

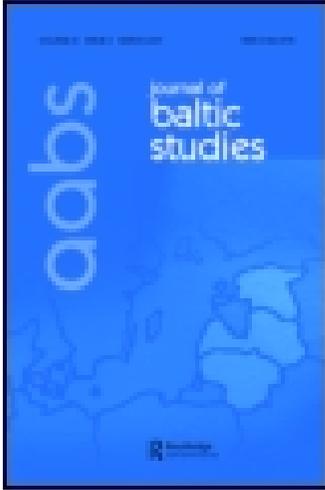
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# POPULISM IN THE MANIFESTOS OF LATVIAN POLITICAL PARTIES: INCREASINGLY USED BUT INEFFECTIVE?

**Ilze Balcere**

It is often stated that we live in an era of populist *zeitgeist*, namely, that populism today has become part of everyday politics. Despite systematic attempts to investigate the validity of this claim in Western European democracies, the situation in the Baltic states has been overlooked. This article marks the first attempt to investigate the dynamics of populism in the Latvian party manifestos by using novel research methodology to quantitatively estimate how populist Latvian political parties have become over an extensive period of time. Our findings reveal that in the last two decades populism has indeed become more widespread in Latvian party manifestos, yet it does not seem to be very effective and is largely primarily used by electorally unsuccessful parties.

**Keywords:** Latvia; political parties; manifestos; content analysis; level of populism

## Introduction

Populism has become “a feature of representative politics” (Taggart 2004, 269) and has been extensively used both in the public discourse and in academia. In academic circles the interest in populism originated along with the rise of radical, right-wing political parties in a number of Western European democracies during the 1980s and 1990s. However, “it became quickly evident that the populist phenomenon was not confined only to the radical right” (Zaslave 2008, 319). Mudde developed the idea of populist *zeitgeist*, by pointing out that “while populism has been less prominent in mainstream politics of Western Europe, the last decade or so has seen a significant change in this. Various mainstream opposition parties have challenged the government by using familiar populist arguments” (Mudde 2004, 550). Other prominent

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scholars (for example, Mair 2002; Taggart 2004; Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008) have agreed that today populism exceeds its original borders and spills over into the discourse of mainstream parties as well. This makes the traditional distinction between “populist” versus “non-populist” parties obscure.

Our knowledge about populism has certain geographic limitations. The dynamics of populism and its relation with mainstream political actors has been widely analyzed in Western European countries (see Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012), but overlooked in the Eastern and Central European context, where scholars have mostly approached this topic from its normative perspective (see, for example, Spáč 2012; Krašovec 2012; Mesežnikov 2007). In fact, most studies outside the Western European region tend to exclude the Baltic countries and instead devote their attention to Central European states, for example, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, etc. Among the rare exceptions is a recent comparative research project on populism in the Baltic states (Jakobson, Balcer, Loone, Nurk, Saarts, Zakeviciute 2012). This study aimed to give a broad overview of the character of populism on the party manifesto level and in mass and social media. Although this research offers an important starting point, it has certain limitations concerning methodology. Furthermore, the time span covers only the last parliamentary elections, and hence cannot give an evaluation across time.

To test the populist *zeitgeist* thesis, we cannot limit ourselves solely to the mature Western European democracies. Since some scholars have suggested that populism threatens democracy, the study of this topic might be particularly appealing for the young democracies in East and Central Europe. Marczevska-Rytko (2007, 46) states that “populist ideas did not appear on the Central European political scene with the beginning of the democratization process. However, it must be admitted that the process of transformation offered (...) to populism new horizons and challenges”. Others associate populism in this region “to European Union post-accession syndrome, arguing that the spread of integration fatigue in society enables populist reactions toward new challenges related to membership in the EU” (Mesežnikov 2007, 68).

The most comprehensive empirical research measuring populism in the programs of mainstream, as well as non-mainstream, parties from five different countries has been done by Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug (2012). By estimating the degree of populism, the authors conclude that “the programmes of mainstream parties in Western Europe have not become more populist since the late 1980s, nor have those of non-populist non-mainstream and populist parties” (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 10). Thus, in the context of Western Europe, the populist *zeitgeist* thesis seems to be rejected. This article tests whether a similar process is also evident in the Baltic states by analyzing the case of Latvia.

This article tries to answer two main questions. First, how widespread is populism in the manifestos of Latvian political parties and how has it changed across seven parliamentary elections? Since the populist *zeitgeist* thesis implies that populism has become increasingly used, especially during the last decade, we expect to identify an increase in the populist discourse in the elections of the 2000s. The second point of interest is to estimate the “success of populism”. So far, the impact of populism has not been extensively explored. In times of increasing distrust in representative institutions, voters might be expected to find populist arguments relevant and captivating. After all, the populist discourse emphasizes the arrogance of corrupt and ignorant elites,

while appealing to a community of common people. Thus the second question asks – is there a relation between the level of populism and electoral results?

To answer the above questions, we examine the evidence from seven Saeima (parliamentary) elections during the 1990s (election years are 1993, 1995, and 1998) and the 2000s (election years are 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2011), by analyzing the electoral manifestos of all parties running for office. The article then briefly examines the core features of populism. The next section explains the article's research strategy and methodological framework. The final section introduces the results. As will be argued, manifestos of Latvian political parties have indeed become more populist in the past years. However, there seems to be a negative association between the level of populism and electoral performance, showing that parties with strong populist appeal are less successful in competing for votes when compared to those political actors who do not incorporate populism in their programs.

