

Populism and Facebook: 2014 EP election campaign

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Social Media - Populism

- Identifying populist communication
 - Identification of different populist communication: content & style [Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel 2017; Bracciale & Martella 2017]
 - Populistic style “agitation, spectacular acts, exaggeration, calculated provocations, intended breach of taboos” [Pauwels 2011]
- Party/candidate positioning
 - Candidates from parties on **extreme** (right/left) & **oppositional** candidates are more populist [Ernst et al 2017]
- New media logic:
 - virality, popularity: messages that produce likes, comments, promote, and share within the networks [Klinger & Svensson 2015; Klinger 2013]
 - Primary (opinion leaders) and secondary audience [Vaccari & Valeriani 2015; Karlsen 2015]
 - Relation social media – populist vote choice
 - > passive receivers of news more likely to choose populist candidates, active receivers less likely to choose populists [Groshek & Koc-Michalska 2017]
- Facebook affordances
 - Opportunity for dialogue and interactivity >> SM (TW) are not used for interactive horizontal communication but reproduce top-down communication; in Latin America context populists attack critical journalists, social media users and citizens [Waisbord & Amado 2017]
 - Interactivity of the profile owner amplifies citizens’ reactions (likes/shares/comments) [Koc-Michalska et al 2016]

Populist communication - content

Engesser, Ernst, Esser & Büchel (2017), Ernst, Engesser, Buchel, Blassing, Esser (2017)

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the speaker refers to the people as the theoretical origin of power in democracy • the speaker demands more power for the people and he explicitly promotes the implementation of direct-democratic elements
ADVOCATING FOR THE PEOPLE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • presenting party as true and only representative of real people
ATTACKING THE ELITES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political elites • Economic elites • Media elites • Supranational elites (EU) • Legal elites
OSTRACIZM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • message listing the groups that party do not see as part of the society (e.g. migrants, voters for other party etc.) • message accusing other parties to claim party (owner of the wall) of the ostracism (e.g. being fascists, populists etc.)
INVOKING THE HEARTLAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • message using historical symbolism or events to underline the negative policy of other parties putting people at risk
COMBINING THE PEOPLE AND THE ELITE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • message presenting other parties as NON-representatives of the people • message presenting the party (owner of the wall) as the only representative of people

Populist communication - style

Bracciale & Martella (2017)

STAGECRAFT	emotions informality intimidization negative affect simplification storytelling taboo breaker vulgarism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highly emotional (positive or negative) • a direct, non-formal and non-institutional style • the 'unofficial stories', not known to general public • appeal to emotion of fear - to mobilize around negative feeling • oversimplifying issues or solutions • using language full of non-precision, allusions, puns and empty rhetoric, proverbs, stereotypes, clichés and expression of “popular wisdom” • breaking the rules of political correctness, being impolite to distinguish a party from other parties • using vulgar language (to reach 'ordinary people')
'REGISTER' DIMENSION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • using aggressive and provocative language • language is informative/neutral • language is ironic • message is encouraging to further discussion and participation in conversation (asking questions, asking to comments etc.)
'TOPIC' DIMENSION		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • POLICY ISSUES that should be resolved (often local or episodic, individual) that should be resolved fast • PERSONAL LIFE of a candidate or politician from other party • CURRENT EVENTS which are not political but on actuality (from sport, events, news) • CAMPAIGNING how campaign is managed and on performance during the campaign)

Research questions

[RQ1.] Populism *in content* and *in style* was used according to

- >> party economic and cultural populism index
- >> left-right ideological dimension
- >> party size
- >> party position (pro/anti EU; opposition/government)

[RQ2.] Possible relation of populism *in content* and *in style* with community activity (likes and shares) and interactivity (comments), controlling for Facebook affordances.

