu/article/viktor-orban-migrants-are-a-poison-hungarian-prime-minister-europe-refugee-crisis/> (accessed March 14, 2021)

³ Keno Verseck, ‘Hungary’s slow descent into xenophobia, racism and human rights abuses’ (October 21, 2019) <https://www.infomigrants.net/en/post/20220/hungary-s-slow-descent-into-xenophobia-racism-and-human-rights-abuses> (accessed March 14, 2021).

⁴ J. Jiménez Gálvez, ‘Podemos wants foreigners to vote in referendums and regional elections’ (November 24, 2015) https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2015/11/24/inenglish/1448363831_978855.html (accessed March 29, 2021).

defined them as anti-immigrant, xenophobic and nativist.⁵ These elements belong to a lot of right-wing populists in Europe, but left-wing populists like the Spanish party Podemos and the Greek party SYRIZA have a different attitude towards immigration. These more inclusionary left-wing populist parties have not been researched as much as the European right-wing populist parties.⁶ Podemos is one of the few left-wing populist parties in Europe that attained significant political influence in national elections and actually maintained pro-immigrant policies. Therefore, it is interesting to further research the relationship between Podemos and immigration. Several scholars researched the left-wing populism of Podemos and stated that the populist party Podemos follows an inclusionary populist discourse.⁷ This thesis further investigates how Podemos constructed this inclusionary populist discourse towards immigrants.

Populism consists of a broad spectrum, from democratic populism to authoritarian populism and differentiations are also made between exclusionary and inclusionary populism.⁸ In addition, populism can be left, right and even hybrid: combining elements of left and right.⁹ Despite the many different forms of populism, several academics have provided conceptual frameworks, theories and definitions. In this thesis the discursive approach to populism is used to analyse the left-wing populist party Podemos. This discursive approach to populism is derived from the ideas of the Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau. This theory defines populism as a political discourse that every populist political movement or party contains. The theory is useful in assessing how Podemos constructed an inclusive attitude towards immigrants in their political discourse.

Main question and sub questions

In this thesis the research on the left-wing party of Podemos is done by answering one main question and four sub questions. The main question in this thesis is:

How has the left-wing populism of Podemos in Spain resulted in a more inclusionary political discourse towards immigrants?

⁵ Alexandros Kioupiolis, 'Podemos: The ambiguous promises of left-wing populism in contemporary Spain', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21, (2016) 2, 99-120, 100; Paris Aslanidis, 'Avoiding bias in the study of populism', *Chinese Political Science Review* 2 (2017) 3, 266-287, 273.

⁶ Nuria Font, Paolo Graziano, and Myrto Tsakatika, 'Varieties of inclusionary Populism? SYRIZA, Podemos, and the Five Star Movement', *Government and Opposition* 56 (2021) 1, 163-183, 164.

⁷ For example: Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, 'Varieties of inclusionary Populism?', 179.

⁸ Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, 'Varieties of inclusionary Populism?', 164.

⁹ Rogers Brubaker, 'Why populism?', *Theory and Society* 46 (2017) 5, 357-385, 358.

The main question is answered using four sub questions that are each answered in different chapters. The first chapter outlines the theoretical framework of the discursive theory with the sub question: *How is populism defined by the discursive theory?*

In the second chapter an overview of the context of the neoliberal crisis in which left-wing populism in Europe emerged is given. The sub question in this chapter is: *Why did left-wing populism emerge in Europe in the 21st century?*

The third chapter gives an analysis of the left-wing populism of Podemos with the sub question: *How is the left-wing populism of Podemos defined?*

The last chapter focuses on the relationship between Podemos and immigration. The sub question that is investigated in this chapter is: *How does Podemos construct their political discourse on immigration?*

Method and source material

This thesis approaches populism with the discursive theory. This discursive theory is derived from the ideas of Laclau and forms the theoretical framework that analyses the populist discourse of Podemos in the last two chapters. This method follows discourse-oriented scholars from the Essex School of Discourse Analysis.¹⁰ With this method the political discourses of populist parties are analysed. The political discourse of a political party displays how political parties view certain issues. The leaders of a party construct the political discourse and this discourse is communicated to the public through speeches, interviews and political messages on social media. Populist parties want to communicate their political ideas to the common people and have invented new ways of communicating with their constituency. Podemos has done this by excessively using social media platforms, like Twitter and Instagram, and other new digital technologies to convey their political message.¹¹ These new social media platforms are not only a new way of communicating a political message to the voters for populist parties but are very useful and accessible for analysing how a certain political party constructs their political discourse to their voters. Therefore, to understand how

¹⁰ Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Giorgios Katsambekis, 'New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power: The cases of SYRIZA and Podemos', in: G. Charalambous, G. Ioanou (eds.), *Left radicalism and populism in Europe* (Abingdon & NY: Routledge 2020) 129-155, 130.

¹¹ Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, 'New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power', 142.

Podemos views the immigration issue, their political discourse on this issue is analysed. This thesis focuses on the beginning of the populist party in 2014 to their electoral program of 2018. This time period is chosen because during that time Podemos was most successful in the national elections.

The source material of this thesis consists of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources are political messages, speeches and interviews of the leaders of Podemos. Also, the electoral programs of the 2014, 2016 and 2018 elections and a video from *Fort Apache* are used as primary sources.¹² The political messages on Twitter and Instagram have been scanned on the issue of immigration. Most of these primary sources are in Spain and translated to English. All the translated Spanish quotes have been marked with: (my translation). The secondary sources are academic articles of scholars who have researched populism.

Academic debate

There has been a lot of academic debate on the relationship between populism and democracy. This debate involves the discussion whether populism can have a negative or positive effect on democracy. Most of the academic literature on populism portrays populism in a negative way and as a serious threat to liberal democracy.¹³ Some scholars argue that many populist parties or movements are undermining core elements of democracy and want an authoritarian regime.¹⁴ The Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde argues in his article *The Populist Zeitgeist* that populists do not favor participatory democracy and do not actually want to expand democratic representation for the people.¹⁵

Other scholars emphasize the positive effects that some populist parties or movements can have on democracy. One of these scholars is the political scientist Grigoris Markou who has researched the left-wing populism of SYRIZA using the discursive approach in his article *The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe: the case of SYRIZA*. In this article, Markou argues 'that populism as the main enemy of democracy refers principally to an exclusionary

¹² *Fort Apache* is a tv-program that was hosted by Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias.

¹³ Cas Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39 (2004) 4, 541-563, 541.

¹⁴ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Populism and (liberal) democracy: a framework for analysis', in: Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) 1-26, 16.

¹⁵ Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', 558-559.

(racist and xenophobic) right-wing populism and not to an inclusionary one'.¹⁶ According to Markou left-wing populist movements 'promote radical solutions in a democratic way'.¹⁷

Likewise, the Law scholar Bojan Bugarcic argued that more democratic populist parties, like Podemos and SYRIZA 'seek to protect and defend democracy by making it more responsive, equitable and inclusive.'¹⁸ In addition, the sociologist Colin Crouch has researched the relationship between populism and democracy and similarly argued that populism can have a positive effect on democracy. He argues in his article *Post-democracy and populism* that populist movements can strengthen democracy because these movements challenge the existing structure in the establishment and represent neglected issues forgotten by the establishment.¹⁹ The more democratic and inclusionary populist movement and parties are not against the whole political system of democracy but rather against the choices that are made by the current government.

This thesis joins the abovementioned scholars on the argument that some more democratic and inclusionary forms of populism actually have a positive effect on democracy. This thesis aims to show that some democratic and inclusionary populist parties can actually contribute to a more inclusive form of democracy by protecting groups of people who have been excluded from the democratic processes. To achieve this, the populist political party Podemos is used as a case study.

¹⁶ Grigoris Markou, 'The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe: the case of SYRIZA', *Contemporary Southeastern Europe* 4 (2017) 1, 54-71, 55.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*

¹⁸ Bojan Bugarcic, 'The two faces of populism: Between authoritarian and democratic populism', *German Law Journal* 20 (2019) 3, 390-400, 390.

¹⁹ Colin Crouch, 'Post-democracy and populism', *The Political Quarterly* 90 (2019) S1, 124-137, 135.