## Defining the Core Features of Populism

It is problematic to embrace populism with a single comprehensive definition, mostly because of the numerous labels attached to it. Havlík and Pinková (2012, 9) have rightly pointed that “populism in the public as well as journalistic discourse has in many cases become synonymous (...) with demagoguery or rhetorical statements full of empty promises”. In spite of various failed attempts to clarify its core meaning in the past, the last decade has witnessed substantial growth in the body of scholarly research directly or indirectly dealing with the concept of populism. Scholars have also tried to highlight different methodological problems and challenges one would face when dealing with this concept in empirical research. For example, Canovan (2004, 243) has pointed out that the real challenge is not to recognize similarities among different political establishments “as in trying to decide what is ‘populist’ about them and what, if anything, they have in common with other past and present political phenomena known by the same label”. Canovan (1982, 544) in her early studies has furthermore pointed out that “the agreed core of meaning has been notoriously lacking in the case of ‘populism’”. Zaslove (2008, 320), on the other hand, argues that “the discovery of populism in the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries in Europe, separated by a continent and a century from the nineteenth-century North American populism and by a continent from Latin American populism, encouraged a growing number of social scientists to argue that populism had a core set of characteristics that transcend time and space”.

There are several different approaches on how to conceptualize populism. It can be viewed as a specific style, or strategy, as well as a thin ideology or discourse. In line with the recently emerged common agreement, in this article populism is defined as “thin-centered ideology” (a notion originally developed by Freedman 1996). This approach considers populism to be restricted around a definitive set of ideas, and in practice can be combined “with different full ideologies” (Stanley 2008, 108). The core conception of populism is the notion that good people are positioned against the bad elite (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 2–3). By viewing populism as a thin ideology one acknowledges that populism does not have an internal cohesiveness

and “in itself does not provide an all-encompassing agenda on how society should function” (van Kessel 2013, 177). Thus, populism cannot be placed along with such full-fledged ideologies as liberalism, socialism, or conservatism. However, one recognizes that populism “conveys a distinct set of ideas about the political which interact with the established ideational traditions of full ideologies” (Stanley 2008, 95). It is argued that dividing populism “into clearer, more defined subcategories both reduces the tendency towards normative assessments and improves our understanding of the ways in which populism’s core elements hang together” (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009, 82).

There have been various attempts to provide an encompassing definition of populism that could be applicable to different phenomena across time and space. The first attempt to define populism was made by Ionescu and Gellner (1969) in the seminal work *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*. Despite many important empirical and theoretical issues this volume brought to life, it failed to offer a precise definition. Considering the current trends in the field, this article employs one of the most widely used definitions elaborated by Mudde (2004). Mudde defines populism as 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*” (emphasis in original) (Mudde 2004, 543).<sup>1</sup> According to this definition, populism has two core attributes.

Populism is anti-elitist because it accuses elites of ignoring the interests of ordinary people. The notion of antagonism between “us”, the people, and “them”, the corrupt, arrogant elite (Taggart 2000; Canovan 1999; Weyland 2001), is “central to all forms of populism” (Barney and Laycock 1999, 323), be it left, centrist, or right. Populists primarily target the political class (Barr 2009, 31); however, sometimes anti-elitism can also be directed at “the cultural elite, including intellectuals, journalists, and judges, or at the economic elite, including businessmen and the capitalist system” (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 3). Canovan (1999) points out that, according to populists, the government is in the hands of corrupt politicians and selfish millionaires, and functions in the interests of different international institutions. Thus in this variety, anger towards the elite may overcome internal groups and instead be directed against different international actors, be it the International Monetary Fund or the European Union.

Populism “appeals to a community of ‘ordinary people’” (van Kessel 2013, 177). Populists perceive people as a homogenous unit (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 6; Stanley 2008, 102) without class or ideological cleavages. Because society has been atomized by the elite, populists see the necessity to establish the “people’s government”, the rule of which would eventually incorporate the practical knowledge of the people and eliminate endless bureaucratic procedures (Vossen 2010). Populists might be dissatisfied with the way a representative democracy functions, thus they could demand an extension of peoples’ power to influence political decisions, and a broadening of channels through which they could participate in the decision-making process. Traditionally this might include support to the extension of referendums, directly elected officials, or reduction of parliamentary powers (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 1). The usage of the term “people” may find its expression in different forms

ranging from references to citizens to the population or the nation (Taggart 2000; Canovan 1982). In contrast to anti-elitism, the manifestation of people-centrism is often more problematic to assess empirically since it is not feasible to capture in advance the many possible ways parties will define their target group.

Sometimes hostility towards the elite is accompanied by a critique of particular societal groups, sometimes denoted as “the dangerous others” (Taguieff 1995; Zaslove 2011). Betz (2001) even uses the term “exclusionary populism” to describe the ideological profile of new populist parties in Western European democracies, which target immigrant communities and ethnic minorities. Although dislike towards immigrants and various minority groups is a definitive feature of radical right-wing populist parties, it cannot be considered a “constitutive component of populism” (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 3). Since the main intention of this article is to assess the programmatic messages of political parties from a broad ideological spectrum, approaching populism from this aspect would potentially cause bias towards radical right-wing parties, leaving mainstream (right, centrist, and left) parties outside the spectrum. Furthermore, we maintain the position that “one of the confounding features of populism is that it does not fit neatly into conventional conceptions of the left-center-right political spectrum” (Howard 2001, 19) and that “*all* political parties may use populist appeals to some extent” (Deegan-Krause and Haughton 2009, 822). By assigning populism exclusively to the radical right, we can “miss the point that there may be disparate elements of populism in a wide range of phenomena not normally classified as populist” (Taggart 2004, 271).

## Research Method and Strategy

It is possible to distinguish between two general approaches in the study of populism – normative and gradualist. The normative approach seeks to classify parties as either “populist” or “non-populist”. Instead, this article argues that the usage of populism must follow the gradualist perspective. Looking at populism through the “lens of a gradualist” means to recognize that we cannot simply state whether the party is populist or not. Instead we can try to estimate the degree to which the party is populist. It should be pointed that “scholars have not yet developed systematic methods to empirically measure populism across cases and over time” (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011, 1272), thus this research approach is still relatively novel and under-developed. However, the usage of a minimal definition that is alienated from any ideological affiliation in combination with a gradualist outlook allows expanding the applicability of the concept of populism to every political party.