14 days before 2014 European Parliament election

14 EU countries > 112 parties > 11300 posts

sample 40% proportionally per country = 4500

problems (regional languages: Catalan, Irish Gaelic, no CHES code per party) > N= 3696

content analysis - human coding > 18 coders

Chapel Hill Expert Study: L/R ideology

Populism measurement [Inglehart & Norris 2016]

Sotrender: archiving tool

Populism measurements

- Inglehart & Norris 2016 CHES:

Description	Cultural cleavage	Economic cleavage
Favor traditional values	.943	
Opposes liberal social lifestyles	.923	
Promote nationalism	.918	
Favors tough law and order	.916	
Against multiculturalism on immigrants	.904	
Against immigration	.880	
Opposes rights for ethnic minorities	.864	
Supports religious principles in politics	.787	
Supports rural interests	.737	
Favors market deregulation		.956
Opposed to state economic intervention		.925
Opposed to wealth redistribution		.894
Favor cuts in taxes and services		.890

CHES 2014 or 2010 > Index average score per party

(-5) Libertarian/postmaterialist

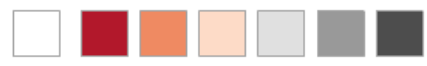
(+5) traditional/authoritarian

Populism Cultural Index Relative PCIR $(a+...+j)/9$

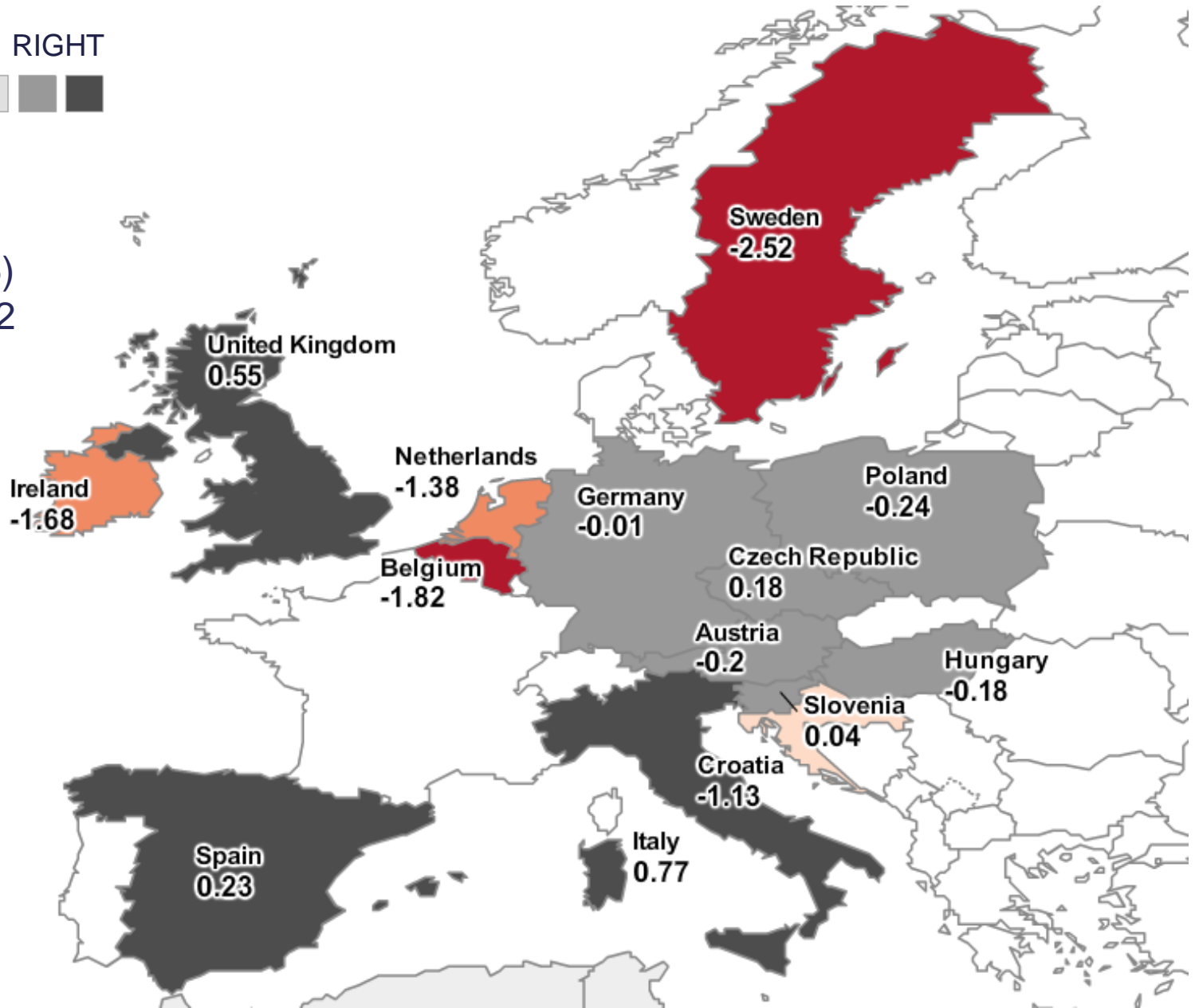
Populism Economic Index Relative PEIR $(a+...+d)/4$