Chapter 1 Theoretical framework

This first chapter outlines the theoretical framework that is used to define populism in this thesis. First of all, the discursive theory is explained which is based on the ideas of Ernesto Laclau. After that the construction of ‘the people’ is explained and lastly the reason for using the discursive approach is clarified. The central question in this chapter is: *How is populism defined by the discursive theory?*

The Discursive Theory

The discursive approach to populism is based on the ideas of the Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau. He produced one of the most influential works on populism with his book *On Populist Reason*.²⁰ Laclau constructed his theory in the midst of the crisis of Marxism and derived his ideas from the structuralist notion of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci and therefore he is mostly labelled as post-Marxist. The ideas of Laclau were used by populist movements and parties to mobilise popular support, but also by various scholars to explain certain populist discourses of mostly left-wing parties.²¹

Laclau saw populism as ‘a way of constructing the political’.²² His theory analyses populism as a certain political logic or discourse that can be found in any political movement or party.²³ The theory argues that the meaning of objects and actions depend on the construction of a certain political discourse. Before the populist discourse can be constructed, Laclau argued that a crisis was a crucial pre-condition for the emergence of populism.²⁴ According to him populism emerges when there exist ‘a crisis of the dominant ideological discourse which is in turn part of a more general social crisis’.²⁵ Thus, in their political discourse populist parties make use of an existing crisis amongst the population to create a new political narrative. The populist movement or party uses this crisis to mobilise the population.

²⁰ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso 2018) Kobo e-book.

²¹ Markou, ‘The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe: the case of SYRIZA’, 58; Alexandros Kioupiolis and Giorgos Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 130.

²² Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, Preface, 12.

²³ Markou, ‘The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe’, 58.; Mudde and Kaltwasser, ‘Populism and (liberal) democracy’, 6.

²⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and ideology in Marxist theory: Capitalism, fascism, populism* (London: Verso Trade 2012), 175.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

In addition, populists construct a political discourse with a specific notion of ‘the people’ that is unified in opposition to ‘the elite’ in power.²⁶ The divide is constructed by using three discursive elements:²⁷

- (1) The creation of an antagonistic opposition between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’.
- (2) The construction of a chain of equality that represents the demands and interests of ‘the people’.
- (3) The construction of ‘the people’ as a unity and a popular identity that is misrepresented and excluded by the governing elite.

The populist party tries to mobilize different social groups through the construction of an opposition between the establishment and the population. At the one end of this opposition the populist party accuses the establishment of not fulfilling the interests and demands of the population. At the other end the populist party argues that the population feels excluded and is not represented by the current establishment. The populist political party or leader claims to be the voice of this excluded population. All these three discursive instruments are used by political actors to inspire and mobilize excluded social groups.

Construction of ‘the people’ in populist discourses

The construction of ‘the people’ by populist parties is an important part of their political discourse. This is because the core element of the populist discourse is the claim that only the populist movement or party speaks in the name of ‘the people’ and against ‘the elite’.²⁸ How populist parties construct the concept of ‘the people’ determines their inclusionary or exclusionary character. Inclusionary populism wants to integrate excluded people and expand democracy.²⁹ In contrast, exclusionary populism sees ‘the people’ as an ethnic or cultural homogenous group and excludes other groups.³⁰

On the one hand, right-wing populism is often characterized as exclusionary. The right-wing populists consider ‘the people’ as only those who share the same nationality or a

²⁶ Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 131.

²⁷ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, chapter 4, 160-161.

²⁸ Brubaker, ‘Why populism?’, 359.

²⁹ Markou, ‘The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe’, 58.

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

certain political culture, while they exclude all other groups of the population.³¹ They feel threatened by outsiders who in their eyes do not belong to the national community and even the outsiders living in the country are seen as a threat.³² On the other hand, left-wing populism is mostly defined as inclusionary. Left-wing populists have a notion of ‘the people’ that is united more in economic or political terms.³³ The external force that threatens the left-wing collective identity are the economic or political elites.³⁴

The discursive approach explains how populists construct an inclusionary idea of ‘the people’. In Laclau’s theory ‘the people’ are perceived as a diverse group with different and often contradictory identities. This theory attempts to give a response to the increasingly complex demands of people that are no longer separated into different homogenous social classes.³⁵ These various identities are united by a shared feeling of existential insecurity and inequality and express new social needs that the current establishment is not able to meet.³⁶ In his book *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe* political sociologist Marco Damiani has included a part of an interview he had with Jean-Luc Melechon, the leader of the left-wing populist party France Insoumise. This interview shows these different identities.

Melechon defines the people consistent with the ideas of Laclau:

[...] Today there is a new humanity, in a very short time we have grown beyond 7 billion people, and when the world’s population grows, it changes the condition of human life. That’s why today we find ourselves confronted with a new political entity: the people. Who is the people? The people is formed by people who live prevalently in large cities and who need public services that provide education, healthcare, energy and food. Today the people is not composed only of those who are employed and who have homogeneous class interests, but also of those who are retired, or are studying, or who can’t find work. The people is the new actor made up of several million people. [...]³⁷

Laclau created a discursive strategy that can be implemented in the political discourse to unite all these diverse demands of different groups of people. To unite all these different groups of people, these unsatisfied popular demands are constructed through a ‘chain of equivalence’.

³¹ Marco Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe: Equality and Sovereignty* (New York: Routledge 2020) 24-25

³² Brubaker, ‘Why populism?’, 363.

³³ Brubaker, ‘Why populism?’, 363.

³⁴ Ibidem.

³⁵ Marco Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 26.

³⁶ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 35.

³⁷ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 30.

This 'chain of equivalence' is the linking of the diverse unsatisfied popular demands of various groups. To create the linkages of this chain of equivalence, populists use 'empty signifiers' with a broad meaning and few connotations. In this way, various social groups can ascribe their own meaning to these empty signifiers and identify themselves with the political project of the party. The task for populist parties is to frame diverse identities together to create a collective subject of change. This process is described by Laclau:

I have already described how the transition from individual to popular demands operates – through the construction of equivalential links. Now I have to explain how this plurality of links becomes a singularity through its condensation around a popular identity ... But if an equivalential link is going to be established between them, some kind of common denominator has to be found which embodies the totality of the series.³⁸

This common denominator is created with empty signifiers such as 'justice', 'democracy' and 'freedom' which are relatively vague and have no concrete agreed meaning. The populist keeps the meaning of the empty signifiers deliberately vague in order to unite the diverse meanings that the public ascribes to them. The populist wants to unite the different social groups and create a collective subject of change. This is done by the creation of a common enemy that is accused of not satisfying all these demands. In this way the political discourse of the populist project represents interests of various groups of people of different social classes. This is how populist parties construct an inclusionary idea of 'the people' so that diverse social groups can identify with the same political project.³⁹

³⁸ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, chapter 4, 206.

³⁹ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 26.

Why the discursive approach?

An advantage of using this definition of populism is that the diverse notions of ‘the people’ that some populist discourses contain can be analysed. This is because the discursive theory of Laclau, constructs a notion of ‘the people’ that can appeal to a wide array of groups, interests and identities.⁴⁰ It considers the concept of ‘the people’ as a more differentiated and pluralist group. A different approach, called the thin-centred ideology frames ‘the people’ as a homogenous concept:

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.⁴¹

This approach has been challenged by various scholars arguing that not all populists employ a ‘homogenous’ concept of the people.⁴² The discursive approach in contrast sees populism as a discursive strategy that is capable of uniting unsatisfied popular demands coming from more diverse groups in society, instead of only a homogenous group in society.⁴³ This makes it a useful approach to research more inclusionary forms of populism, especially how Podemos has included immigrants in their construction of ‘the people’.

Moreover, this approach contributes to the academic debate on the relationship between populism and democracy. Many academics argue that populism is a threat to democracy. Most research on populism in Europe focuses on the exclusionary characteristics of right-wing populist parties with a homogenous concept of ‘people’. These academics consider right-wing populism to be damaging to the democratic institutions and a threat to the core elements of liberal democracy.⁴⁴ Through the discursive approach, populism becomes a social movement with emancipatory elements that can bring about inclusive transformational change to the democratic process and include various groups of people. This approach incorporates populist movements that embody more inclusionary constructions of ‘the people’. In this way, populist parties also represent excluded groups and actually increase

⁴⁰ Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, ‘Varieties of inclusionary Populism?’, 165.

⁴¹ Cas Mudde, ‘The Populist Zeitgeist’, 543.

⁴² Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, ‘Varieties of inclusionary Populism?’, 165.

⁴³ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 34.

⁴⁴ Bugarcic, ‘The two faces of populism’, 390.

their democratic representation. The discursive theory is used to show that some forms of populism actually have a positive effect on democracy.

However, there is a lot of discussion if such a transformation can eventually establish a stable, rights-protecting democracy and the inclusionary populism has received criticism by some scholars. As these critics pointed out, an important difference has to be made between a social movement utilizing populist rhetoric that actually contributes and expands democratic processes and other populist movements that only seek state power and when in power can become authoritarian and un-democratic.⁴⁵ This was seen in some of the left-wing populist movements in Latin America when they were instituted as the government.