By using a qualitative content analysis method, we estimate the degree of populism within the electoral manifestos of Latvian political parties. The time frame for the analysis covers seven parliamentary elections from 1993 (the first post-independence elections) to 2011 (the last parliamentary elections). The unit of analysis is an election manifesto. On the whole, the analysis includes 65 election programs. The number of cases for each election year is: 23 (1993), 19 (1995), 21 (1998), 20 (2002), 19 (2006), 13 (2010) and 13 (2011). To determine the degree of populism we analyze only the short manifesto versions. According to the Latvian legislative framework, if a political

party is to register for elections, it is obliged to submit to the Central Electoral Committee an electoral program that is no longer than 4000 characters. Political parties can elaborate a more comprehensive and detailed manifesto; however, the Latvian practice shows that only the largest parties tend to have these long versions, while small and marginal forces mostly elaborate only short programs due to the lack of capacity or ability to offer more detailed policy platforms. For example, in the 2011 elections only three out of 13 parties had long election programs. Differentiation of sources would unavoidably cause lack of comparability. Thus to ensure comparability, we have only selected the short versions for the analysis.

These short election programs may not embrace a detailed ideological profile of the party. However, these coherent documents seem to be more subjected to public consideration, and are more widely read than the lengthy ones (also because they are usually discussed and at times published in the mass media). On the other hand, due to size restrictions, parties are motivated to include only the most important messages they want to send to their voters. Election programs are also the main official document that represents policy proposals of a particular party at a given time and are usually revised or updated before the elections. Party members are bound to the promises laid out in the manifestos (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 7) and it is unlikely that a politician would publicly disclaim or reject propositions indicated in the program. Although election programs are not the only source that allows estimating the degree of populism, they certainly seem to have many advantages.

Since populism tends to be dependent on the context, namely, the respective political system it functions in, the manifestations of people-centrism and anti-elitism can also be very diverse. This article employs a qualitative content analysis. This type of content analysis was chosen because we are not only considering references to particular key words representing people-centrism and anti-elitism, but also analyzing the general context of the message. For example, a reference to “we” might indicate people-centrism (for example, “we, the people, feel left behind!”), or it might refer to the party itself (for example, “we believe that our party must be in the government”) (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). Similarly, a reference to “intellectuals” can be used to express anti-elitism (for example, “the state is governed by arrogant intellectuals, not by the ordinary people”) or the other way around – to welcome more involvement of the intelligentsia (for example, “we should rely on the knowledge of our intellectuals”). Manifestos were analyzed using classical (expert) content analysis, since it is estimated that computer-based analysis is less content-valid (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011) and proves to be more useful when analyzing anti-elitism rather than people-centrism.

Assuming that populism includes people-centrism in combination with anti-elitism, we calculated populism scores (the percentage of populist sentences) only if the manifesto simultaneously included both features.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the parties which included references to the people, but lacked critique towards elites, scored zero on the populist scale. The unit of measurement is a sentence, because it is common to present a certain idea or position within the limits of a sentence.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars have suggested that the coding of paragraphs is more valid because it is understood that “breaks between paragraphs represent objectively traceable distinctions between arguments” (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 7). However, it was not

possible to use this approach here, since we are dealing with relatively coherent and short textual messages, most of which are organized in separate sentences (sometimes even as bullet points) without paragraphs. For each category a set of key words was elaborated. The vocabulary was formulated based on the theoretical literature, previous studies (for example, Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012), as well as in the course of the analysis. Integration of various strategies helped to highlight local particularities since the vocabularies of populists “depend on local concerns and the kind of political establishment they are challenging” (Canovan 2004, 242).

In order to answer the question whether a manifesto criticizes elites, we tried to capture and count every word that could potentially be associated with elite groups (Table A1 with the list of keywords can be found in the appendix.). In the article *elite* is defined as any group of people associated with the higher ranks of political, administrative, judicial, intellectual, business, or media establishment. We coded sentences that not only included antagonism towards the elite in general terms, but also expressed negativism towards specific political parties or party groups (for example, liberals, nationalists, or socialists), if they were associated with the elite. For example, the left-wing party “For Human Rights in United Latvia” (*Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā*, PCTVL) expressed negativism towards nationalist political forces, deeming them a “national-oligarchic regime” (PCTVL 2011). One of the challenges we faced was related to antagonism against administrative elites. Manifesto analysis revealed that a number of parties supported reformation and/or reduction of “red tape”. However, we did not consider this as a sufficient indicator of antagonism against administrative elites; hence, sentences that simply included general calls to reform bureaucracy were not coded as manifestations of anti-elitist attitude.

Populists perceive the people as a homogeneous and virtuous community (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2008, 6); however, it is not self-evident who belongs to this group, because populists rarely specify their target audience (van Kessel 2013, p.177). In relation to people-centrism, populists might also “call for issues of popular concern to be decided by referendum, by-passing professional politicians and leaving decisions to the people” (Canovan 2004, 242). Thus the very construction of this notion is adjusted to the political context, and parties might use manifold terms to approach and address their primary target. For this reason we considered every reference that could potentially indicate an appeal towards the people. People-centrism can be made both in a plural form – for example, “We work in the name of the people!” – or in a singular form, for example, “Voter, your voice is crucial to us!” Manifesto analysis helped to indicate that various left-wing political forces primarily targeted non-citizens (legal status in Latvia allocated to those who have not obtained Latvian citizenship, mostly the Russian-speaking minority) as their reference group. Hence, we included non-citizens as one possible way to approach the people. We did not consider references to particular social groups, such as pensioners, students, farmers, teachers, etc., to be a populist way of approaching the people, since populism does not include social cleavages. Having outlined the theoretical and methodological issues, the next section will analyze the dynamics of populism in the manifestos of political parties in Latvia.

