Rise of populism

From marginal to mainstream?
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Introduction

“They live in fear” claimed Florian Philippot, the second leader of the Front National (FN), in response to Malek Boutih in May 2014, who announced that the FN will probably win the next presidential elections. “They” refers to the traditional ruling parties, which, according to Philippot, understand that the FN is now part of the political landscape and has all opportunities to dethrone the main stream parties (MSP).

The fact that a populist party (PP) does not seem to be marginal anymore is far from being isolated; The rise of the PP within the European countries is a new, unprecedented and generalized trend which deserves to be studied, and this is the topic of this essay. Of course, the word “rise” should be taken carefully, by rise we should understand that the PP are now almost considered as “respectable” parties and get some seats in Parliaments. More than one would have wondered if this fear is justified, leading to the following research question: how could the PP threaten the ruling position of the traditional parties?

Populism is not gaining influence the same way among the European countries. This observation points out the direction to follow, namely the factors leading to such disparate results. It is known that the PP are anti establishment parties, contesting the legitimacy of the mainstream parties as representative of the people. It seems that their speech works in certain countries and not in others. The first assumption is that the relative success of the PP depends on the state of the social cleavages. They are particular to each country, even though some phenomenons occur at the European level, so tend to homogenize its evolution. The cleavages involve conscious people to be part of a social institutionalized division (Bartoloni and Mair, 1990, Bartolini 2000, read in Gallagher, Mair and Laver, 2011). Thus, the cleavages are primordial, because in shaping the party system, they define the parties and so bring a convinced, faithful electorate. The PP draw strength by pointing out the chronic blur of the cleavages between the left and right MSP. They argue that there is no difference anymore between them, no concerns about the real issues, and so the PP constitute the new real cleavage. Besides the general dealignment and disappointment endorsing the rise of the PP, the electoral system enhances more or less the access to power. This is the second assumption. Let's remind that the electoral system is “the mechanisms that turn votes cast by people on
election day into seats to be occupied” whether by deputies or president according to the type of elections (Gallagher, Mair and Laver, 2011).

Thus, it is assumed that the social cleavages and the electoral system, because they shape the party system, affect the emergence of the PP. Therefore, this paper will describe the evolution of the social cleavages and discuss the different attitudes of the mainstream parties, explaining how the PP are attracting the electoral support. Then, the electoral system and its mechanical and psychological effects will be studied, trying to understand the unequal access to power of the PP among the European countries.

The countries studied will be mostly France, Denmark and Spain, given that they have three different electoral systems leading to different results. In fact, even though the electoral support is comparable in France and Denmark for their far right populist parties, they are not represented the same way in Parliament.

**Definition**

The PP can be characterized by a charismatic leader, close to the people, who claims to understand more than the other politicians, who are disconnected from the real world, the needs of the population. They globally play on the fears and propose solutions supposed to be the opposite of those of the traditional parties. However, populism as a whole concept should be used carefully, given that it is diverse: there are two kinds of populism. “Populism can, in certain cases, constitute the antechamber of fascism. But it's just one possible option, there are others, which are progressive” (Philippe Marlière, 2014). Thus, there is a progressive populism, which is trying to extend the democratic rights, and the retrograde populism, which wants to confine a country with laws implemented over the past century. Indeed, quite often, the politicians show the PP as dangerous parties. To take back the words of François Hollande, (during the tough exchange he had with Marine Le Pen during a session of the European Parliament) the logic of the FN is to: “get out of Europe, dispose of the Euro, get out of the Schengen area and even, if you can, get out of democracy”. We cannot really imagine Mariano Rajoy blaming Pablo Iglesias for the same thing.
I. General rise of populism: fed by a global context of dealignment and disappointment

A. Causes and proof of dealignment

“Cleavages remain stable to the degree that the basic oppositions they represent continue to shape voters’ understandings and interpretations of everyday politics, thereby ‘organizing out’ new issues.” (Bornschier, 2012). Thus, cleavages are primordial to make people agree or adhere to the parties. Knowing that they build and underpin the party system, their evolution need to be studied. First, there was the centre-periphery cleavage. The boundaries of the states were being built, and a political authority emerged. This authority was denied by the people living in periphery, almost outside these boundaries. Then, the well-known church-state cleavage, both having spheres of authority impinging on the other. Came after the old rural-urban cleavage, particularly stronger during the period of industrialisation, because it was a period of transition, and both rural and urban had completely opposite interests. Finally, there is the class cleavage, described as the most important one, which grew during the process of industrialization as well; the number of workers increased and consequently, they formed political parties. In spite of the expansion of the service sector, the worker interests remain strong enough for certain parties which claim to be representative of the workers (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967 read in Gallagher, Mair and Laver, 2011). The Church aspect still matters to people because some parties wear the name (Christian Democrat for instance) of some religions.