In Venezuela for instance, Hugo Chávez was one of the most influential Latin American left-wing populists with his political discourse that is called *Chavismo*. This discourse articulated an antagonistic opposition between a virtuous people (*el pueblo*) and a corrupt elite, inspired by the theory of Ernesto Laclau, where Chávez himself represented *el pueblo* with his leadership.⁴⁶ He promised more participatory and inclusionary politics for the Venezuelan people. Despite this promise, the left-wing populist Chávez in power turned out to actually undermine the democratic institutions. His policies in office polarized Venezuelan society and impeded the checks and balances to create effective democratic debate or institutionalized pluralism.⁴⁷ This Chavez populism is an example of how left-wing populism while at first promoting more inclusionary and democratic changes, became highly undemocratic as president. Podemos is currently governing in a coalition with PSOE, but his thesis analyses Podemos when it is not yet part of the government.⁴⁸ Therefore, this thesis does not analyse if Podemos becomes authoritarian or un-democratic in government.

⁴⁵ Frederico Finchelstein and Nadia Urbinati, 'On Populism and Democracy', *Populism* 1 (2018) 1, 15-37, 24.

⁴⁶ M. Kenneth Roberts, 'Populism and democracy in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez', in: Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) 136-159,136.

⁴⁷ Roberts, 'Populism and democracy in Venezuela under Hugo Chavez', 158-159.

⁴⁸ Sam Jones, 'Socialists and Podemos to rule together in Spanish coalition' (January 7, 2020), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/07/pedro-sanchez-spain-pm-government-vote-parliament> (accessed 12 March 2021)

Conclusion

To summarise, populism according to the discursive approach is seen as a certain political discourse that is present in every populist party. The populist party uses an existing crisis in the population to create popular support for their political project. In addition, their populist discourse centres on 'the people' while dividing the population in an opposition between 'the elite' and 'the people'. Through the discursive theory the notion of 'the people' can represent a diverse group with many interests and demands and the populist party unites 'the people' by creating a common enemy. This theory shows how the more inclusionary notion of 'the people' of left-wing populism is constructed with the ideas of Laclau. While right-wing populists construct 'the people' as homogenous group that is united in ethnic and cultural terms, left-wing populists construct 'the people' as a pluralist group that is more united in economic or political terms. The discourse approach gives an important contribution to the debate on the relationship between populism and democracy. This approach explains the more inclusionary concept of 'the people' and shows how some populist parties can include excluded groups in the democratic processes. Therefore, it is an useful approach to research how Podemos has constructed an inclusionary political discourse towards immigrants.

Chapter 2 The emergence of left-wing populism in Europe

This chapter explains the context in which the left-wing populist party Podemos emerged. When researching a specific kind of populist party or movement, the historical and regional processes in which it was created are essential to the analysis. This is because populism is argued to be context-based and is a reflection of the cultural and social character of the society in which it emerges.⁴⁹ First the crisis of the neoliberal system is explained. Secondly, this chapter explains the responses of left and right-wing parties to the neoliberal crisis. The central question in this chapter is: *Why did left-wing populism emerge in Europe in the 21st century?*

Populism in Europe and the crisis of the neoliberal system

During the 20th century European countries were threatened by political extremes, such as the extreme right of fascism and extreme left of communism.⁵⁰ At the end of the 20th century, with the fall of the Soviet Union, many countries in Europe adopted the system of liberal democracy. In the 21st century almost all of the countries in Europe have grown into stable democracies and are part of the European Union. With his article *The End of History* Francis Fukuyama argued in 1989 that liberal democracy would have no more rivals at the level of ideas.⁵¹ According to Fukuyama there would be other ideologies that would gain popularity, but none of these would be able to compete with liberal democracy's global attractiveness. All countries would eventually adopt the system of Western liberal democracy, because this was the ideal political system. This statement has now been criticized because of the emergence of populism in different parts throughout the world. While some scholars argue that populism does not offer a viable alternative for liberal democracy, it can emerge in a wide range of contexts and pose a threat to the political system of liberal democracy.⁵² Especially in Europe the popularity of right-wing populism poses a threat to liberal democracy because these populist parties often combine populism with authoritarianism and

⁴⁹ Finchelstein and Urbinati, 'On Populism and Democracy', 17.

⁵⁰ Cas Mudde, 'Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe Today', in: York Norman, Gary Marotta, Bridget Maria Chesterton, and John Abromeit (eds.), *Transformations of Populism and Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies* (2015) 295-307, 295.

⁵¹ Francis Fukuyama, 'The End of History?', *The National Interest* (1989) 16, 3-18.

⁵² M. Kenneth Roberts, 'Crises of Representation and Populist Challenges to Liberal Democracy', *Chinese Political Science Review* 4 (2019) 2, 188-199, 188.

ethno-nationalism.⁵³ For example, the populist governments in Hungary and Poland attacked the core elements of liberal democracy, such as the rule of law and civil rights.⁵⁴ This appeal to populism in contemporary Europe is a popular reaction to the crisis of the neoliberal system.

Political and economic changes in the political system of European countries produced the crisis of the neoliberal system. In the 21st century the neoliberal capitalist system became the dominant international economic system.⁵⁵ This system includes political and economic liberalism and an international elite agreed that there was no viable alternative to this system.⁵⁶ The world has also become increasingly more globalized in the 20th and 21st century. This globalization, which is the process where trade and investments move on a worldwide scale, has produced significant changes on political level.⁵⁷ One of these changes are new forms of political authority and new channels of transnational, international and supranational representation for citizens.⁵⁸ Liberal democracies promote the adoption of models of international governance which is embodied by international institutions such as the IMF, United Nations, the NATO and the Council of Europe. This creates a more global community and produces a (fear of) significant reduction in the traditional levels of political participation of the citizens in several countries around the world.⁵⁹ The citizens fear that their own individual interests will not be represented in this increasingly more global form of governance.

Along with this, the neoliberal system also created an economic crisis. It promoted a globalized economy with globalized free markets. Due to these neoliberal policies, there was an ineffective redistribution of wealth: the poor became poorer and the rich became richer.⁶⁰ In many countries it created anti-globalization attitudes amongst the population. Thus, the neoliberal capitalist system has led to a group of people who have benefitted from the globalization but also many individuals who feel that globalization has impacted them badly and perceive greater insecurity and inequality.

One of the direct causes for the rise in popularity for populist parties in Europe was the Great Recession and financial crisis that started in 2008. This economic and financial crisis

⁵³ Bugaric, 'The two faces of populism', 393.

⁵⁴ Bugaric, 'The two faces of populism', 393.

⁵⁵ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 15.

⁵⁶ Roberts, 'Crises of Representation and Populist Challenges to Liberal Democracy', 189.

⁵⁷ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 19.

⁵⁸ Ibidem.

⁵⁹ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 20.

⁶⁰ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 19.

exacerbated the already wide gap between the rich and the poor that was created by globalization. Many European countries handled the crisis with austerity policies and this produced widespread poverty amongst the population and uncertainty for sitting governments in the political sphere.⁶¹ The poverty produced great popular discontent with mainstream parties and the current institutional order, especially amongst the normal people and working class.⁶² As a result, current established democracies in various European countries faced a political crisis because a part of the population felt their interests were not represented by the government. Political Scientist Kenneth Roberts mentions this political crisis in his article *Populism and Political Parties*. He argues that: ‘Populism thrives where mainstream parties are in crisis, or at least where they exclude or ignore major currents of opinion that are denied institutionalized channels of expression.’⁶³ Populist parties used the political crisis of mainstream parties to create popular support for their parties.

Subsequently, in the eyes of populists the political crisis and austerity policies directly created an opposition between a large, dissatisfied majority and a smaller privileged ruling elite. This created the view of populism of a divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’.

According to sociologist Marco Damiani these opposites contain:

The people include all those persons (workers, and not only) who recognize themselves in the negative representation of the effects produced by globalization and the consequences of the neoliberal economic policies pursued by the principle European governments at the turn of the 21st century. The elites, on the other hand, include all those (owners of the means of production, but not only) who benefit directly from those policies.⁶⁴

These feelings amongst a big part of the European population created a new way of thinking: a significant part of the ‘the people’ felt that the ‘the elite’ was no longer able to represent them.⁶⁵ The current political establishment could not offer representation for certain groups in the population and populist movements used this lack of representation to create new political

⁶¹ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 33.

⁶² Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, ‘Varieties of inclusionary Populism?’, 163.

