

Euroscepticism in the Populism Era

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Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration. By Catherine De Vries. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism. By Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

The Responsive Union: National Elections and European Governance. By Christina Schneider. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

The 2016 Brexit referendum not only signaled the beginning of the end of the United Kingdom's membership in the European Union (EU), but it also highlighted the success of the populist strategies of the United Kingdom Independence Party. Euroscepticism fits well with populist messaging, both through its rejection of a liberal international organization and its emphasis on returning decision-making power to "the people." As the Brexit campaign showed, Euroscepticism aided by populist rhetoric is a formidable threat to mainstream parties and democratic institutions. Thus, European national governments and the EU itself face a crisis of democratic legitimacy. In response, the mix of public Euroscepticism and the rise of populism has contributed to a burgeoning research agenda in comparative politics.

The three books we review in this essay contribute to this growing literature. First, Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart's *Cultural Backlash* sets the stage by developing broader explanations of populist success, attributing the development and growth of a particular strand of populism, authoritarian populism, to a backlash against modern liberal democracy, which includes the EU. Next, Catherine De Vries's *Euroscepticism and the Future of European Integration* delves more

deeply into Euroscepticism, arguing that citizen attitudes about their own governments and the EU are deeply interconnected. Finally, Christina Schneider's *The Responsive Union* demonstrates that national governments are in fact responsive to their electorates during EU budgetary and legislative negotiations; furthermore, this responsiveness is rewarded by voters.

These books apply traditional theories of political representation, party competition, and voter behavior to Euroscepticism and populism, in addition to developing their own novel theoretical explanations. The authors use surveys, experiments, and case studies to test these theories, offering persuasive evidence in favor of their arguments and the merits of multimethod research. In doing so, they also highlight areas for future research, on both the rise of populism and the challenges to liberal democracy and European integration.

POPULISM AND CULTURAL BACKLASH

According to Norris and Inglehart, the stage for contemporary populism was set when long-term sociostructural changes in society led to a silent revolution in cultural values. This shift toward more liberal and cosmopolitan values triggered a conservative backlash laced with authoritarianism (what the authors refer to as the "authoritarian reflex"). Eventually, those who feel left behind begin to push back and support authoritarian-populist parties and leaders. To their credit, Norris and Inglehart recognize that there are other factors that contribute to the rise of populists, including the institutional context, but some factors remain underexplored, such as the strategic failure of mainstream parties to ward off these new competitors. Nonetheless, their articulation and defense of the cultural backlash argument is the central contribution of their book and is a powerful critique of the purely economic-hardship explanation of populism.

The second contribution of this book is the development of the concept of authoritarian populism, building on the broader

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populism literature that often sees “populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 6). Similarly, for Norris and Inglehart, populism itself is a political rhetoric that “challenges the legitimate authority of the ‘establishment’” (4). Populists further claim that “the only legitimate source of political and moral authority in a democracy rests with the ‘people’” (5). The authoritarian half of authoritarian-populism refers to the values of security, conformity, and obedience (7). As Donald Trump’s twitter account makes clear, defining who “the people” are is the first order of business, and it certainly excludes establishment elites of all sorts. Significantly, the authors treat authoritarian populism as a scale rather than a binary choice, so that parties (and voters) can be more or less authoritarian or libertarian, populist or pluralist.

A strength of the book is the systematic and careful empirical investigation of the cultural backlash thesis developed in chapter 2. For instance, chapter 4 focuses attention on the long-term changes in values in postwar Europe and America, with higher values on a socially liberal scale with each successive generation. The factor-analysis-derived measures of authoritarianism/libertarianism (104) are intuitive and compelling. Using observational data, Norris and Inglehart find that “the long-term trajectory of cultural evolution has continued to move Western cultures in a more socially liberal direction” and that this “silent revolution” contributed to a major cultural backlash fueled by the interwar and Baby Boomer generations (122–23). The intergenerational differences turn out to be a critical piece of the puzzle for the book.