## The Results

We are interested in measuring how populist Latvian political parties are, and how the level of populism has changed in the period of almost 20 years. Altogether analysis includes 128 election manifestos. [Table 1](#) shows the average level of populism for each parliamentary election from 1993 (the first independent elections after the breakdown of the soviet regime) to 2011 (the last parliamentary elections). Although the degree of populism tends to fluctuate, the general data suggest that parties have started to practice anti-elitism and people-centrism in their programs more often. The increase is further evident if we compare the mean level of populism for the 1990s and 2000s, where it reaches 10.36% and 12.44% respectively. The data indicate a constant increase of populism starting with national elections in 2002, but with a slight decrease in 2011.<sup>4</sup>

Following the theoretical argument, populism should increase if there is a presence of crisis, be it an economic or political one. We could suggest that the elections of 2002 and 2006 marked a period before Latvia was affected by the economic and financial hardships that escalated in 2008/2009. The other two elections, on the other hand, can be described as post-crisis elections, marking a period when the economy gradually started to recover. Hence we could hypothesize that when compared to the elections of 2002 and 2006, populism would increase in the elections of 2010 and 2011, as parties would continuously blame the establishment and elites for the economic and financial disaster that the Latvian people were forced to experience. Although we do not control for other variables, data demonstrate that in the pre-crisis elections, especially in 2002, the average level of populism reached only 10%, and increased by almost 4% in 2010. Other factors might be at play, but economic hardship seems to have caused a bias towards populism.

Considering the 1990s, we witness a notable decline of populism in the elections of 1998. Although it would require an in-depth analysis, a sudden decline could possibly suggest a temporal “normalization” of the political process, where parties were more inclined to concentrate on policies, rather than on an anti-elitist/pro-people divide. In the aftermath of regime change, most parties actively promoted the need to “get rid of old communist elites”. Thus, the change of elite composition at all levels constituted the very core of anti-elitist discourse (especially considering the first elections), but it became almost absent in the end of the first democratic decade. By

**TABLE 1** Level of populism in the party election manifestos

Election year	Level of populism, %	Average level of populism in 1990s and 2000s
1993	10.11	10.36
1995	13.00	
1998	7.98	
2002	10.36	12.44
2006	11.85	
2010	14.14	
2011	13.41	

The table illustrates the mean level of populism for each parliamentary election.

the end of the first democratic decade, this rhetoric had lost its relevance, gradually regaining its topicality in the beginning of the new millennium, yet in the form of antagonism towards mainstream elite groups (mostly in the form of the political establishment).

The increased usage of populism in the manifestos of Latvian political parties can also be observed if we consider the percentage of electoral lists that included the presence of populism. If at the elections of 1993 only 30% of all parties running for office included populism in their pre-election messages, more than a decade later, in 2006, it was already 58%, reaching almost 70% in the last electoral race in 2011.<sup>5</sup> This, however, means that parties dissociating from populist claims have gradually become a minority and constitute only a small share. This article does not state that populism endangers democracy as some authors have claimed (for example, Akkerman 2003; Abts and Rummens 2007; Howard 2001; Plattner 2010). However, the presence of populism certainly might disrupt and hinder the quality of the political process. When mobilization of the electorate takes place on the grounds of a distinction between “virtuous people” and “evil elite”, and when policy proposals consist of demands to replace the current political establishment, it leaves less room for a pragmatic and rational political process.

Table A2 indicates the level of populism for each electoral list (Table A2 can be found in the appendix). According to the data, in general, populism seems to be a more attractive strategy for relatively small, unpopular parties without any previous parliamentary experience or for those who have entered the political arena only recently. If we consider, for example, the parliamentary elections of 1995, six of the nine parties with populist appeals could be classified as rather marginal and extrinsic challengers to the more established forces. Here we particularly refer to the Democratic Party (*Demokrātu partija*, DP) with the highest degree of populism (46%), Latvia’s Liberal Party (*Latvijas Liberālā partija*, LLP) – 36%, as well as the party “Our Land” and “Anticommunist Union” (*partija “Mūsu Zeme” un “Pretkomunistu apvienība”*, PMZPA) – 32%. Similar tendencies can be observed in other elections as well. In 2002, five of the eight parties with populist rhetoric can be classified as marginal in a sense that their chances of being elected were considered very low. This is relevant in the case of the United Republican Party of Latvia (*Latvijas Apvienotā Republikāņu partija*, LARP), with the level of populism at 45%, “Our Land” (*Mūsu zeme*, MZ) with 36%, Latvian Party (*Latviešu partija*, LP) – 36%, Light of Latgale (*Latgales Gaismā*, LG) – 23%, and Political Alliance “The Center” (*Politiskā apvienība “Centrs”*, PAC) – 18%. The same applies also to the elections in 2006, where the presence of populism was identified in the manifestos of 11 electoral lists, the majority of which could again be described as small and meaningless competitors to the mainstream parties. Here we refer, for example, to Nationally Political Latvian Defense Organization “Latvian Latvia” (*Nacionālpolitiska Latviešu Aizstāvības Organizācija Latviešu Latvija*, NLAOLL), with the degree of populism reaching 35%, National Power Union (*Nacionālā Spēka Savienība*, NSS) – 21%, or “Our Land” (MZ) – almost 37%.