⁶³ M. Kenneth Roberts, ‘Populism and Political Parties’, in: Cristóbal R. Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina O. Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (eds), *Oxford Handbook of Populism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018) 287–304, 289.

⁶⁴ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 22.

⁶⁵ Mudde, ‘The Populist Zeitgeist’, 563.

parties. A new political cycle was created, which scholars gave various labels: ‘the populist turn’, ‘the populist moment’ and it has even been called a ‘populist age’.⁶⁶

Populist response to the neoliberal crisis

The populist wave in Europe included various possible answers to the crisis of the neoliberal model. This wave consisted of both right-wing and left-wing populism, with right-wing populism proven to be most dominant in Europe. Right-wing populist parties were critical towards the establishment, but then directed their criticism to immigrants and foreigners.⁶⁷ This criticism is related to one of the effects of globalization: in recent years the European population has been confronted with the changing migratory patterns and increasing numbers of migrants.⁶⁸ These increased migratory flows resulted in a migration crisis that became more urgent since 2011.⁶⁹ A part of the population viewed the opening of national borders and the increase in immigrants as an external threat to the national community.⁷⁰ Many right-wing populists in Europe saw the displeasure towards the increased immigration under the population as a useful tool to blame the poverty on immigrants. These right-wing parties used the anti-immigrant sentiments in the population generated by the migration crisis to mobilise popular support for their parties. Right-wing populists did this by trying to unify ‘the people’ by scapegoating others, like blacks, Jews, immigrants, Mexicans and Muslims.⁷¹

For example, Marine Le Pen of the far-right Front National in France (now called the National Rally) currently presents her party as the last defender of the French Republican values against the twin threats of Islam and monetary policies of the European Union that they perceive as being dictated by Germany.⁷² Another example is Geert Wilders with his anti-Islam Freedom Party in the Netherlands. Wilders criticized the establishment by calling them ‘fake politicians’.⁷³ His party also portrayed exclusionary ideas towards immigrants in the last elections. The anti-Islam Freedom Party sees immigrants as a great threat to the native Dutch population, specifically the immigrants from Muslim countries. Many of these right-

⁶⁶ Alexandros Kioupiolis and Giorgios Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 139.; Müller, *What is Populism?*, 7.

⁶⁷ Crouch, ‘Post-democracy and populism’, 132.

⁶⁸ Giovanna Campani, ‘The migration crisis between populism and post-democracy’, *Populism and the Crisis of Democracy* 3 (2018), 29-47, 31.

⁶⁹ Campani, ‘The migration crisis between populism and post-democracy’, 29.

⁷⁰ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 20.

⁷¹ Campani, ‘The migration crisis between populism and post-democracy’, 31.

⁷² Müller, *What is Populism*, 25.

⁷³ Müller, *What is Populism*, 22.

wing populists actually only promote the rights of what they perceive as the ‘true people’ and exclude other groups, while arguing that they do represent the majority. They perceive ‘the people’ as a homogenous group, that includes citizens of the same skin colour and the same civic culture, the same religion and the same language.⁷⁴

Left-wing populism on the other hand, was also very critical towards the establishment for economic crisis, but unlike right-wing populism not always directed the blame for the current crisis towards immigrants and foreigners. The most relevant European left-wing populist parties in the political sphere are in Southern Europe. These parties that are mainly labelled left-wing and inclusionary are the Greek party SYRIZA, and Podemos in Spain.⁷⁵ The Southern European countries where these political parties have gained popularity experienced the economic crisis intensively and the crisis exposed the inefficiency and corruption in their traditional political party systems.⁷⁶ Other European Union members that were less affected by the economic crisis insisted that these countries imposed austerity policies.⁷⁷ This led to mass unemployment and gave rise to left populist movements in Spain and Greece.⁷⁸ Even though the migration crisis was also present in the South of Europe, left-wing populist parties in these countries focused more on the economic crisis and opposing neoliberalism and austerity policies than on the migration crisis and the immigration issue.⁷⁹

The radical left-wing party of SYRIZA employed anti-establishment politics, with a focus on ‘the people’ but with an aim to include minority groups such as workers, women, the unemployed, the poor, the young and immigrants.⁸⁰ The party promoted pro-immigrant policies and showed that populism is not necessarily nationalist or racist.⁸¹ Podemos followed this pro-immigrant rhetoric and was similarly inclusive towards minority groups, such as immigrants. This shows that these left-wing populists aim to challenge the existing institutions and the neoliberal policies of the establishment with an inclusionary nature. Another political party in Southern Europe, the populist Five Star Movement (M5S) in Italy partly portrayed inclusionary ideas but not always followed an inclusive approach towards immigrants or other marginalized people.⁸² The leader of M5S, Beppe Grillo, made racist and anti-Semitic comments and the M5S had an ambiguous and complex relationship with

⁷⁴ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 34.

⁷⁵ Markou, ‘The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe’, 54.

⁷⁶ Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, ‘Varieties of inclusionary Populism?’, 164.

⁷⁷ Brubaker, ‘Why populism?’, 374.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁹ Markou, ‘The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe’, 54.

⁸⁰ Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, ‘Varieties of inclusionary Populism?’, 171-172.

⁸¹ Markou, ‘The rise of inclusionary populism in Europe’, 68.

⁸² Font, Graziano, and Tsakatika, ‘Varieties of inclusionary Populism?’, 174.

immigration: they accepted asylum-seekers but rejected illegal immigrants.⁸³ These examples show that populist parties have a varied attitude towards immigrants.

The narrative of a crisis, anti-establishment and an appeal to ‘the people’

The similarities between the right-wing and left-wing examples of populist parties were that they used the narrative of a crisis to gain popular support, portrayed anti-elitist or anti-establishment politics and all appealed to ‘the people’. The differences between right-wing and left-wing populists were the narrative of the crisis and how the notion of ‘the people’ is constructed. Right wing populism focused on the migration crisis to mobilise popular support, while left-wing populist focused more on the economic crisis. Next to that, they differed on what they think actually constitutes ‘the people’, specifically with regard to immigrants and foreigners. Right-wing or exclusionary populism largely constructed ‘the people’ as a national community that needs to be protected from external pressures and influences such as migratory flows.⁸⁴ Left-wing or inclusionary populism wanted to integrate excluded members of the national community in their notion of ‘the people’.⁸⁵ This shows how some forms of populism can have a positive effect on democracy because it includes groups that do not feel represented by the existing political establishment.⁸⁶

Conclusion

This chapter showed how the emergence of left-wing populist parties in Europe was a consequence of the crisis of the neoliberal system. Political and economic changes due to globalization created a division in society. There was a group in society that felt globalization had benefitted them and another group that felt that globalization had impacted them badly. The economic crisis worsened the already wide gap between these two groups and created in the eyes of the populists the division between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. The European left-wing populism used the economic crisis to gain popular support for their party and focused on criticising the neoliberalism and austerity policies of the establishment. In addition, the left-wing populists created a notion of ‘the people’ that included minority groups.

⁸³ Giorgios Katsambekis, ‘The Populist Surge in Post-Democratic Times’, *The Political Quarterly* 88 (2017) 2, 202-210, 207.; Campani, ‘The migration crisis between populism and post-democracy’, 41.

⁸⁴ Roberts, ‘Crises of Representation and Populist Challenges to Liberal Democracy’, 197.

⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁸⁶ Mudde, Cas and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, ‘Populism: corrective and threat to democracy’, in: Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2012) 205-222, 209.

Chapter 3 Defining the left-wing populism of Podemos in Spain

In this chapter the left-wing populism of Podemos is explained using the discursive approach based on the theory from Ernesto Laclau. Firstly, the political background of Spain in which Podemos emerged is sketched and after that an overview of Podemos is given. The research question that is answered in this chapter is: *How is the left-wing populism of Podemos defined?*

The political background in Spain

There was a widespread discontent under the Spanish population towards the post-democratic regime that was in power after the fall of the Franco dictatorship in 1978.⁸⁷ Although the Francoist fascist dictatorship came to an end in 1978, political and economic elements of the regime were maintained and a democratic and egalitarian change for mainly the workers and unions failed to appear.⁸⁸ The several governments that were in power after the end of the regime, employed neoliberal economic policies.⁸⁹ The country gradually slipped into a severe crisis due to these neoliberal policies that were continued by the various governments led by the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido socialista obrero español (PSOE). Eventually, this all erupted in the Great Recession of 2008.