To be clear, the authors also consider economic issues, finding that economic grievances are more closely linked to the populist (mistrust of politicians) than to the authoritarian (see chap. 5). But it is here that it becomes clearest that the observational data available do not allow straightforward testing of the causal direction (do poor subjective economic conditions drive mistrust, or does mistrust drive poor subjective economics?).¹ Survey experiments, along the lines of De Vries and Schneider, or interviews/focus groups, similar to Cramer’s (2016) excellent book on a related topic, would have bolstered the regression results. Similarly, the links between anti-immigration attitudes and authoritarian values are difficult to untangle using these data. Nevertheless, the empirical work in these chapters carefully documents the relationships between value changes, economic grievances, and the authoritarian turn in the population, contributing to

our understanding of the value changes underlying the rise of populism.

In part 3, the authors close the loop by explaining how the cultural backlash leads to increased votes for authoritarian populist parties. A key contribution here is to identify these parties, but this is a challenge given existing data. Their minimal populism definition focuses on how democratic authority only comes from the people and that establishment elites are “corrupt, out of touch, and self-serving” (216). Authoritarianism is contrasted with libertarianism. Here, the authors use existing data, primarily the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk et al. 2017). But as the authors point out, neither the Chapel Hill Expert Survey nor the Comparative Manifesto Project measures the people-authority concept, so they are forced to rely on measures of salience of corruption and anti-elite rhetoric only. Thus, because of data concerns, the measure of authoritarian populist parties is not quite as clean as their measure of authoritarian populism among individuals. With that said, the actual parties identified mostly fit the “eye test” even with these measures, and furthermore, this raises the flag for future research to more clearly measure and identify populism in political party rhetoric (which was a major topic of panels at the 2019 American Political Science Association annual meeting).

In identifying support for authoritarian populist parties, Norris and Inglehart find interesting generational differences. While the older interwar generation is more likely to support the more authoritarian parties, it is the millennials who are more likely to support populists (i.e., parties that emphasize anti-corruption and anti-elite messages; 259). Here, the generational turnout gap becomes crucial, with the older generations having oversized impacts on the elections themselves (278) and with these generational differences having huge impacts in both the Trump’s America case (chap. 10) and the Brexit case (chap. 11).

Norris and Inglehart’s book covers so much theoretical and empirical ground that it raises even more questions. For example, how does cultural backlash theory work in either states with a very homogeneous population or one with several ethnic minorities? These different environments, such as parts of Eastern Europe, might change the dynamic for populists with their us-versus-them rhetoric. Similarly, how does the cultural backlash theory work going back to earlier periods of populism? In other words, is the particular silent revolution in values between current generations documented here unique? In part, this question arises from the Euroscepticism debate raging across Europe. For many in Eastern Europe, such as in Poland, it is precisely the liberal part of liberal democracy that is the problem, and the EU is seen as a harbinger of those values. Next, we turn to De

1. The authors acknowledge this point on pp. 143–44.

Vries's book on Euroscepticism to shed more light on this part of the puzzle.

EUROSCEPTICISM AND THE BENCHMARK MODEL

De Vries's central contribution to the Euroscepticism literature is the benchmark model. In short, she argues that "the way people view the EU is intrinsically linked to the national conditions in which they find themselves as well as their comparison of these conditions to those at the EU level" (5). Significantly, it is subjective perceptions of these conditions, and the comparison between national conditions and EU conditions, that matters for public support for European integration.

In her empirical work, De Vries clearly lays out how the idea of EU differentials applies at both the state and individual levels. At the state level, countries who were able to stabilize quickly after the Eurozone crisis were more skeptical and less likely to be willing to submit more power to the EU, while countries who struggled to regain their footing were more likely to support the EU and look to the EU for leadership. In chapter 3, for instance, De Vries uses the German and Spanish case to demonstrate these points. Germany experienced a relatively quick economic rebound and thus had little need for European aid. However, Germany still partly paid for the rehabilitation of other states' economies, leading to heightened criticism within Germany about the way the EU spent that money and managed the recovery. Compared to the national government, the EU was perceived as ineffective, creating a swell of Euroscepticism in Germany. Thus, the EU differential changed, with evaluations of the national government improving and evaluations of the EU worsening (57–58). Spain, however, struggled to regain stability and relied on EU aid. Spain's national government had also recently weathered some major political scandals, so trust was low. Thus, in Spain, the EU differential went the other way, with Spanish opinion of the EU improving while opinion of the national government worsened (58).