This tendency continued to appear also in 2010 and 2011. Even though in these elections, populism was also observed within the manifestos of parties with stable electoral support, the highest degrees of populism were still evident in smaller and

marginal parties with weak chances of overcoming the 5% electoral threshold (for example, People's Control (*Tautas kontrole*, TK) and The Last Party (*Pēdējā partija*, PP) in 2010 and 2011). The idea that populism is more appealing to electorally unsuccessful parties can also be found in the most recent comparative research about populism in the Baltic states. By examining electoral manifestos of parties running in the last parliamentary elections in the three Baltic states, research concludes that “populism is more common strategy among ‘newcomers’ and ‘faders’” (Jakobson, Balcere, Loone, Nurk, Saarts, Zakeviciute 2012, 121), rather than a characteristic of more established forces.

However, analysis also revealed political forces which, once re-elected, continued to use populism in their manifestos. This is, for instance, the case of the left-wing opposition party For Human Rights in United Latvia (*Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā*, PCTVL). It was first elected into the Saeima in 2002 with a considerable level of populism (20.45%) in its electoral program. In spite of being part of the elite (if we consider being in legislature a sufficient indicator of belonging to the political elite), PCTVL had no actual governing experience because it had never been a coalition member. Notwithstanding, in the following elections it slightly increased the amount of populism in its manifesto, scoring 24% in 2006 before dropping to 19% in 2011.

Given the small number of cases (the small *N* problem), it is not possible to make far-reaching conclusions. However, evidence tends to support the argument that parties without former parliamentary experience score much higher on the populism scale than those political forces that have been previously elected in the national legislature. It seems that the position of a party within the party system sets the ground for its populist rhetoric. As such, it is much easier for a party without any previous parliamentary experience to position itself as a political outsider that has nothing to do with the establishment. The previously elected political forces, in turn, encounter a moral difficulty in practicing anti-elite rhetoric and in distancing themselves from previous political affairs and decisions. At the same time, analysis shows that under certain conditions coalition parties may also turn to populism. This becomes evident in case of Unity (*Vienotība*, V), which has been the leading party in government since 2009. In spite of being part of the establishment and the political elite itself, the party practiced people-centrism and anti-elitism in its electoral program for the 2011 elections when it acknowledged its responsibility in front of the people and, among other things, promised to prevent the impact of oligarchs on the executive, legislature, and courts (V 2011). At the same time, parties with notable legislative and coalition experience like Union of Greens and Farmers (*Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība*, ZZS), Peoples Party (*Tautas partija*, TP), or Latvia's Way (*Latvijas Ceļš*, LC) managed to distance themselves from populism at least as far the manifestos are concerned.

So far analysis has indicated that populism has indeed become more present in the manifestos of political parties, yet the question remains – how effective is it? Does being a populist secure a mandate in parliament? To answer these questions, we have tried to measure the association between populism and the electoral results by calculating the Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*) for each election to estimate the relation between the level of populism for each political party and the number of votes it received.<sup>6</sup> Thus we treated the level of populism as an independent variable and the number of votes as a dependent variable. Correlation values are included in Table 2.

**TABLE 2** Correlation between the level of populism and electoral results

Election year	Correlation coefficient
1993	-.181
1995	-.395
1998	-.304
2002	-.173
2006	-.305
2010	-.243
2011	.008

Since the values of the coefficient are negative (with an exception for 2011 when no correlation was identified), it suggests that being a populist does not result in electoral fortune. Thus, the higher the level of populism, the fewer votes a party tends to gather. This observation again corresponds with the conclusions from a recent study on populism in the Baltic states, which claims that “populists are not very successful in the Baltic states” (Jakobson, Balcere, Loone, Nurk, Saarts, Zakeviciute 2012, 124), and largely the strongest populist appeals concentrate below the electoral threshold. Thus, the more populist a party is, the fewer votes it tends to receive. Such findings were expected since the data showed that populism tended to be more widespread among marginal parties without realistic opportunities for winning at least the minimum share of votes. At the same time there are no reasons to overestimate the relation between populism and electoral outcome, because the coefficient values range only from  $-.00$  to  $-.39$ , indicating a weak association between the variables.

## Conclusion

Scholars argue that populism today has become mainstream and that we live in an era of populist *zeitgeist*. This article sought to answer the question whether it is possible to apply this claim not only to the Western European countries, but also to the Baltic states by looking at the case of Latvia. We used content analysis of election manifestos to quantitatively measure the level of populism. Results revealed that during all seven parliamentary elections (from 1993 till 2011), we witnessed an increase in the number of parties that employed references to the people in combination with arrogance towards a diverse range of elite groups. In contrast to the previous research on Western European countries that concluded there was an absence of populist *zeitgeist* (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012), a case study of Latvia leads to the opposite conclusion, where the mean average level of populism is 10.36 in the 1990s, and 12.44 in the 2000s. In Western Europe, however, populism in the programs of mainstream parties in the 1990s and 2000s reached respectively 0.59 and 0.52, while in the manifestos of non-mainstream parties populism scores were 7.76 in the 1990s, and 6.12 in the 2000s (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2012, 9–10).<sup>7</sup> Hence, in the manifestos of Western European parties, the amount of populism has dropped, while it has increased in the Latvian case.

With regard to the relation between populism and the left-right division, the evidence is clearly mixed and would require more in-depth analysis. Considering the

group of parties whose manifestos included populism, a substantial part of them constitute political organizations with strong nationalist orientation (especially in the first post-independence elections). But we also see a number of liberal, as well as social and social democratic, parties. Hence, in the Latvian case the first impression tends to suggest that populism cannot be assigned to a particular ideological wing; it is rather spread across the ideological spectrum with no clear and consistent pattern.

Although a further study about the character and impact of populism in the Baltic states region is needed, including the cases of Estonia and Lithuania, as far as the current studies reveal, populism seems to be increasingly used, yet does not seem to be working. In the Latvian case, this can partly be explained by the unstable and fragmented party system, since before each election a number of new parties have entered the electoral race, and hence parties are subjected to more populism, continuing electoral volatility, as well as the established tendency to distrust representative institutions and politicians. The Latvian party system incorporates a growing number of parties with hostile attitudes against elites and references to the people, but in most cases this does not lead to the desired outcome. The correlation between the level of populism and the number of received votes tends to be weak and negative. The more populist a party is, the less successfully it tends to perform in elections.