After the economic crisis of 2008 the Spanish government introduced heavy austerity packages to counter the debt crisis.⁹⁰ Other European Union Members pressured the Spanish government to implement these austerity packages. Despite the austerity policies the Spanish economy only deteriorated, and unemployment rates went up. Also, corruption scandals in the government of Spain, involving both the PSOE and the PP, came to light and 40% of the Spanish population believed in 2013 that corruption was the main problem in the country.⁹¹ Many Spanish people believed that the two-party structure in the government, that consisted of the Partido Popular (PP) and the Partido socialista obrero español (PSOE) was responsible for the economic crisis in 2008 and they heavily criticized the austerity policies that the

⁸⁷ Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, 'New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power', 133.

⁸⁸ César Rendueles, and Jorge Sola, 'The Rise of Podemos: Promises, Constraints, and Dilemmas', in: Óscar García Agustín and Marco Briziarelli (eds.), *Podemos and the new Political Cycle* (Palgrave, Macmillan: Cham 2018) 25-47, 30.

⁸⁹ Rendueles and Sola, 'The Rise of Podemos', 31.

⁹⁰ Margarita Gómez-Reino and Iván Llamazares, 'Populism in Spain: the role of ideational change in Podemos', in: Kirk A. Hawkins, Ryan E. Carlin, Levente Littvay, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds.), *The London Ideational Approach to Populism: Concept, Theory, and Method* (London: Routledge, 2018) 294-309, 296.

⁹¹ Gómez-Reino and Llamazares, 'Populism in Spain', 296.

government imposed afterwards. This discontent amongst many in the Spanish population eventually fuelled many protests and accumulated with the largest protest on 15 May 2011 at the Puerta del Sol in Madrid.⁹² The people that participated in these protests were afterwards named the 15M movement. The main goal of this movement was to get effective popular control over the government and create ‘real democracy’.⁹³ Amongst those protesters were a wide array of people with a diverse social and ideological profiles: ‘men and women, students, the unemployed, precarious workers, blue- and white-collar workers, homemakers, artisans, professionals, teachers and university professors, small businesspeople and storeowners’.⁹⁴ The 15M movement called themselves people of the *indignados* (the indignant ones) and even though they had a wide arrange of demands it appealed to a diversity of identities.

Podemos: a new political project

The creation of Podemos was inspired by those tens of thousands of protesters who came together on 15 May 2011 to display their discontent towards the country’s rapidly deteriorating social and economic conditions and the 15M movement was essential for the creation of the party.⁹⁵ The political scientist Pablo Iglesias and his proponents created the political party Podemos in 2014 and it began as a small grassroots movement with a strong aversion against the traditional political parties and mainstream politics. The party started with aspirations for a candidacy for the European Parliament. The profound economic recession, distrust of the political establishment and the crisis of representation felt by many Spanish people were the fruitful conditions for creating an extensive number of followers for the political project of Podemos.⁹⁶ It opened a window of opportunity for Podemos to articulate greater representation for the Spanish common people that felt misrepresented or not even represented at all.⁹⁷ This crisis amongst the Spanish population can be perceived as the crisis that is needed for the emergence of populism and the creation of a new political narrative.⁹⁸ This economic and representative crisis was utilized to justify the need for transformational change of the traditional party system and the social mobilization to achieve

⁹² El País, ‘Cronología del 15-M’ (May 16, 2016),

https://elpais.com/elpais/2016/05/16/album/1463392920_779494.html#foto_gal_8 (accessed March 27, 2021)

⁹³ Kioupkiolis, ‘Podemos: The ambiguous promises of left-wing populism in contemporary Spain’, 101.

⁹⁴ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 81

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁶ Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’ 133.

⁹⁷ Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Giorgios Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 138.

⁹⁸ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 87.

greater rights for Spanish people. The ultimate goal of the party was to achieve social inclusion and egalitarian democratic change.

The party followed a populist discourse from the moment that it was created by putting at its centre the antagonistic divide between the social majority and a privileged elitist minority.⁹⁹ The electoral campaign of Podemos centred on the charismatic character of leader Pablo Iglesias and the construction of his political discourse in the media was very important to achieve more popularity.¹⁰⁰ Íñigo Errejón, cofounder of Podemos translated the theory of Laclau into the discourse and strategy of Podemos.¹⁰¹ They were inspired by the Latin American regimes of Chavez in Venezuela, Kirchner in Argentina, and Morales in Bolivia that drew upon ideas of Laclau and Podemos saw an opportunity to implement these ideas into the Spanish context.¹⁰²

Populist discourse of Podemos

Podemos leader Pablo Iglesias portrayed a strong populist discourse in his speeches. In his speeches he constructed an opposition between ‘the people’ (*la gente*) against the ‘the caste’ (*la casta*).¹⁰³ This opposition is the antagonistic opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ deriving from Laclau’s ideas. Iglesias argued that the caste or elite was the bi-partisan leadership of PP and PSOE and the economic and financial elites of the upper classes who own most of the wealth. According to Podemos, the elite or establishment was given power by the institutional mechanisms that were created by the 1978 Spanish Constitution. Since 1978 the two parties, PP and PSOE, have ruled the country with their own financial interests and this has resulted in a rigid two-party structure. Podemos also argued that the government was only following orders from the European Union with the implementation of the austerity packages.¹⁰⁴ At the other side of the division the underprivileged social majority is articulated by Podemos with ‘*el pueblo*’, ‘*la gente*’, ‘*la mayoria social*’, ‘*la ciudadania*’.¹⁰⁵ These people

⁹⁹ Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 136.

¹⁰⁰ Rendueles and Sola, ‘The Rise of Podemos’, 33-34.

¹⁰¹ Óscar G. Agustín and Marco Briziarelli, ‘Introduction: Wind of Change: Podemos, its dreams and its politics’, in: Óscar García Agustín and Marco Briziarelli (eds.), *Podemos and the new Political Cycle* (Palgrave Macmillan: Cham 2018) 3-22, 7.

¹⁰² Agustín and Briziarelli, ‘Podemos: its dreams and its politics’, 14.

¹⁰³ Gómez-Reino and Llamazares ‘Populism in Spain’, 299.

¹⁰⁴ M. Nicolina Montessori, and Esperanza Morales-López. ‘The articulation of ‘the people’ in the discourse of Podemos’, *Imagining the Peoples of Europe: Populist discourses across the political spectrum* 83 (2019), 123-147, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Kioupkiolis and Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 136.

include everyone who is suffering from impoverishment and exclusion at the hand of the elites.

Podemos was born out of the grassroots movement of the *indignados* with the intention of representing their demands that are extremely varied and with different characteristics.¹⁰⁶ Podemos argued that these various unsatisfied social demands of the Spanish population resulted from the economic crisis.¹⁰⁷ The existing political establishment consisting of the PSOE and PP is held responsible for the economic crisis and their neoliberal policies led to the poverty. The establishment was not able to satisfy the demands of ‘the people’. Podemos brought together all the demands that are left unsatisfied in what Laclau has called a chain of equivalence. Consistent with Laclau’s theory, this chain of equivalence revolved around empty signifiers. These empty signifiers included ‘*el pueblo*’ or ‘*la gente*’, or more vague terms such as ‘democracy’, ‘justice’, or ‘change’ and even Iglesias as a charismatic leader was an important symbol in representing these demands.¹⁰⁸ These empty signifiers were relatively divested of specific content, and this ‘emptiness’ enabled different constituencies to identify with them despite their diverse identities.¹⁰⁹ The leaders of Podemos united these demands by creating a common adversary: the political elite and the global financial elite.¹¹⁰ By creating a common enemy, the existing order, Podemos created a collective subject that united their concept of ‘the people’.

The construction of the political discourse of Podemos is explained with the following example. In this example Iglesias implemented the theory of Laclau. In a speech that Iglesias delivered after “La Marcha del Cambio”¹¹¹ in Madrid, he addressed the people:

[...] Today, we dream of a Europe of citizens. Not of a Europe of brokers and banks. A Europe of the people and the villages. Allow me to salute some of these dreamers. Those young people that fill the squares of May, those good citizens who stopped evictions with their bodies while risking their freedom. Those heroes and heroines in the white coats that defend the right to health and decent work for health professionals. Those patients with hepatitis who had to occupy hospitals to demand their right to live. That green tide that reminds us that there is no democracy without the quality of public education. That courageous working-class, workers of AENA, workers of Coca-Cola: you are an example. Those relentless grandfathers

¹⁰⁶ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 87.

¹⁰⁷ Kioukiolis and Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 136.

¹⁰⁸ Agustín and Briziarelli, ‘Podemos: its dreams and its politics’, 15.

¹⁰⁹ Kioukiolis and Katsambekis, ‘New Left Populism Contesting and Taking Power’, 143.

¹¹⁰ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 88.