The focus on multiple levels of analysis continues throughout the book and makes a strong case for the benchmark theory. At the individual level, De Vries introduces the second key theoretical contribution of the book: the articulation of a new typology of skepticism and support (see chap. 4). "Exit skeptics" are those 18% of EU voters, like the Brexiters, who perceive national policies outside of the EU regime as preferable to the status quo. "Loyal supporters," in contrast, generally hold more positive or equivalent views of the EU policy and regime to that of their own country and make up 43% of the EU. In between are policy skeptics and regime skeptics, with regime skepticism largely proxied by trust and democratic satisfaction measures. Policy skeptics (16%) sup-

port the EU generally but are skeptical of particular policies (e.g., the Scottish Nationalist Party and fisheries policy), whereas regime skeptics (23%) may appreciate some policies but find fault in the rules and procedures of the EU. This typology highlights the heterogeneity of public attitudes toward the EU and makes clear that there is no single Euroscepticism. Significantly, De Vries emphasizes the relational aspects of Euroscepticism: individual attitudes toward the EU are linked to their perceptions of their own national government.

As a viability test for the benchmark mechanism, De Vries also makes clever use of a survey experiment (chap. 3). The experiments demonstrate that individuals do react to treatments as the benchmark model predicts. When given negative news about one's own country (e.g., a corruption scandal in Spain), respondents' EU differentials improve. In contrast, respondents' EU views diminish considerably when given a treatment about European Parliament scandals. This experiment is a useful illustration of the model and offers a necessary validity check for the assumptions in the other cross-national analysis. Unfortunately, data availability in the European Social Survey limits some of this analysis geographically, with some countries (mostly in Eastern Europe) dropping from parts of the analysis (see, e.g., chap. 2). This is challenging for a number of reasons, not least of which is that many of the Eastern European states would be excellent tests for the framework. But the combination of the experimental evidence with the observational data offers significant support for the model.

In dialog with Norris and Inglehart, there is much less emphasis on values relative to the rational benchmark model. If anything, anti-elite attitudes matter much less than expected for explaining Euroscepticism (see fig. 7.3). In fact, the subjective perceptions of economic satisfaction with one's own country and quality of government, which are key variables in the benchmark model, are the most consistent factors in explaining individual-level skepticism (94).

Not surprisingly, given the emphasis on individual-level analysis and mechanisms, strategic party actors receive less attention in this book, even when discussing issue priorities of voters (chap. 5). Instead, Eurosceptic parties are used as another test of the benchmark model (chap. 6), demonstrating that exit skeptic voters are the most likely to vote for Eurosceptic parties. But these parties are also strategic issue entrepreneurs themselves, as Hobolt and De Vries explain elsewhere (2015). Further, the benchmark model is set up as a bit of a zero-sum game, so if there is good news at the national level, then the EU differential will fall and vice versa. If the authoritarian populists are able to attribute blame to the EU consistently, then exit skepticism is likely to rise. But

if national actors can leverage the EU's policy-making apparatus to demonstrate both policy success and responsiveness, then it seems plausible that at least some voters will be more satisfied with both institutions (i.e., leaving the differential the same but increasing support for both the EU and the national government). Building on these findings, it makes sense that if the EU can be seen as being responsive to public opinion, then support for the EU should follow.