If this is indeed the case, we can estimate that voters are more reluctant to support parties whose electoral appeal focuses on people-centrism and anti-elitism, and instead prefer more pragmatic political forces. For political parties, on the other hand, this signals that an anti-establishment rhetoric alone is not sufficient to please the electorate and magnetize votes. This conclusion can be an important message for the skeptics who consider Latvian politics to be nothing but populist. This conclusion is scientifically interesting, but involves a contradiction when applied to party behavior. One could raise a legitimate question: if populism does not work, why are an increasing number of parties continuing to practice it?

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## Notes

- 1 Although in this definition Mudde refers to ideology, in other contributions he has specifically stated that he considers populism to be a thin ideology.
- 2 We used the kappa coefficient to estimate the reliability of content analysis. For this reason each manifesto was coded twice. The results are: 0.82 (1993), .94 (1995), .94 (1998), .92 (2002), .96 (2006), .94 (2010), .96 (2011). If coefficient values are  $> 0.70$ , it indicates high measurement reliability.
- 3 The average number of sentences and the standard deviation in the manifestos for all seven elections are: 39.83 (st.dev. 12.02) in 1993; 39.26 (st.dev. 10.71) in 1995; 44.1 (st.dev.10.1) in 1998; 42.3 (st.dev.12.02) in 2002; 44.11 (st.dev. 9.99) in 2006; 42.50 (st.dev. 13.80) in 2010; 42.85 (st.dev. 10.66) in 2011.
- 4 We also have provided the overall proportion between the number of populist sentences and all sentences in the manifestos (information only for those parties who

included both features) – VATB: 11/17; PA: 11/21; KZ: 7/22; L: 11/36; LLP: 5/23; NS: 7/35; LDDP: 5/44 (for 1993); PMZPA: 13/40; LLP: 11/30; KDT: 6/28; LSP: 13/40; MPALNP: 4/32; DP: 6/13; LTF: 13/38; PAT: 5/48; TKL ZP: 6/29 (for 1995); TKL ZP: 14/56; DPS: 13/52; LNDP: 10/63; DP: 16/42; JP: 8/44; TKB: 13/44; LZS: 9/56 (for 1998); LP:22/61; LPP:7/38; LARP: 21/46; PAC: 8/43; MZ:16/44; LG:9/38; LSDSP:4/50; PCTVL:9/44 (for 2002); JL:5/52; NLAOLL:20/57; NSS:8/38; JD:8/43; MZ:17/46; LSDSP:3/41; PCTVL:13/54; E: 7/47; SC:11/51; Dz:7/39; TS:9/50 (for 2006); DL:9/58; PP:17/46; SC:12/41; TK:6/13; PCTVL:8/41; PPR:13/52; A:4/35 (for 2010); TK:7/23; BBBND:8/58; VL-TB/LNNK:9/41; PPR:11/53; PP:8/37; SC:3/31; PCTVL:7/35; ZRP:7/39; V:8/44 (for 2011).

- 5 The percentage of parties that included populist messages for each election year is: 30.43 (1993), 47.37 (1995), 33.33 (1998), 35.00 (2002), 57.89 (2006), 53.85 (2010) and 69.23 (2011).
- 6 We used a bivariate correlation model to calculate the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ), which varies from +1.00 (indicating strong positive correlation) to -1.00 (indicating strong negative correlation). None of the cases indicated a statistically significant correlation ( $p > .05$ ).
- 7 Comparisons with Western European countries should be made with caution, because they applied slightly different methodology and coding strategy, differentiating between mainstream and non-mainstream (including populist) parties, and selecting only two elections in the 1990s and 2000s.

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## Appendix

**TABLE A1** List of keywords for people-centrism and anti-elitism

People-centrism	Anti-elitism
People; nation; we; each of us; our country; society; public; community; population; inhabitants; popular vote; Latvian(s); voter(s); citizen(s); non-citizen(s).	Elite; politicians; political parties; nomenklatura; oligarchs, political establishment; the power; government; legislature; top civil servants; media; intellectuals; business; banks; international organizations; European Union; Brussels.