¹¹¹ Francesco Manetto, ‘Podemos inicia su campana electoral con una marcha en Madrid’ (February 2, 2015) https://elpais.com/politica/2015/01/31/actualidad/1422673981_619047.html (accessed March 27, 2021)

and grandmothers who are called ‘*yayoflautas*’, while defending their dignity, defend that of their children and grandchildren. Those millions of exiled adolescents who are viewing us through ‘streaming’: I promise you that we will build a country where you can come back to. Those women who have to be reminded that nobody has the right to decide over your bodies. Those deceived because of the privileged who observe how the most dangerous thieves use hair gel and a tie. Those students who were at the forefront of the university community. Those migrant workers: nobody has the right to call you foreigners in Spain. Thankyou. Thank you to all for being this popular movement without which the change would not be possible in our country [...] (my translation).¹¹²

In this speech Iglesias created the chain of equivalence of all the demands of different people. He united these different demands of various groups of people by means of the empty signifier of ‘dreamers’ as common denominator. A lot of people saw themselves as ‘dreamers’ and in this way many different groups were able to identify with this vague concept. The ‘dreamers’ were united by the common enemy of the ‘brokers and bankers’. This populist rhetoric of Podemos resonated with the people because in the national elections of 2015 and 2016 Podemos with its left-wing allies obtained almost 20% of the votes.¹¹³ This was a turning point in Spain because Podemos became the third largest political party in Spain, after the PP and PSOE.

Anti-elitist and exclusionary?

The scholars Karen Sanders, María Jesús Molina Hurtado, and Jessica Zoragastua have expressed their criticism towards the anti-elitist rhetoric of Podemos in their article *Populism and exclusionary narratives: The ‘other’ in Podemos’ 2014 European Union election campaign*. They argue that the populist discourse of continuously depicting the elites as the ‘other’ is also a form of exclusionary narratives.¹¹⁴ This debate within the literature on the illiberal character of left-wing populism contains two different notions. On the one hand the notion is shared that left-wing populism shares right-wing populism’s identification with ‘the people’ and its anti-elitism but not the exclusionary character of right-wing populism.¹¹⁵ At

¹¹² Pablo Iglesias, ‘Discurso completo de Pablo Iglesias en la ‘Marcha del cambio’, YouTube video, 14’58”-16’45” (January 31, 2015) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YUrm0-SUCXY> (accessed March 14, 2021)

¹¹³ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 94.

¹¹⁴ Sanders, Karen, María Jesús Molina Hurtado, and Jessica Zoragastua, ‘Populism and exclusionary narratives: The ‘other’ in Podemos’ 2014 European Union election campaign’, *European Journal of Communication* 32 (2017) 6, 552-567.

¹¹⁵ Sanders, Hurtado, and Zoragastua, ‘Populism and exclusionary narratives’, 552.

the other hand some scholars argue that anti-elitism is also a form of excluding populist communication and is thus perceived as exclusionary. The political scientist and sociologist Paris Aslanidis brings up an important argument against the latter notion. He argues in his article *Avoiding Bias in the Study of Populism* that: '[...] scepticism towards elites is a healthy element in democratic societies and that citizens are justified in being vigilant against elites with regards to the power struggle over issues that dominate the decision-making process'.¹¹⁶ This means that populist are allowed to criticize the establishment in a democratic way and their anti-elitism is a legitimate claim that the current establishment is not representing the interest of 'the people'. In this way, the democratic representation of these excluded people is expanded (and contributes to an increase of popular sovereignty.)

Conclusion

This chapter analysed the left-wing populism of Podemos through the discursive theory. The economic recession, the discontent towards the establishment and the political crisis in the Spanish population were used by Podemos to create popular support for their new political project. In their political discourse Podemos created an opposition between 'the people' (*la gente*) and 'the elite' (*la casta*). Podemos created an inclusionary notion of 'the people' by implementing the ideas of Laclau in their political discourse. Podemos was inspired by the 15M movement that consisted of a wide array of identities. The 15 movement was essential for the creation of the party and Podemos constructed a notion of 'the people' that fitted all the diverse identities. Podemos united all the diverse identities of 'the people' by creating a common enemy: the financial and economic elites in Spain. Their political discourse was focused on blaming the current establishment for the economic crisis.

¹¹⁶ Aslanidis, 'Avoiding bias in the study of populism', 280-281.

Chapter 4 Podemos and their political discourse on immigration

This chapter focuses on the relationship between Podemos and immigration. The attitude of Podemos towards immigrants is researched by further analysing how they construct their inclusive political discourse towards this group. Firstly, the background of the immigration issue in Spain will be explained. After that the political discourse of Podemos on the migration crisis and immigrants is analysed. The central question in this chapter is: *How does Podemos construct their political discourse on immigration?*

Background of the immigration issue in Spain

Since 2011 migratory flows coming from North Africa and the Middle East have increased because of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the Syrian civil war.¹¹⁷ These increased migratory flows made the European migration crisis more urgent. The approach of the European Union (EU) to the migration crisis was directed by *Frontex* which is the EU agency for border controls.¹¹⁸ There was a lot of criticism directed to the EU regarding the handling of the migration crisis. *Frontex* focused more on the security of the European borders than on saving the lives of thousands of migrants and refugees.¹¹⁹ Spain also felt the consequences of these increased migratory flows. In 2015 Spain received three times more asylum applications than in 2014 and thousands undocumented migrants tried to enter Spain at the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco.¹²⁰

In 2012 only five per cent of the Spanish population saw immigration as the main problem of Spain.¹²¹ During this period the Spaniards saw the economic crisis as a bigger problem than the immigration crisis and attitudes towards immigration softened.¹²² Other than in most European countries, in this period the new successful political force in Spain was the left-wing populist party Podemos. Podemos followed an anti-elitist political discourse with an appeal to the people, but with a rejection of the exclusion of out-groups, such as

¹¹⁷ Campani, 'The migration crisis between populism and post-democracy', 31.

¹¹⁸ Campani, 'The migration crisis between populism and post-democracy', 32.

¹¹⁹ Ibidem.

¹²⁰ Javier Casqueiro, 'Spain will take in more refugees but says it is overwhelmed by its petitions' (September 7, 2015) https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2015/09/07/inenglish/1441617448_606454.html (accessed March 29, 2021).

¹²¹ Sonia Alonso and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, 'Spain: No country for the populist radical right?', *South European Society and Politics* 20 (2015) 1, 21-45, 31.

¹²² Ibidem.

immigrants.¹²³ Until the 2018 elections, Spain, together with Portugal, lacked a significant right-wing populist party on national level.¹²⁴ At the last elections of 2019 the right-wing populist party Vox was the new right-wing populist party that gained more popularity on national level.¹²⁵ In the 2018 elections Podemos received less votes than in the national elections of 2015 and 2016.¹²⁶

The narrative of Podemos on the migration crisis

The existence of a crisis in the population is important for the populist party to gain popular support. Right-wing populists used the migration crisis to create an exclusionary view towards immigrants. In contrary, Podemos created a more inclusionary view towards immigrants by framing the migration crisis in a different way. This came forward in their political discourse in several ways.

For example, Podemos heavily criticized the actions of the EU concerning the migration crisis. Podemos stated that the tragedies of immigrants drowning in the Mediterranean were not just accidents but originated from the European politics on the migration crisis.¹²⁷ They further argued that it was necessary to drastically change these politics following the guidelines of the UN Refugee Agency. The military and security approach of the EU agency *Frontex* had to be changed in a more humanitarian approach that preserved the physical integrity of all persons. Pablo Iglesias likewise framed the migration crisis not as a migration crisis but more as a humanitarian crisis: ‘it is not a migration crisis ("crisis migratoria"), it is a humanitarian crisis (“una crisis humanitaria”) caused by the war and the systemic violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights’ (my translation).¹²⁸ Podemos did not see the migration crisis as an external threat to the Spanish population. Iglesias argued that the crisis was not only a migration problem. He emphasized the humanitarian side of the crisis and highlighted the violation of the human rights. Podemos

¹²³ Andreu Casero-Ripollés Marçal Sintés-Olivella, and Pere Franch, ‘The populist political communication style in action: Podemos’ issues and function on Twitter during the 2016 Spanish General Election 2016’, *American behavioral scientist* 61 (2017) 9, 986-1001, 998.

¹²⁴ Alonso and Kaltwasser, ‘Spain: No country for the populist radical right?’, 23.

¹²⁵ Guy Hedgecoe, ‘Spanish Elections: How the far-right Vox party found its footing’ (November 11, 2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46422036> (accessed March 22, 2021).