Cultural populism (party average per country)

nd LEFT RIGHT



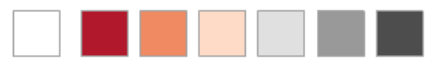
M= -.36 (SD 2.5)
Min -3.9 Max 4.2



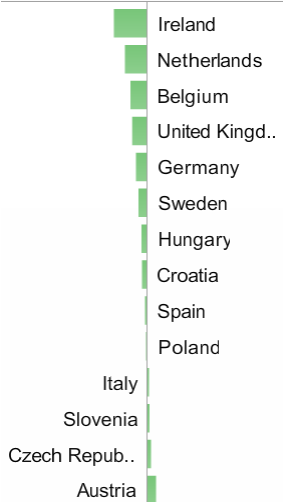
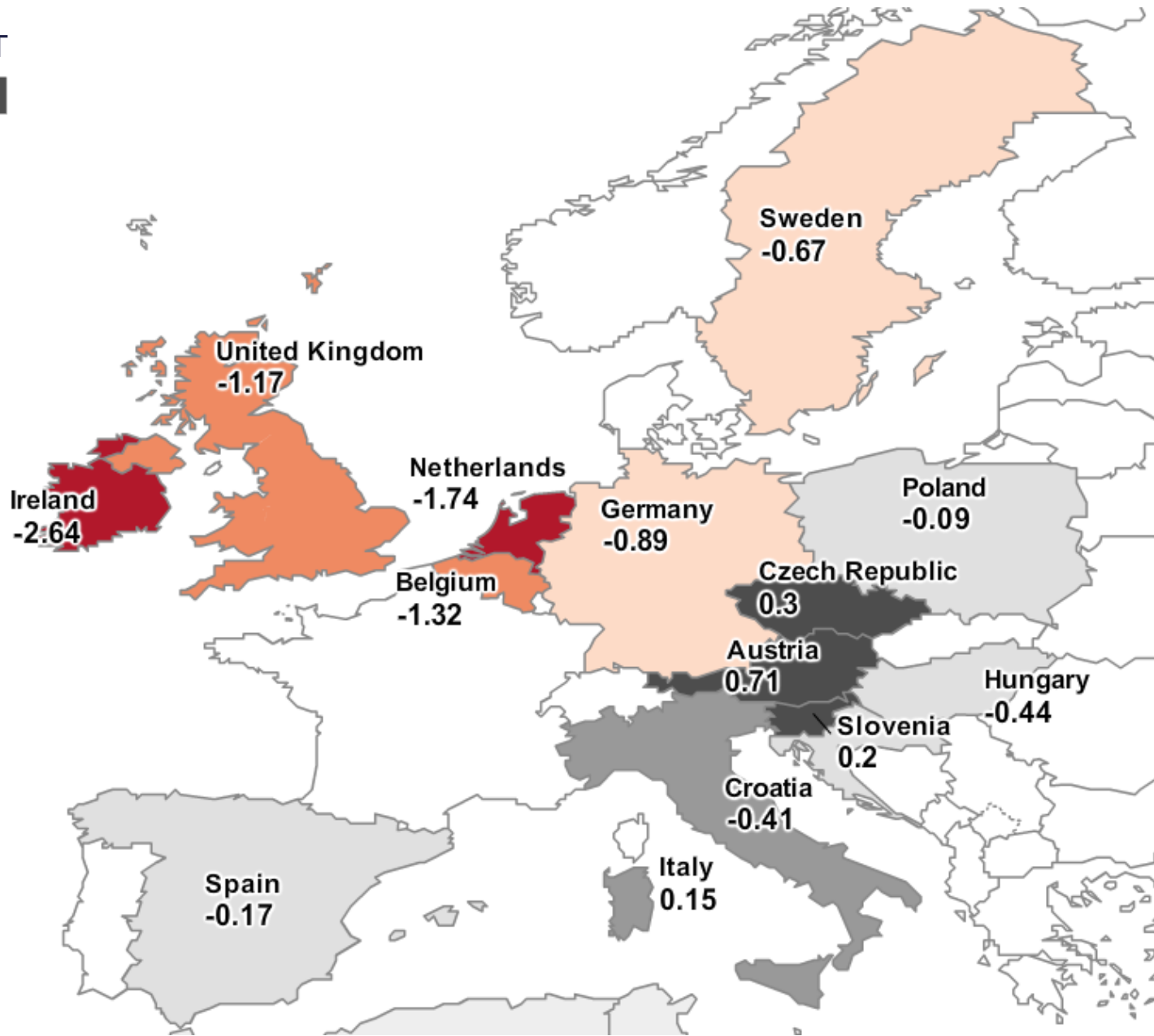
- Sweden
- Belgium
- Ireland
- Netherlands
- Croatia
- Poland
- Austria
- Hungary
- Germany
- Slovenia
- Czech Repub..
- Spain
- United Kingd..
- Italy