**TABLE A2** Populism in the manifestos of Latvian political parties (1993–2011)

Electoral list	1993		1995		1998	
	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list
Electoral union "For Fatherland and Freedom" (Vēlēšanu apvienība "Tēvzemei un brīvībai, VA TB")	64.71	Democratic Party (Demokrātu partija, DP)	46.15	Democratic Party (Demokrātu partija, DP)	38.10	Democratic Party (Demokrātu partija, DP)
Anticommunist Union (Pretkomunistu apvienība, PA)	52.38	Latvia's Liberal Party (Latvijas Liberālā partija, LLP)	36.67	Latvia's Liberal Party (Latvijas Liberālā partija, LLP)	29.55	People's Assembly "Freedom" (Tautas kopa "Brīvība", TKB)
Conservatives and Farmers (Konservatīvie un Zemnieki, KZ)	31.82	Latvia's Popular Front (Latvijas Tautas fronte, LTF)	34.21	Latvia's Popular Front (Latvijas Tautas fronte, LTF)	25.00	People's Movement for Latvia (Zigerists' party) (Tautas kustība Latvijai (Zīgerista partija), TKL ZP)
"Equal Rights" ("Līdztiesība", L)	30.56	Latvia's Socialist Party (Latvijas Sociālistiskā partija, LSP)	32.50	Latvia's Socialist Party (Latvijas Sociālistiskā partija, LSP)	25.00	Democratic party "Saimnieks" (Demokrātiskā partija "Saimnieks", DPS)
Latvian Liberal Party (Latvijas Liberālā partija, LLP)	21.74	Party "Our Land" and "Anticommunist Union" (partija "Mūsu Zeme" un "Pretkomunistu apvienība", PMZPA)	32.50	Party "Our Land" and "Anticommunist Union" (partija "Mūsu Zeme" un "Pretkomunistu apvienība", PMZPA)	18.18	The New Party (Jaunā partija, JP)
Independents' Union (Neatkarīgo savienība, NS)	20.00	"Labor and Justice" – the Coalition of Latvia's Democratic Workers Party, Latvia's Social Democratic Workers' Party and Latvia's Party of Defence of Victims of Fraud (Latvijas Demokrātiskās darba partijas (LDDP), Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās strādnieku partijas (LSDSP) un Latvijas Apmērto cilvēku aizstāvības partijas "Taisnība" (Taisnība) koalīcija "Darbs un Taisnīgums", KDT)	21.43	"Labor and Justice" – the Coalition of Latvia's Democratic Workers Party, Latvia's Social Democratic Workers' Party and Latvia's Party of Defence of Victims of Fraud (Latvijas Demokrātiskās darba partijas (LDDP), Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskās strādnieku partijas (LSDSP) un Latvijas Apmērto cilvēku aizstāvības partijas "Taisnība" (Taisnība) koalīcija "Darbs un Taisnīgums", KDT)	16.07	Latvia's Farmers' Union (Latvijas Zemnieku Savienība, LZS)
Latvian Democratic Labour Party (Latvijas Demokrātiskā darba partija, LDDP)	11.36	People's Movement for Latvia (Zigerists' party) (Tautas kustība Latvijai (Zīgerista partija), TKL ZP)	20.69	People's Movement for Latvia (Zigerists' party) (Tautas kustība Latvijai (Zīgerista partija), TKL ZP)	15.87	Latvia's National Democratic Party (Latvijas Nacionāli demokrātiskā partija, LNDFP)

Party "Our Land" (Pīlsoņu kopa "Mūsu zeme", PK MZ)	0.00	Union of the Indigent and Latvian Independence Party (Maznodrošināto politiskā apvienība un Latviešu neatkarības partija, MPALNP)	12.50	Marā's Land (Māras zeme, MāZ)	0.00
Latvia's Farmers' Union (Latvijas zemnieku savienība, LZS)	0.00	Political Union of Economists (Tautsaimnieku politiskā apvienība "Tautsaimnieks" TPAT)	10.42	"Latvia's Way" (Latvijas ceļš, LC)	0.00
Republic's Platform (Republikas platforma, RP)	0.00	Union "For Fatherland and Freedom" (Apvienība "Tēvzemei un Brīvībai", TB)	0.00	Social Democratic Women's Organization (Sociāldemokrātiskā sieviešu organizācija, SSO)	0.00
Liberal Alliance (Liberālā alianse, LA)	0.00	Democratic Party "Saimnieks" (Demokrātiskā partija "Saimnieks", DPS)	0.00	People's Harmony Party (Tautas saskaņas partija, TSP)	0.00
Latvia's Popular Front (Latvijas Tautas fronte, LTF)	0.00	People's Harmony Party (Tautas saskaņas partija, TSP)	0.00	Union of Labor Party, Latvia's Christian Democratic Union and Latvia's Green Party (Darba partijas, Kristīgi demokrātiskas savienības, Latvijas Zaļās partija apvienība, DP KDS LZP)	0.00
Latvia's Green Party (Zaļais saraksts, ZS)	0.00	Latvian Unity Party (Latvijas Vienības partija, LVP)	0.00	Latvia's National Reform Party (Latvijas Nacionālā reformu partija, LNRP)	0.00
Latvian National Independence Movement (Latvijas Nacionālā neatkarības kustība, LNNK)	0.00	Latvian National Conservative Party (Latvijas Nacionāli konservatīvā partijas LNNK un Latvijas Zaļā partija, LNNK LZP)	0.00	National Progress Party (Nacionālā progresa partija, NPP)	0.00
Democratic Centre Party (Demokrātiskā Centra partija, DCP)	0.00	"Latvia's Way"	0.00	People's Party (Tautas partija, TP)	0.00
Latvian Social Democratic Workers Party (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija, LSDSP)	0.00	Latvia's National Democratic Party (Latvijas Nacionāli Demokrātiskā partija, LNDP)	0.00	Latvia's Union of Social Democrats (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātu apvienība, LSDA)	0.00
Latvia's Christian Democratic Union (Latvijas Kristīgo demokrātu savienība, LKDS)	0.00	Latvian Farmers' Union (Latviešu Zemnieku Savienība, LZS)	0.00	Latvian Unity Party (Latvijas Vienības partija, LVP)	0.00

(continued)

TABLE A2 (Continued)

Electoral list	1993		1995		1998	
	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list
Latvian Unity Party (Latvijas Vienības partija, LVP)	0.00	Latvia's Party of Russian Citizens (Latvijas Krievu pilsoņu partija, LKPP)	0.00	For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK), TB/LNNK	0.00	For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK), TB/LNNK
Union "Latvia's Happiness" (Vēlēšanu apvienība "Latvijas Laime", VA LL)	0.00	The Joint List of Latvia's Farmers' Union, Latvia's Christian Democrat Union and Latgale's Democratic Party (Latvijas Zemnieku savienības, Latvijas Krištieņu demokrātu savienības un Latgalē Latgales Demokrātiskās partijas apvienotais saraksts, LZS LKDS LDP AP)	0.00	Latvia's Revival Party (Latvijas Atdzimšanas partija, LAP)	0.00	Latvia's Revival Party (Latvijas Atdzimšanas partija, LAP)
Russian National Democratic List (Krievu Nacionālais demokrātiskais saraksts, KNDS)	0.00					Helsinki-86 (Helsinki-86, H-86)
Electoral Union "Harmony for Latvia – Revival for National Economy" (Vēlēšanu apvienība "Saskaņa Latvijai – atdzimšana tautsaimniecībai", VA SL-AT)	0.00					The Conservative Party (Konservatīvā partija, KP)
Economic Activity League (Saimnieciskās rostības līga, SRL)	0.00					
"Latvia's Way" (Latvijas Ceļš, LC)	0.00					