¹²⁶ Damiani, *Populist Radical Left Parties in Western Europe*, 95.

¹²⁷ Podemos, ‘Pablo Iglesias: «La dignidad de Europa muera cada día en las aguas del mediterraneo»’ (April 29, 2015) <https://podemos.info/pablo-iglesias-la-dignidad-de-europa-muere-cada-dia-en-las-aguas-del-mediterraneo/> (accessed 23 March, 2021)

¹²⁸ Pablo Iglesias, (@PabloIglesias), ‘No es una "crisis migratoria", es una crisis humanitaria provocada por la guerra y la violación sistemática de DDHH’ (August 27, 2015) <https://twitter.com/PabloIglesias/status/636880136126730240> (accessed March 12, 2021).

framed the migration crisis similarly not as a migration problem but rather a crisis of human rights: ‘We are not confronted with a crisis of the arrival of massive number of immigrants, but we are confronted with a crisis of human rights’.¹²⁹

Iglesias also highly criticized the migration policy of the European Union before leaving the European Parliament in 2015. He directed this criticism towards the socialists, which he perceives as the ‘elite’ in the European parliament:

[...] I return to my country to ensure that in Spain there will be no people like you in the government, but I want to ask you something before I go: change your politics, the refugee crisis is not resolved with wire fences, the refugee crisis is not resolved with the police, it is resolved with a responsible policy, quit playing chess with villages of the Mediterranean, work to reach peace instead of inciting wars, help the people who are fleeing from horror, do not continue to destroy the dignity of Europe [...] (my translation).¹³⁰

Along with this criticism on the policy of the European Union, Pablo Iglesias expressed his criticism on the policy of the Spanish government regarding the migration crisis. He wrote on twitter: ‘The government wants to prevent immigrants without legal documents to call from phone booths inside the detention facilities of foreigners’(my translation) and he called this intolerable discrimination.¹³¹

Podemos leaders created a program named *Fort Apache* where they expressed their ideas and positions. On this program, Podemos argued that the migration crisis was not the reason for the poverty in Spain. According to this program *Fort Apache*, the migration crisis happened in a context where Europe had suffered from the effects of the economic crisis, the social deprivation and salary cuts in public services.¹³² On this program Podemos argued that extreme rights parties used the immigrant as scapegoats in the hope that this will strengthen them politically. Besides that, they pointed out that actually many adolescents are obligated to flee the country looking for jobs in other European countries because of the poverty in Spain. At the same time a large part of Latin American emigrants were returning from these

¹²⁹ Podemos, (@PODEMOS), ‘No estamos ante una crisis de llegada masiva de inmigrantes, estamos ante una crisis de derechos’ (July 4, 2018) <https://twitter.com/PODEMOS/status/1014509907842883584> (accessed March 14, 2021).

¹³⁰ Francesco Manetto, ‘Iglesias deja el Parlamento Europeo con un duro ataque a la gran coalición’ (October 27, 2015), https://elpais.com/politica/2015/10/27/actualidad/1445946487_860296.html (accessed 12 March, 2021).

¹³¹ Pablo Iglesias (@PabloIglesias), ‘El Gobierno quiere impedir a inmigrantes sin papeles llamar desde locutorios’ (April 14, 2014) <https://twitter.com/PabloIglesias/status/455791744303788033> (accessed March 12, 2021)

¹³² Fort Apache, ‘Más de 1.500 muertos en el Mediterraneo en 2015’ You Tube Video, 00’52” (May 23, 2015), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbTgSiW9Cr4> (accessed February 12, 2021)

countries to Spain, their country of origin. In other words, Podemos argued that right-wing parties highlighted the migration crisis as the main cause for the poverty, the party itself emphasized that there are other causes for the poverty. On their twitter account the party also stated multiple times that the poverty is not caused by immigrants, but rather the departure of many young people: ‘The problem in Spain is not that there is much immigration, but that many young people are leaving’ (@Podemos, May 27, 2014) (my translation).

Podemos and the inclusion of immigrants in ‘the people’

The construction of ‘the people’ is an important part in the political discourse of a populist party. In the case of Podemos this construction included a wide arrange of people which they claim to represent. The previous chapter showed an example where Pablo Iglesias included immigrants in his notion of ‘the people’. Iglesias included the immigrants in his speech in Madrid: ‘Those migrant workers: nobody has to right to call you foreigners in Spain’. The issue of immigration appeared multiple times in the electoral programmes of Podemos during the period of 2014 to 2018, but it was not the most important issue in their political discourse. the focus of the electoral campaigns was more on criticising the establishment than the immigration issue. In addition, the construction of ‘the people’ with the inclusion of immigrants showed up in several political speeches and messages on various social media platforms.

The political leaders of Podemos started their political project with aspirations for a candidacy in the European parliament. The focus during the election campaign for the European parliament was mainly on issues such as corruption, inequality and the effects of the austerity policies.¹³³ In the beginning Podemos political discourse mainly focused on creating the divide between ‘the elite’ and ‘the people’ to gain support for their new political project. In a speech in the electoral campaign for the European elections, Pablo Iglesias focused on heavily criticising policies of the current establishment and the European Union.¹³⁴ The issue on immigration did not appear much during their electoral campaign, but the party’s manifesto for these elections did briefly cover their position on immigration.¹³⁵ Podemos wanted to ban detention centres for immigrants, put a stop to the immigration control program and deportation of immigrants and change Spain’s return policy for

¹³³ Sanders, Hurtado, and Zoragastua, ‘Populism and exclusionary narratives’, 559.

¹³⁴ Pablo Iglesias, ‘Intervención Pablo Iglesias Inicio Campaña en Valencia’ You Tube video, (May 15, 2014) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8RGcUpK6fE> (accessed March 29, 2021).

¹³⁵ Sanders, Hurtado, and Zoragastua, ‘Populism and exclusionary narratives’, 559.

immigrants.¹³⁶ From the start of their political project they wanted to create greater rights for immigrants.

After the European elections in 2014, the national elections in 2016 turned out to be a turning point for Podemos. In these elections they became the third largest political party and revolutionized the political landscape of Spain. In this electoral program for the elections of 2016, one of the objectives of Podemos was to give immigrants several rights, such as voting rights, the right for asylum and equal treatment.¹³⁷ Next to that, from their positions came forward that they welcomed immigrants in Spain and even wanted to make it easier for them to come to Spain by taking several measures, such as closing the detention centres for foreigners and making it easier for them to become a Spanish citizen.¹³⁸

In the national elections of 2018, Podemos also dedicated a part of their electoral program to the issue of migration.¹³⁹ In this program of 2018 Podemos did not change their position on immigration in the electoral programme. Podemos still advocated for the rights of immigrants and wanted to take several measures to create a safer environment for the entry of immigrants to Spain.¹⁴⁰ These measures to establish the safe entry's for immigrants included: stop the irregularities in the supervision of the migratory flows and guarantee the civil rights of migrants. Their objective for 2020 was to achieve zero deaths in the Mediterranean area.

During their electoral campaign for the elections of 2018 Podemos advocated for the recognition of the pluri-nationality of Spain.¹⁴¹ In an interview Podemos's former head of political discourse Jorge Moruno talked about how Podemos viewed the construction of the pluri-nationality of Spain. In this interview he argued:

[...] Podemos sees Spain as a project to be constructed, we aim for a new country where nobody wants to leave because nobody is forced to stay. This federalized Spain would require the reordering of the states's institutional and constitutional architecture so that there is no conflict between being Spanish and belonging to another national community existing in the state. It would be a polycentric Spain where not everything passes through Madrid, and where

¹³⁶ Ibidem.

¹³⁷ Podemos, 'Electoral program of Podemos for the 26J 2016 General Elections' 1-195, 169-170, <http://estaticos.elperiodico.com/resources/pdf/9/4/1465389843149.pdf>. (accessed February 14, 2021).

¹³⁸ Ibidem.

¹³⁹ Podemos, 'Programa de Podemos: para un nuevo país' 1-105, https://podemos.info/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Podemos_programa_generales_28A.pdf (accessed 14 February, 2021).

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁴¹ Instagram, 'Podemos defiende un proyecto de país plurinacional' (November 26, 2017) <https://www.instagram.com/p/Bb9hzC6lr7u/> (accessed March 13, 2021); Instagram, 'Pablo Iglesias defiende una España plurinacional y fraterna' (December 3, 2017) <https://www.instagram.com/p/BcQOzXTIEhd/> (accessed March 13, 2021).