Economic populism

nd LEFT RIGHT

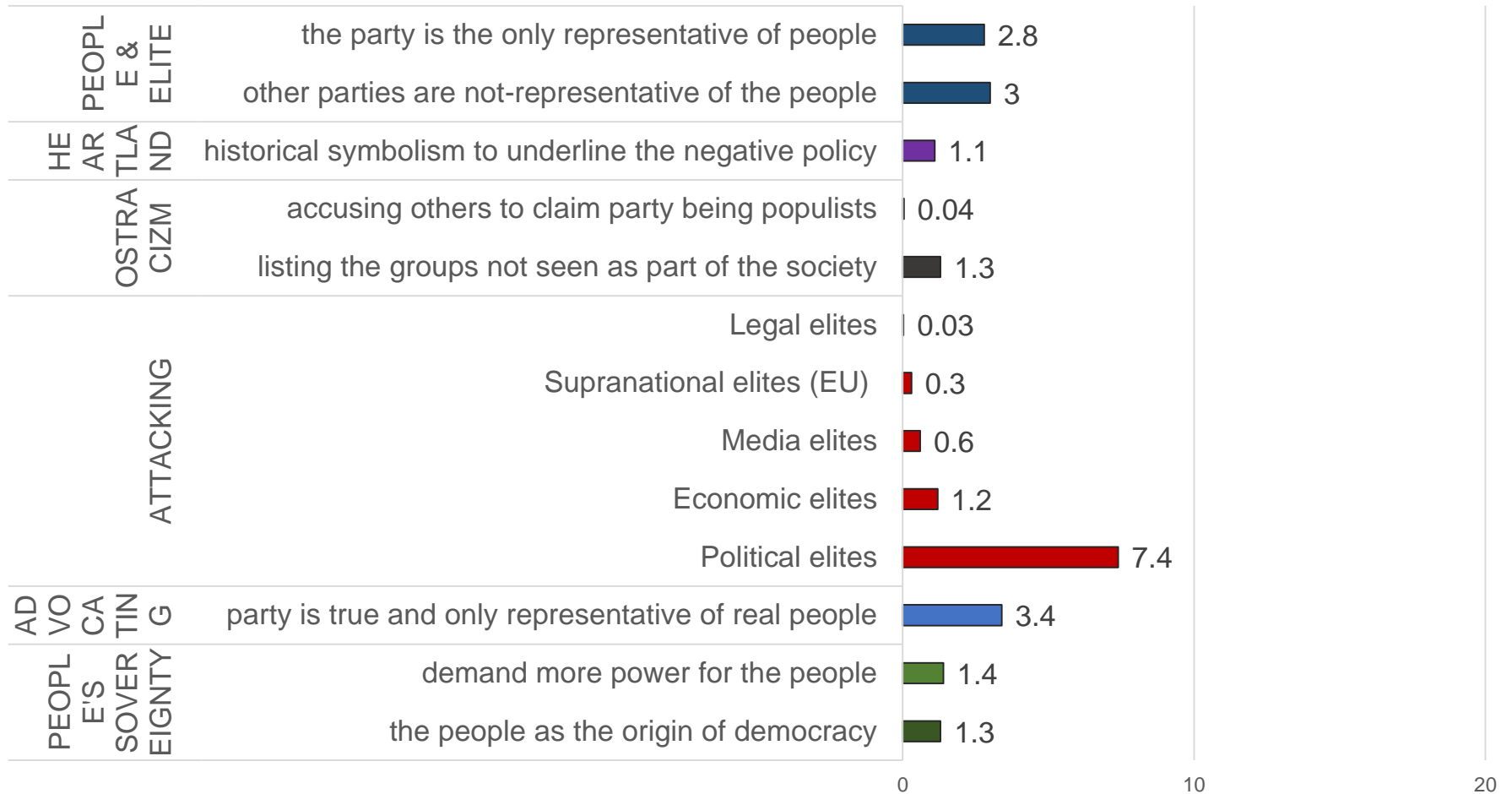


M= -.44 (SD 2.2)
Min -4.7 Max 4.6