RESPONSIVENESS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

Schneider's *Responsive Union* makes as clear a case as we have seen that European policy making is dependent on domestic politics, especially electoral politics. The main argument is deceptively simple: national political actors negotiating at the EU level are responsive to their publics, particularly before national elections (5). For Schneider, politicians "can signal that they are responsive when they adopt policy positions close to the preferences of electorally relevant domestic groups, when they defend these positions throughout the negotiation process, and most of all, when they achieve extraordinary success in these negotiations" (42). In addition, Schneider rightly emphasizes the importance of salience and politicization: governments are responsive on issues that are not even salient domestically precisely because of the aggregate levels of EU politicization and the uncertainty about which EU issue will become salient next. Finally, this responsiveness (i.e., perceived success in EU negotiations) is rewarded electorally (7).

Contrasted with De Vries, who focuses directly on public Euroscepticism, Schneider flips the focus to be on how voters evaluate national government behavior in European policy making. National political actors have several strategies available to signal responsiveness, ranging from position taking to position defending and from credit claiming to blame avoidance. Whether these strategies are successful depends in large part on the perceived competence of the national government.

In this sense, the other books have something to add to this responsiveness model. Norris and Inglehart's authoritarian populists use their anti-elite rhetoric to persuade voters that the mainstream parties are incompetent and not to be trusted. De Vries's benchmark model, however, warns us that perceived incompetence at the national level will perhaps increase support for the EU but at the cost of trust in the national government. When Western democracies are under threat both at home and in Brussels, this potential zero-sum game may have additional ill effects.

Schneider, like De Vries, tests her most important assumption using experimental data: Are voters even EU-aware? Chapter 4 evaluates how voters respond to signals of responsiveness in a highly politicized environment, primarily using

a conjoint survey experiment. Voters rewarded the politicians in the treatment who were able to successfully signal that they shared a common position with the voter, defended that position at the EU, and, importantly, were successful in those policy negotiations. Responsiveness matters even when controlling for partisanship (91). These tests increase confidence in the internal validity of the model and in the interpretation of the regression results throughout the rest of the book. Significantly, they are also a strong piece of evidence that voters can and do incorporate EU policy making into their vote calculations.

Next, Schneider shifts the focus to budgets and legislation negotiations in the Council of the European Union to evaluate whether national governments are signaling responsiveness. The empirical investigation is guided by the theoretical model, and the regressions are supported by the earlier experiments and by case studies, such as the multiannual financial frameworks (MFF) negotiations. For budgetary negotiations, Schneider finds that states are more likely to fight for and secure more funding in preelection years.² For scholars of EU budgets, there is nuance in these findings to be sure, but the main results are clear. Compared to legislation, budgets are more straightforward to study: more money is better. Even more importantly for the responsiveness model, she finds that these hard-won increased budget shares pay off in public approval of the government (see, e.g., 140). The MFF case study builds on the quantitative analysis, carefully arguing how the electioneering and budgetary process worked, especially but not exclusively in the United Kingdom and Germany. The case study clarifies how domestic politics matters in these negotiations, much more so than the statistics could.

In the legislative case study chapter, where it is harder to see the actual negotiations or real positions behind the scenes, Schneider compares the initial government position to the final outcome to evaluate the government strategies. Of course, it is challenging to know whether a leader is just signaling without putting real effort into winning (i.e., actually being responsive). But the historical case studies, such as the German/Greek bailout case in chapter 9, do demonstrate that governments are playing a strategic game, taking into account the upcoming elections of their negotiating partners. In these cases, governments can be willing to make concessions (or delay negotiations) if it will help their national position. It is in these chapters that Schneider's multimethod research design really shines, using the experimental data to validate key assumptions, quantitative data to demonstrate the patterns,

2. Schneider offers a primer on the EU budget in chap. 5 that would be useful introductory material for anyone teaching EU policy making.

and then historical case studies to buttress and elaborate those results.