However, there is a change within the cleavages in Europe (Gallagher, Mair and Laver, 2011) . In fact, people are now more educated, more prosperous and the working class does not seem to have any class conscious anymore. Moreover, we are entering in the “postmaterialist world”, (Ronald Inglehart, 1977). It means that now the materialist things as wages, food and housing have been reached, people have other concerns such as feminism,
environment, and the “extension of the democratic and social rights”. Thus, it's possible to assert that the old cleavages, even if they still remain, are too weak to still constitute a strong factor of alignment to the traditional parties.

In fact, new cleavages are emerging with the impact of Europeanization and globalization: the “economic divide” and the “the libertarian universalistic vs. traditionalist-communitarian line of conflict” (Bornschier, 2012). The “fragmentation of the old left/right blocs” (Gallagher, Mair and Laver, 2011) is mainly due to all the processes people go through such as immigration, Europeanization, integration of markets. It gives the feeling that people think that the traditional government cannot control anymore what's happening, that there is no difference between left and right anymore at this point. “Our rights are no longer secured by our collective power as voters, but are subject to the logic of the financial market. Voters can change governments, yet it is nearly impossible for them to change economic policies.” (Ivan Krastev, 2014 read in Leonard, 2014). That's why the PP are so attractive: they propose to end this powerlessness, to really act according to the people's will.

If there is no more alignment, there is dealignment. In fact, people identify themselves less and less to a party, according to a survey made by Dalton. For instance, in Austria, between 1954 and 2001, the party identification declines of 46%. In Italy, between 1978 and 1996, it declines of 16%. A general tendency of decline is observed. Another evidence is the emergence of new political parties (parties which have contested their first election after 1960 according to Lipset and Rokkan). The aggregate support for these parties have increased to get in some countries the majority (France) or even the totality of the votes (Italy). The other evidence of dealignment is the electoral volatility, “a measure of the net electoral change between two consecutive elections”, from what Bartolini said. It supports the fact that there is a decline of party identification. From 1950 to 2009, we see that there is a rise of electoral volatility: 4,1% in 1950 and 15,5 % in 2009 in Austria, and a general trend in the European countries (Dalton, read in Gallagher, Mair and Laver, 2011).

**B. Electoral support : from traditional parties to populist parties**

The failure of the MSP to represent people leads to “The ruling void”, a gap the anti-
establishment parties are trying to fill (Mair, 2006). Simon Hix even characterized the MSP as “cosmopolitan” and “metrosexual” because they are trying to maximize the vote of the people who already agree with them. For instance, the left wing parties try to catch the votes from the civil servants and the cultural industries, whereas the right wing parties want to appeal the workers in finance and business. The MSP have become a “governing class”, thinking “of themselves as self-sufficient and specialized organizations” (Mair, 2006). In that sense, the politicians have given up their first role, namely serve the people's will, to serve their own interests. Mark Leonard, in an article he published in “New Republic”, says that the European elections are particularly underlying what Mair means. “Because these polls are not connected with capturing state power, the established parties can barely be bothered to campaign”.

The other reason why there is room for the PP or not is partly caused by “the positions of the established actors with respect to the new cultural divide” (Bornschier, 2012). If the MPS do not take into account the new issues becoming that important that it is becoming a cleavage, the PP will grow in influence. As a result, there is an empty space for supply.

The PP target the weaknesses of the MSP to gain votes. They are trying to change the common sense (the way of seeing the world) of people, which is a view of Antonio Gramsci, a famous theorist. To take his words, the common sense is ruled by the parties in power, which impose by many ways (communication mostly) their own views. It's called hegemony. This is contradictory because this hegemony is led by a little elite in power: the capitalists. In that sense, the PP want to make people realize this by changing their common sense. In order to achieve that, they blame the main parties for the austerity, corruption for instance, and they offer solutions which seem to be closer to the concrete experience life of people. (Iglesias, 2015). “The key of success is the creation of an interaction between the analysis of the party and what the majority think”(Iglesias, 2014). The supposed goal of the PP is to understand and propose things which are strongly related to people concrete life. This is what is attracting people: the feeling that the PP are more aware and more interested in their concrete life.