(continued)

TABLE A2 (Continued)

Electoral list	2002		2006		2010		2011	
	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list
Latvian Party (Latviešu partija, LP)	36.06	New Era (Jaunais laiks, JL)	9.61	Daugava – For Latvia (Daugava-Latvijai, DL)	15.51	People's Control (Tautas kontrole, TK)	30.34	
Latvia's First Party (Latvijas Pirmā partija, LPP)	18.42	Nationally Political Latvian Defense Organization "Latvian Latvia" (Nacionālpolitiska Latviešu Aizstāvēšanas Organizācija Latviešu Latvija, NLAOLL)	35.08	The Last Party (Pēdējā partija, PP)	36.95	Freedom. Free from Fear, Hate and Anger (Brīvība. Brīvs no bailēm, naida un dusmām, BBBND)	13.79	
United Republican Party of Latvia (Latvijas Apvienotā Republikāņu partija, LARP)	45.65	National Power Union (Nacionālā Spēka Savienība, NSS)	21.05	Harmony Centre (Saskaņas Centrs, SC)	29.26	National Association "All for Latvia" – For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (Visu Latvijai: Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK, VL-TB/LNNK)	21.95	
Political Alliance "The Center" (Politiskā apvienība "Centrs", PAC)	18.60	New Democrats (Jaunie Demokrāti, JD)	18.60	People's Control (Tautas kontrole, TK)	46.15	For Presidential Republic (Par prezidentālu republiku, PPR)	20.75	
Our Land (Mūsu zeme, MZ)	36.36	Our Land (Mūsu Zeme, MZ)	36.95	For Human Rights in United Latvia (Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā, PCTVL)	19.51	The Last Party (Pēdējā partija, PP)	21.62	
Light of Latgale (Latgales Gaisma, LG)	23.68	Latvian Socialdemocratic Worker Party (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku partija, LSDSP)	7.31	For Presidential Republic (Par prezidentālu Republiku, PPR)	25.00	Harmony Centre (Saskaņas Centrs, SC)	9.67	

(continued)

TABLE A2 (Continued)

2002		2006		2010		2011	
Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)	Electoral list	Populism (%)
Latvian Socialdemocratic Worker Party (Latvijas)		Sociāldemokrātiskā strādnieku partija, LSDSP)	8.00	For Human Rights in United Latvia (Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā, PCTVL)	24.07	Responsibility – Social Democratic Association of Political Parties (Atbildība, A)	11.42
For Human Rights in United Latvia (Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā, PCTVL)	20.00						
For Human Rights in United Latvia (Par cilvēka tiesībām vienotā Latvijā, PCTVL)	20.45	Euroceptics (Eirosceptiķi, E)	14.89	National Association "All for Latvia"-For Fatherland and Freedom/LNNK (Visu Latvīju- Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNNK, VL-TB/LNNK)	0.00	Zatlers' Reform Party (Zatlera Reformu partija, ZRP)	17.94
Latvia's Revival Party (Latvijas Atdzimšanas partija, LAP)	0.00	Harmony Centre (Saskaņas Centrs, SC)	21.56	Christian Democratic Union (Kristīgi demokrātiskā savienība, KDS)	0.00	Unity (Vienotība, V)	18.18
New Era (Jaunais laiks, JL)	0.00	Political Patriotic Union "Motherland" (Dzimtene, Dz)	17.94	For Good Latvia (Par Labu Latviju, PLL)	0.00	Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība, ZZS)	0.00
Progressive Center Party (Progressīva Centriskā partija, PCP)	0.00	Union of Fatherland (Tēvzemes savienība, TS)	18.00	Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku Savienība, ZZS)	0.00	Christian Democratic Union (Kristīgi demokrātiskā savienība, KDS)	0.00
Latvia's Way (Latvijas Ceļš, LC)	0.00	Party of Pensioners and Seniors (Pensionāru un senioru partija, PSP)	0.00	Unity (Vienotība, V)	0.00	Slesers' Reform Party (Šlesera Reformu partija, ŠRP)	0.00

Mara's Land (Māras zeme, MaZ)	0.00	Party of Social Justice (Sociālā Taisnīguma partija, STP)	0.00	Made in Latvia (Ražots Latvijā, RL)	0.00	Latvian Socialdemocratic Worker Party (Latvijas Sociāldemokrātiskā Strādnieku partija, LSDSP)	0.00
Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība, ZS)	0.00	For Fatherland and Freedom/ LNKK (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNKK, TB/LNKK)	0.00				
Freedom Party (Brīvības partija, BP)	0.00	People's Party (Tautas partija, TP)	0.00				
Russian Party (Krievu partija, KP)	0.00	Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība, ZS)	0.00				
Socialdemocratic Welfare Party		(Sociāldemokrātiskā Labklājības partija, SDLP)	0.00	Latvian First Party and Latvian Way electoral union (Latvijas Pirmā partija/LC, LPP/LC)	0.00		
For Fatherland and Freedom/LNKK (Tēvzemei un Brīvībai/LNKK, TB/LNKK)	0.00	Mara's land (Māras Zeme, MaZ)	0.00				
Union of Social Democrats (Sociāldemokrātu savienība-SDS, SDS)	0.00	All for Latvia (Visu Latvijai, VL)	0.00				
Peoples Party (Tautas partija, TP)	0.00						