In many ways, Schneider's work is an important next step in the larger field of European and regional integration, demonstrating clearly how national politics and domestic voters affect actual EU policy making. It is neither just national economic interests nor is it supranational actors who are driving European integration, but it is increasingly public pressure (e.g., Hooghe and Marks 2009). Schneider's work provides more direct evidence of this shift away from the old permissive consensus.³

STRATEGIC PARTY ACTORS

Common to all three books is the importance of political parties and domestic political elites as strategic actors, but it is emphasized to varying degrees. In Norris and Inglehart's cultural backlash argument, they mostly use a bottom-up approach, citing demand-side factors such as individual attitudes and values as the basis for populist challenges, but they do also consider supply-side factors such as party appeals. These party appeals include how parties mobilize and persuade voters in order to turn their attitudes and values into seats in governments. The authors conclude that, in response to populist challengers, mainstream parties have a choice to (try to) delegitimize the populists, exclude the populists, or co-opt the populists' message (similar to Meguid's [2008] mainstream party strategies to combat niche parties). This is a step forward in considering how mainstream parties affect the chances of populist success, but it fails to fully consider the circular nature of voter-party relationships. In other words, once voters have acknowledged populists as political actors, the populists have some authority with which to try to persuade voters to adopt different stances. In this way, the beginning of the Norris and Inglehart cultural backlash flowchart could be circular rather than linear.

De Vries tackles the concept of supply and demand, as well, but focuses on a linear relationship between demand for populism and the supply of populist parties in a system. Given that the book is designed to focus more on individual attitudes and cross-country variation, it is understandable that it does not discuss the issue of mainstream party responses to Eurosceptic parties at great length. But in doing so, it thereby treats parties partly as manifestations of the attitudes held by the public, which leaves room for future research. In particular, we need more work on the role of populist parties in shaping public attitudes and the role of mainstream parties in strategically countering Eurosceptic and populist actors.

Finally, Schneider's work raises more concerns about strategic actors and the EU. *The Responsive Union* explains why European cooperation has been politicized and how it affects responsiveness. In the concluding chapter, Schneider encourages more transparency at the EU level but also worries about overpoliticization and how that will affect future integration. While Schneider mostly focuses on the mainstream government parties, the authoritarian populists and exit skeptic parties from Norris and Inglehart and De Vries have different incentives to politicize the EU, which could make integration more challenging in the future.

EUROSCEPTICISM IN THE POPULISM ERA

The EU has faced numerous crises during its life as an international organization, most recently the 2008 Euro crisis, the 2015 immigration crisis, and the seemingly never-ending Brexit crisis. Laying some of the blame on authoritarian populists, Norris and Inglehart close their book decrying the erosion of civic culture, from trust in government to intolerance. The Brexit debacle itself, with all of its accompanying uncertainty and instability, sheds light on what can happen when institutions and mainstream parties fail to counter the efforts of Eurosceptic populists. However, there are places where parties and governments have been relatively successful in keeping populists from fulfilling their Eurosceptic and in some cases antiliberal democracy agendas. These three books help us understand whether and how national governments, mainstream parties, and the EU itself will weather this storm.

In addition to the theoretical and empirical progress made, these books offer prescriptive advice for European leaders, ranging from greater transparency in European policy making to a more flexible Union to reducing the underlying causes of populism, such as inequality (Norris and Inglehart, 463). For instance, De Vries presents evidence from a conjoint experiment (chap. 8), which demonstrates the EU voters want more democracy (i.e., referendums) and more emphasis on peace and security vis-à-vis economic growth. In addition, voters across Europe support Eurozone reforms, which suggests that EU policy makers may be able to satisfy some policy/regime skeptics with reform. Schneider's findings point to the need for even more active promotion of EU activities by the national and EU governments, in order to increase the responsiveness link between voters and policy makers.

As a whole, these books tackle some of the biggest topics in European politics today, including the rise of authoritarian populism, Euroscepticism, and EU legitimacy. In addition, they offer insight into how mainstream party actors may be able to win back some disaffected voters by demonstrating

3. See also a forthcoming special issue of the *Journal of European Public Policy* titled "Domestic Contestation of the European Union."

responsiveness. Whether national mainstream political actors can do so, all the while fighting against the Eurosceptic authoritarian populists, will shape European politics and European integration in the next decade.

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