Therefore, the electorate of the PP consists of people who feel abandoned by the MSP, or who think that they do not represent their interests anymore. However, even if the PP gain influence by pointing out the disappearance of the cleavages between left and right, and so claim to be the new real cleavage people needed, we will see that they are not that far from
being traditional.

C. Relativism of the dangerousness of the PP: they are a part of the cleavage left/right

The politicians from the MSP understood the reason why the PP are gaining votes at their expense. They understood that there are issues they do not treat as much as they should, given that the cleavages change. It is now not unusual to hear a radicalisation of the discourses of politicians from traditional parties, trying to catch the electorate from the extreme parties. For instance, in France, the theme of immigration is becoming recurrent in Sarkozy's discourses, and Nadine Morano qualified France a few months ago as a “white-race country”. These politicians belong to the UMP, the central right party. This radicalisation show that the PP and MSP are not that far apart from each other, which makes coalitions possible, as it is usual between all the central parties.

Syriza, the far left wing PP in Greece, obtained 149 seats over 300 in the Parliament the 25th January 2015. As a result, the leader of the party Alexis Tsipras is named Prime minister the following day. Lots of people were expecting big changes, some people were worried about what a PP could do. Alexis Tsipras was firm at the beginning in his talks with the European Union and the Troika, regarding the debt repayment and the loans, threatening to leave Europe and the Euro zone. He's currently applying their instructions. The question he asked to the Greeks via referendum did not change anything. So this is what a PP is doing while it is in power; it does not really overwhelm the system. In that sense, it looks more like a MSP in power.

An example of a PP trying to turn into a MSP is the FN in France. The strategy of Marine Le Pen is to get rid of the image of the party, which is an image her father implemented years ago, namely strong racism, anti-Semitism, retrograde regarding equality between men and women. She is talking about restricting immigration, of course, but as a way to protect French and foreigners: there is not enough space for immigrants, so they have bad jobs, they are poor
and they cannot find anything. It's better for them and French people to stop the migratory flow. Sometimes she claims some radical things, but it's rare; that's why her party is becoming more dangerous, because he's pretending not being radical at all, on the contrary. In that sense, even though the electoral system does not enhance their rise, it's dangerous because people are no longer afraid of considering to elect them.

In Norway, Fremskrittspartiet or FrP is a PP, but relatively close to the right wing parties. Even though this party is like most of the far right PP, against immigration, against Islam, it promotes free exchange. Liberal on the economic plan, conservative on the social plan, FrP promotes more deregulation, a decentralization of the State, and argues for a stronger relationship with the US and Israel. Thus, FrP is a very unusual PP, which seems to be part of the traditional cleavage between left and right.

We can see that the PP can be part of coalition with the left, or even the right, even if in general they say they are not part of the left/right cleavage, blaming them for not being different at all. Podemos, the Spanish party, is part of numerous left coalitions. It shows that they are more traditional than we could think. Moreover, the PP are becoming strategic allies: “To the extent that PRR [populist radical right] parties command significant vote shares, they are not only attractive, but sometimes indispensable coalition partners for parties on the center-right.” (Zaslove, 2011). The PP are now respectable, and their support is useful. For instance, in Denmark, the number of seats needed in Parliament to win a majority is 90. The centre party, without the PRR, do not have a majority, whereas they have one if they make a coalition.

Now, let's point out some strangeness. During the European elections, the PP have sometimes much more success than sometimes in its national elections. To take back the French example, if the FN won the European election, why isn't it more represented in Parliament?
II. Disparate rise of populism: caused by an electoral system which enhances more or less the PP

A. Study of the electoral system and its mechanical and psychological effects

Mechanical effects

The electoral system consists of two main types: the majoritarian and the proportional system. In France, this is the two round ballot system: if a candidate does not win a majority, there is a second round with the “top candidates”, namely that the two candidates who won the most votes during the first round are able to run for the second round. The one who wins most of the votes is elected. In this system, the largest parties are enhanced to the expense of the smaller parties. If the critics assert that it's unfair regarding the fact that the elected candidate are not representative at all sometimes, this type is seen as bringing a stable government. The majoritarian system tends to implement a two party system (Duverger, 1965), and in France, this is what has happened so far: the left as well as the right wing parties have alternated with each other in power. They had in general a majority in the Parliament, even though there were some periods of cohabitation. It was corrected by changing the time of the legislative elections, which take place now just after the presidential elections.