Madrid is converted into a federal district along the path to a less unitary state. Ultimately a pluri-national Spain has to do with reinventing Spain's own identity so that it ceases to be a weapon used to attack other Spaniards.¹⁴²

According to Podemos the Spanish identity had to reform to include all the different nationalities of the people that live in Spain. The Spanish population is composed of many different regional identities, from Catalan to Basque minority identities.¹⁴³ According to Podemos including the pluri-nationality of Spain was an important part in the construction of the Spanish identity. In an interview with Dina Bouselham, who was the Head of the Area of Migrations in Madrid from Podemos, she talked about all the different identities of the Spanish population and how these needed to be implemented in the political discourse. She expressed how Podemos needed to construct their discourse on immigration:

We need to construct our own migrant discourse. As it is observed that we are not a homogenous group. We have different origins so what unites us is that we all form this country. Spain would not be understood without Basques, Catalans etc., and also not without the people who have come here from other parts of the world like Morocco, Bolivia, etc. "The right to have rights", what is something transversal to all, such as the right of Education, Healthcare, etc.¹⁴⁴ (my translation)

Podemos viewed 'the people' as a collective identity that involved many different identities because of the cultural diversity in Spain. They argued that their political discourse created a notion of 'the people' that did not consist of a homogenous group, but included all these different identities, from Basques to Catalans.

Podemos also used the ideas of Laclau to include immigrants in the notion of 'the people'. For example, in the following political message Podemos used empty signifiers to include the demands of the immigrants. The previous chapter showed how Iglesias used the ideas of Ernesto Laclau to represent the different demands of a diverse group of people. According to the theory of Laclau the demands are constructed in a chain of equivalence using empty signifiers, such as democracy, justice and change. In a tweet on the Twitter

¹⁴² Brais Fernandez and Jorge Moruno, 'Podemos Under Pressure' interview by Eoghan Gilmartin (September 12, 2017) <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2017/12/podemos-under-pressure> (accessed March 29, 2021).

¹⁴³ Alonso and Kaltwasser, 'Spain: No country for the populist radical right?', 36.

¹⁴⁴ Dina Bouselham, 'Bouselham: "Me parece clave que queramos una sociedad sin racismo"' interview by Santiago Aparicio, (November 12, 2017) <https://mediterraneo.diario16.com/bouselham-me-parece-clave-queramos-una-sociedad-sin-racismo/> (accessed March 22, 2021).

account of Podemos, the party articulated an unsatisfied demand of the immigrants by using the empty signifier of democracy. The message stated: ‘a true democracy (“*la verdadera democracia*”) is not compatible with wire fences at the borders (“*cuchillas en las fronteras*”) and police firing rubber bullets (“*balas de gomas*”) against the immigrants’ (my translation).¹⁴⁵ In this case Podemos used the empty signifier of democracy to represent the demands of the immigrants. Democracy is a vague term that can have different meanings. In this way, the demands of the immigrants became equal to all the other demands that Podemos articulated by using the empty signifier of democracy.

In another message the antagonistic opposition of the theory of Laclau was used. In the following message Podemos constructed the antagonistic divide between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ in their political discourse to blame the poverty in Spain on the government: ‘It were not the working people (“*los trabajadores*”) and also not the immigrants (“*los inmigrantes*”) that let the country slip away, it were those from above (“*los de arriba*”)’ (my translation).¹⁴⁶ In this message Podemos constructed a common enemy between the immigrants and the working people and attempted to unite them. The creation of a common enemy unites different groups of people according to the ideas of Laclau.

¹⁴⁵ Podemos, (@Podemos), ‘Una verdadera democracia no es compatible con cuchillas en las fronteras y policías disparando balas de goma contra inmigrantes’ (February 7, 2014) <https://twitter.com/PODEMOS/status/431815090665689088> (accessed March 12, 2021).

¹⁴⁶ Podemos, (@Podemos), ‘No fueron los trabajadores ni los inmigrantes los que hundieron el país, fueron los de arriba’ (June 21, 2016) <https://twitter.com/PODEMOS/status/745323057066160128> (accessed March 12, 2021).

Conclusion

This chapter showed how Podemos constructed their political discourse on immigration. Firstly, Podemos had a different perspective on the migration crisis than right-wing populist parties. They created a different narrative on the migration crisis that created a more inclusionary view towards immigrants. In their political discourse Podemos argued that it was more a humanitarian crisis than a problem of migration. The approach of the EU had to focus more on defending the rights of the immigrants and a humanitarian approach rather than on the security of the borders. Besides that, Podemos argued that there were different reasons for the poverty than the arrival of immigrants. By constructing a narrative that did not blame the immigrants for the poverty and unemployment, Podemos created an inclusionary discourse towards immigrants. The immigrants were not the problem but needed to be protected and included. In addition, Podemos constructed a notion of 'the people' that included immigrants. The aim of their political discourse was to construct a Spanish identity that included all the different regional nationalities of Spain. In this pluri-nationality of Spain the immigrants were included. Podemos also used the ideas of Laclau to include immigrants in several political messages.

Conclusion

The main question that is researched in this thesis is: *How has the left-wing populism of Podemos in Spain resulted in a more inclusionary political discourse towards immigrants?*

With this research question this thesis tried to explain the more inclusionary attitude of the left-wing populism of Podemos towards immigrants in contrast to the more exclusionary attitude of right-wing populists. This more inclusionary political discourse was explained by investigating the emergence of left-wing populism in Europe, defining the left-wing populism of Podemos and lastly investigating how Podemos constructed their political discourse on immigration.

The emergence of left-wing populism was explained as a response to the crisis of the neoliberal system. This crisis of the neoliberal system created a division in the European population between a dissatisfied majority and a privileged elite. This division created the opposition between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ in the eyes of the populists. In light of this more general crisis, Podemos used the economic crisis in Spain to gain popular support for their new populist project. Unlike the right-wing populist that used the migration crisis to gain popular support, left-wing Podemos focused more on the economic crisis in Spain to create popular support. This created a populist discourse that focused more on criticising the establishment than blaming immigrants and foreigners. In addition, Podemos expressed a populist political discourse that claimed to speak for ‘the people’ and created an opposition between ‘the people’ (*la gente*) and ‘the elite’ (*la casta*). They focused on uniting ‘the people’ by criticising the economic and financial elites, instead of uniting ‘the people’ in ethnic and cultural terms. This resulted in an inclusionary notion of ‘the people’ which included minorities groups such as immigrants. In their political discourse the migration crisis was framed more as a humanitarian crisis and the rights of the immigrants needed to be protected. In their notion of ‘the people’ the immigrants were included by using the ideas of Laclau. Also, Podemos argued that creating a Spanish pluri-national identity was an important part of their discourse. In this way, Podemos constructed a more inclusionary political discourse on immigrants. This thesis showed how Podemos included the immigrants in their notion of ‘the people’ and aimed to include them into the democratic process. It showed how the inclusionary approach towards immigrants of the left-wing populism of Podemos had a positive effect on democracy.

Shortcomings & further research

This thesis focused on the relationship between Podemos and immigration. However, the populist discourse of Podemos mostly focused on anti-establishment politics and an appeal for the ‘people’. Therefore, the issue of immigration was less prominent in their populist discourse. This has resulted in a less profound analysis of the populist discourse of Podemos on immigration than was expected. This thesis provided answers to how Podemos has constructed their political discourse on immigration, but other research methods could conduct a deeper analysis. For example, this thesis made use of the available primary sources on social media and other platforms. Future research could conduct interviews with the leaders of Podemos specifically focused on the immigration issue to get an even more detailed analysis.

Furthermore, due to the size this thesis focused only on the immigrants as minority groups. It showed how the inclusion of this minority group has a positive effect on democracy, but other minority groups have not been included in the research. Further research on these groups has to be done to really prove the positive relationship between Podemos and democracy.

There are several interesting topics for further research on Podemos. For example, the focus in this thesis was on the relationship of the left-wing populism with immigration. Future research could focus on other issues and analyse how Podemos displays these issues in their political discourse. Next to that, the position of Podemos in the government is an interesting subject to investigate. Some scholars have argued that populist parties can become authoritarian and un-democratic in government. It would be interesting for further research to analyse how the left-wing populism of Podemos behaves in government.

Furthermore, another interesting topic for future research is the relationship between the right-wing populist party Vox in Spain and immigration. At the last elections of 2018 the new populist force was the right-wing party Vox. Before these elections, there was no significant right-wing party in the national elections. The right-wing populist surge that has been widespread in other European countries has now also arrived in Spain. Vox has an exclusionary attitude towards immigrants. Future research could thus investigate how Vox has constructed their political discourse towards immigrants.

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