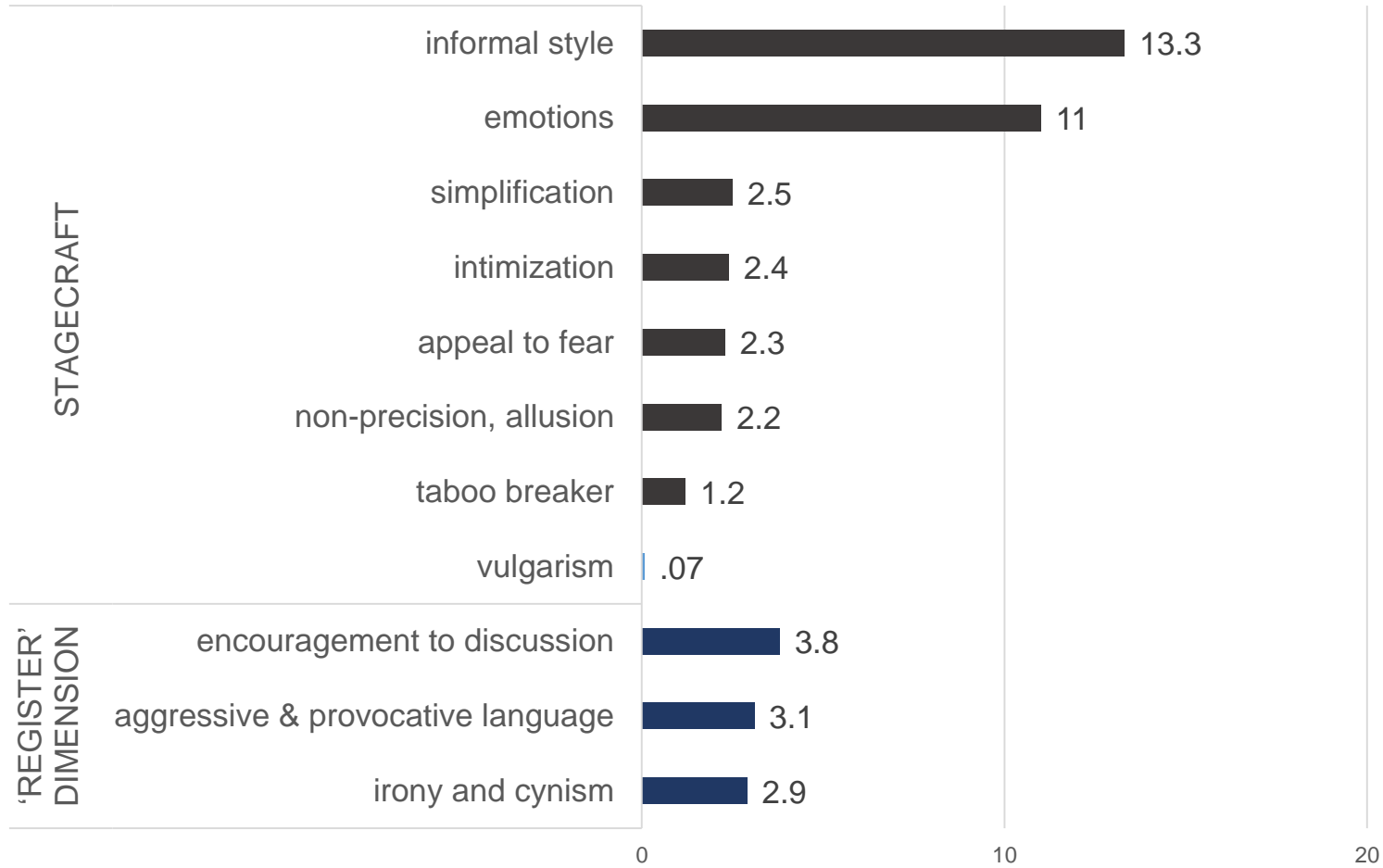


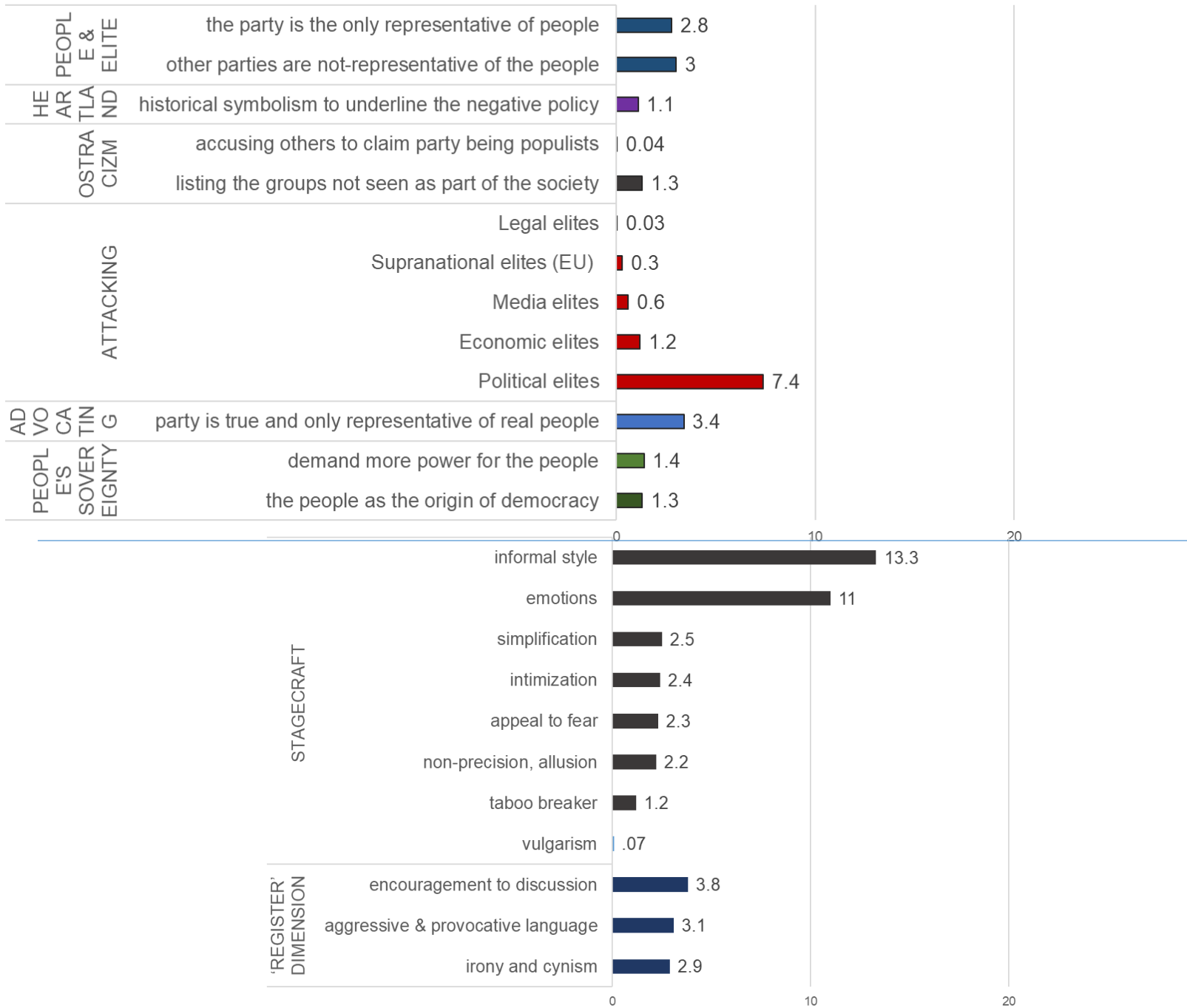