Denmark, as well as Spain, use a proportional system. They have a list system: each party must present a list of candidates in each constituency. The principle of a proportional system is to give a proportional number of seats according to the percentage of votes. The difference remains in the methods used. Denmark uses the D'Hondt methods for 135 seats, and the larger remainders Hare methods for 40 seats. It means that there is a higher tier seat allocation, which is supposed to enhance the access to power for the smallest parties, given that it gives a better representativeness of the votes. However, in Spain, even though there is a proportional list system with the D'Hondt method, there is no compensatory system. The Duverger laws point out that the proportional system leads to multipartism and then coalition
Psychological effects

The psychological effect of the electoral system is the tendency of the voters to predict the mechanical effects of the electoral system, and to adjust their behaviour according to the probability of success of the different running parties. The goal is to vote usefully, because people want their vote to count. It is called a strategic vote or a useful vote. The psychological effect is particularly strong within the single member plurality, namely that people do not want their vote to be lost and thus vote for the parties which are more likely to win the election, so the two MSP. The two round ballot system allows more flexibility. It put less pressure on the voters, even though they know that only two or three candidates will run for the second round. The psychological effect is less strong, but it is still there: if lots of people vote for their favourite party during the first round, they have to vote strategically for the second round, to prevent a party they absolutely do not want in power from being elected, even though it means that they have to vote for a party they do not like. That is what happened in 2012 for the presidential elections: lots of people voted for François Hollande to avoid a new term for Nicolas Sarkozy, the outgoing president. Moreover, because the candidates, during the second round, need most of the votes, it leads to a bipolarization within the two left and right factions, and so two big parties emerge. The smallest parties negotiate alliances for the second round, and sometimes call their electorate to vote for one of the biggest parties.

It seems that there is no psychological effect with the proportional system, given that it enhances multipartism and independence between the parties. However, as was said before, there are different types of methods within this system, and we will see that the way Spain turn the votes into seats can lead to a strategic vote, because the biggest parties are more likely to win seats than the smallest parties.

B. Analysis of the concrete application of the electoral system

In France, the electoral system for the legislative is a majoritarian two round ballot system;
to be able to take part in the second round, the candidates must win more than 12.5% of the votes. Consequently, the PP, namely the far right wing party led by Marine Le Pen, the FN, is supposed to be limited. In fact, there is currently only one member of parliament among the 557 belonging to the FN: Marion Maréchal Le Pen. She is not part of any group within the Parliament: the FN does not make any alliance. Moreover, we can show that this is not a problem of electoral support (even if everybody knows to what extent the FN weighs more and more in the French political landscape) because of the few successful elections. For instance, for the European elections, Marine Le Pen's party represents France at the European level (it wins most of the votes). The fact that the European elections are a proportional system has to be mentioned. Moreover, during the local elections (a proportional system for the cities which count more than 1000 inhabitants, and majoritarian system for the less important cities) in 2014, the FN won 12 cities, which is a significant number for a party which is not mainstream. Until now, it makes sense: the proportional system enhances the FN to win seats. However, a fact in the past shows that there are exceptions: the presidential elections of 2002, when Jean Marie Le Pen run the second round for the presidential elections against Jacques Chirac. It should have never happened in a majoritarian system, because at this time, and even now, the FN is far from being a traditional party. The thing is that the votes were spread among different left-wing parties: the left encountered a fragmentation. That's why Lionel Jospin, the socialist leader, was pushed into the third position, so he did not go over the first round. Of course, everyone rushed to the poll to vote for Chirac for the second round. This example shows a dysfunction of the majoritarian system.

Thus, the Duverger law is confirmed: this kind of electoral system leads to the emergence of two MSP, which are ensured to compete with each other during the second round. However, even though the number of the votes for the FN is not enough, some politicians talk about a new tripartism, given that the growing influence of the party.

In Denmark, the electoral system for the legislative elections is a proportional list. In consequence, the PP are supposed to be enhanced to win seats in Parliaments. The Danish electoral system is the perfect example: in fact, the Dansk Folkeparti (DF or DPP: Danish people party) a far right wing PP, won a significant number of seats for the legislative elections in June 2015. But even before that, the DF had already a growing influence in Parliament: the liberal-conservative government did not have a majority, that's why they had
to negotiate with the DF, who accepted to vote a budget in exchange of tougher laws regarding immigration (prohibition for people under 24 years old to marry a foreigner, impediments for family reunification, language test for the attribution of the Danish nationality). Denmark is now known as being one of the tougher European country regarding politics of immigration. The best success of the DF occurred in June 2015, where they won approximately 21% of the votes, which quite exceptional for such a party (D.H. avec AFP, 2015). They were behind the social democratic party (which won 26% of the votes) but ahead of the liberal. That's why the DF in one of the big political forces of the country, and as a Danish politician said: “The Danish People’s party once seemed quite extreme but now they’re mainstream.”. Once again, the fear of the traditional parties can be notices through the radicalization of their speech: the two main parties (centre left social democrats and the centre-right liberal) compete for being the toughest. The liberals claim that they will stop the “huge flux” of asylum seekers whereas the social democrats warn the migrants with a poster: “if you come to Denmark, you have to work” (Milne, 2015).

Thanks to the electoral system, the DF won an important number of votes, a fact probably impossible in a majoritarian system. The earthquake election in 1973 shows very well that this system does not favour any big party. In fact, the percentage of the votes for the established parties fell by more than 30% points. As a result, the number of parties within Parliament was doubled.

In Spain, the electoral system for the legislative is a proportional list, but there is no higher tier seat allocation to compensate an eventual disproportionality. The constituencies (based on the provinces) are awarded a proportional number of seats according to their population, but have at least two seats; therefore, the small rural provinces are over-represented in comparison with the big cities. However, the smallest parties tend to be penalized by the system, because each party must reach at least 3% of the vote to win a seat: in this way, the two MSP (the left wing party, PSOE and the right wing party, PP) are almost assured to win a seat in each constituency, whereas the smallest parties are more likely to win seats only in the two main constituencies: Madrid and Barcelona. That's why the two MSP do not really fear Podemos, the far left wing PP, during the legislative, albeit it's perhaps too soon to predict anything (Podemos is a very recent party, created in January 2014). However, it can be reasonable to argue that it will be very difficult for Podemos, regarding the electoral system, to win a
significant number of seats for the next legislative election, on December 2015.
Let's examine two other elections, which have been quite a success for such a young party: the European and local elections. In may 2014, Podemos won 5 seats with almost 8% of the votes for the European elections. The electoral system is obviously proportional, like in all the European countries, but in Spain, the whole country is the constituency, and the parties do not need any threshold to get seats, and it's probably what made the difference for Podemos. Moreover, in June 2015, two women from a coalition of small insurgent parties, including Podemos (Manuela Carmena and Ada Colau) won the biggest Spanish cities during the local elections: Barcelona and Madrid. The local elections are indirect: it means that people elect a local parliament (ayuntamiento) within their city with a proportional system (D'Hondt) and this ayuntamiento elects the mayors. The coalitions are very important here; for instance, Ada Colau has been elected albeit her list was behind the PP list for the ayuntamiento election because the PSOE (left wing party) gave its votes for electing her as a mayor (Torres Reyes, 2015).

Having said that, we can see that in Spain, in spite of the proportional system, the distribution of constituencies and the fact that there is no higher tier seat allocation penalizes the smallest parties like Podemos, which must form coalitions to be stronger and win some seats (except for the European elections).

After having studied the electoral system within some countries, we can see that obviously this is a factor of the relative success of the PP; the comparison between France and Denmark is very good because both of the extreme parties, FN and DF have approximately the same electoral support in their respective country, and they are not represented the same way at all; in fact, the DF has much more power in Parliament than the FN, whereas the FN is older and growing in support every day among the young generations. The DF jeopardize much more the MSP thanks to its electoral system. Even though Podemos will have difficulties to be represented, the fact that he can and he will make alliances will be really helpful to win seats, whereas the FN, because of its ideology, cannot even think about making any coalitions, so it will be even more difficult for Marine Le Pen to gain power.
Moreover, the concept of proportionalism must be taken carefully, because as we can see, it can penalizes the smallest parties as well according to the method used.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the social cleavages and the electoral system are important parameters affecting the emergence of the PP. Both concepts are related to the shape of the party system, influencing the voter’s behaviour. The PP are taking advantage of the emergence of new cleavages, catching some issues that the MSP do not seem to mention; therefore, they introduce themselves in the political scene. Moreover, the rise of the PP can threaten the ruling position of the MSP through the electoral system. A certain kind of proportional system is needed, with a compensatory system and a good repartition of constituency to allow a good proportionality and therefore enhance the access to Parliament of the smallest parties and so the PP; even if sometimes it's no longer possible to rank the PP among the smallest parties. Thus, the PP are no longer marginal, partly turning into MSP given that they are now able to compete and coalesce with them in term of electorate support. More than ever, we can fear a dramatic success of the PP within the following years, regarding the recent bloody terrorist attacks. The migration and immigration themes will be targeted. It is too soon to predict anything, but in France, the next presidential election of 2017 will be decisive for the French political landscape.
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