Populism *in content*

- **31% of posts contained at least one populist item**



Populism *in style*





Populism *in content* and *in style* by Party ID

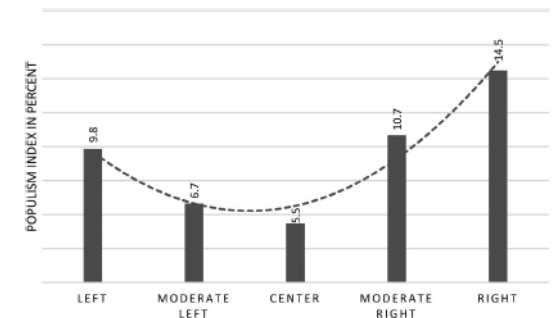
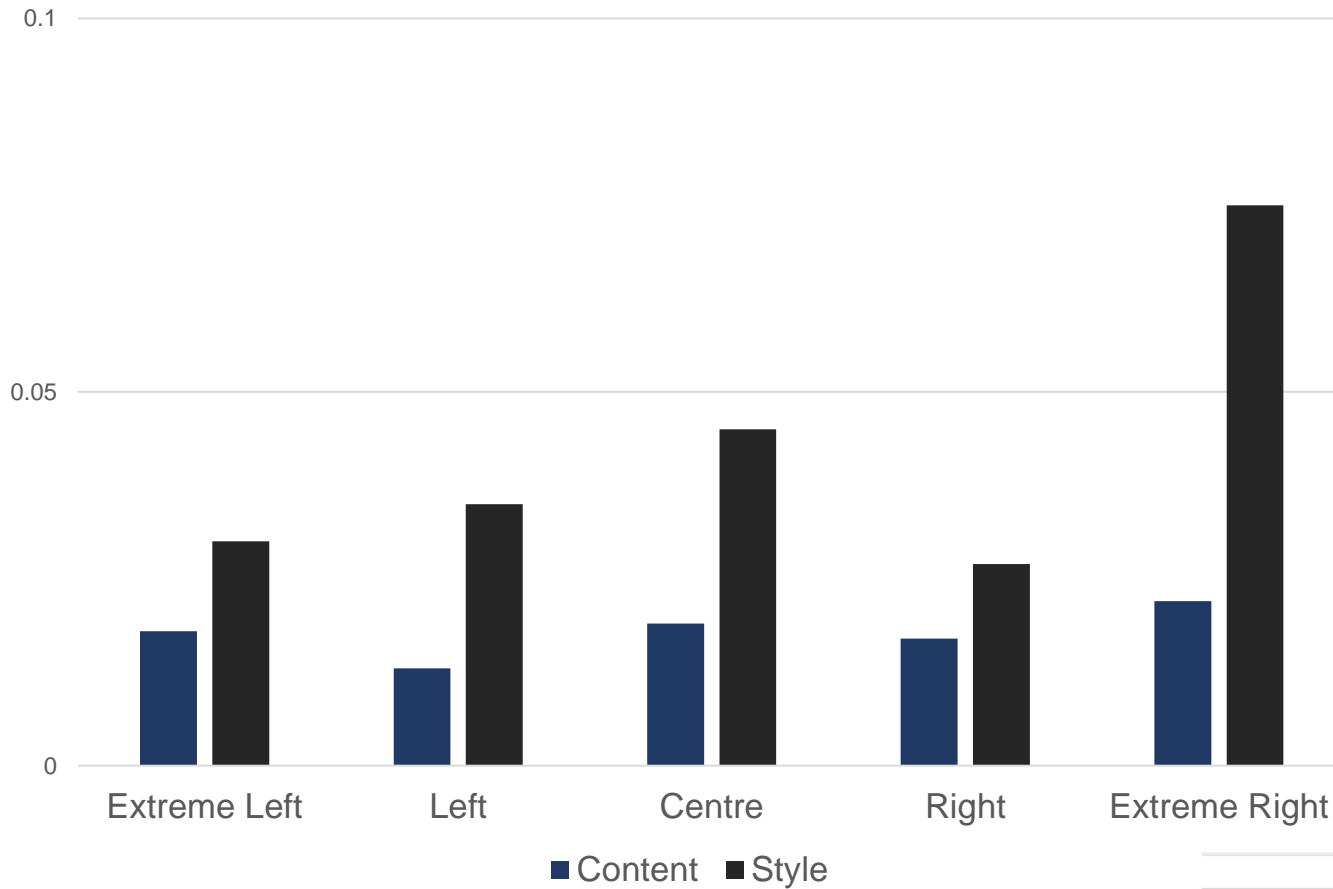
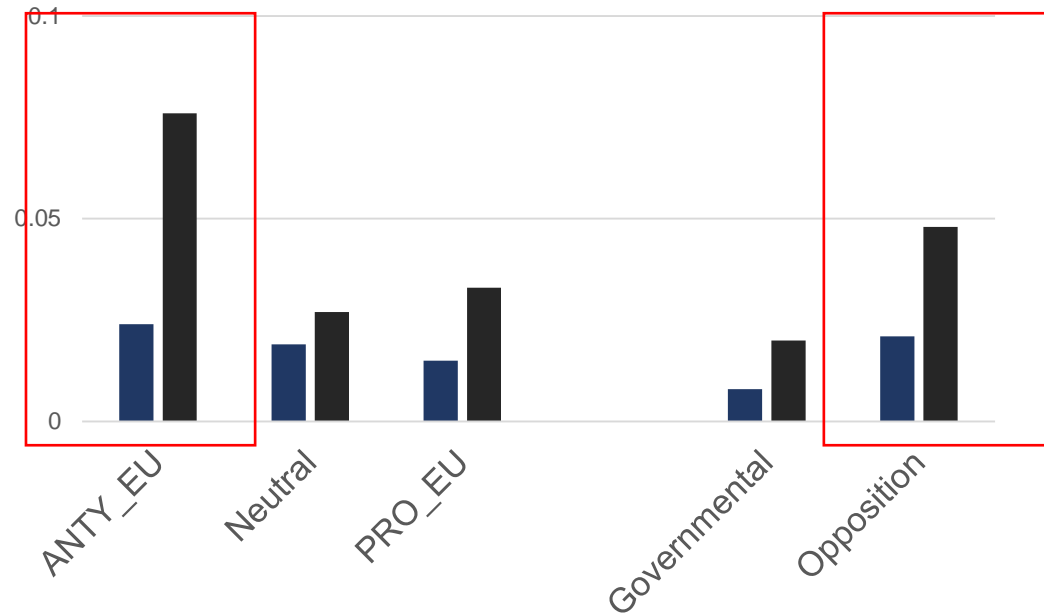
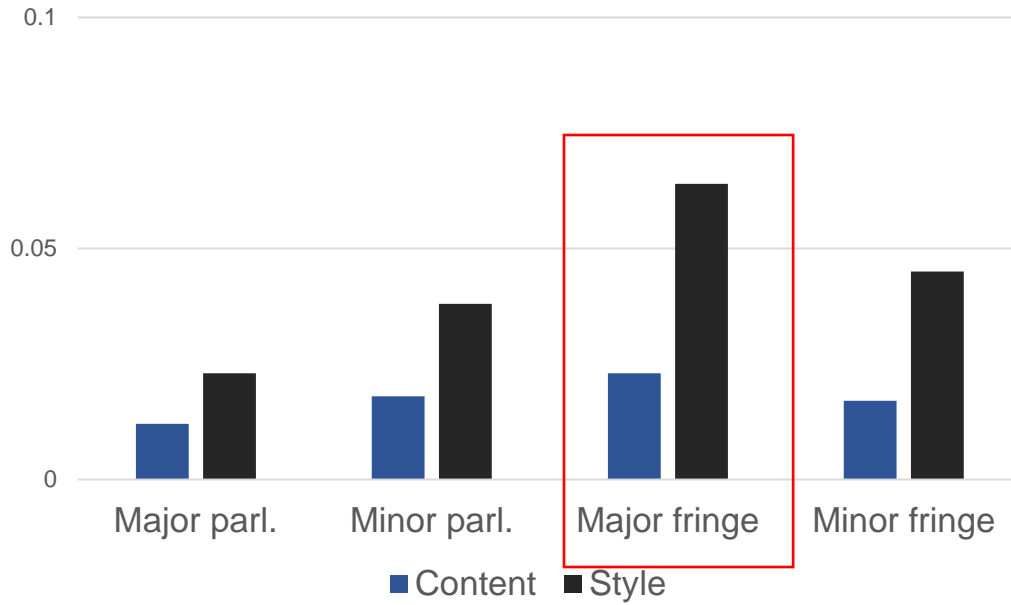
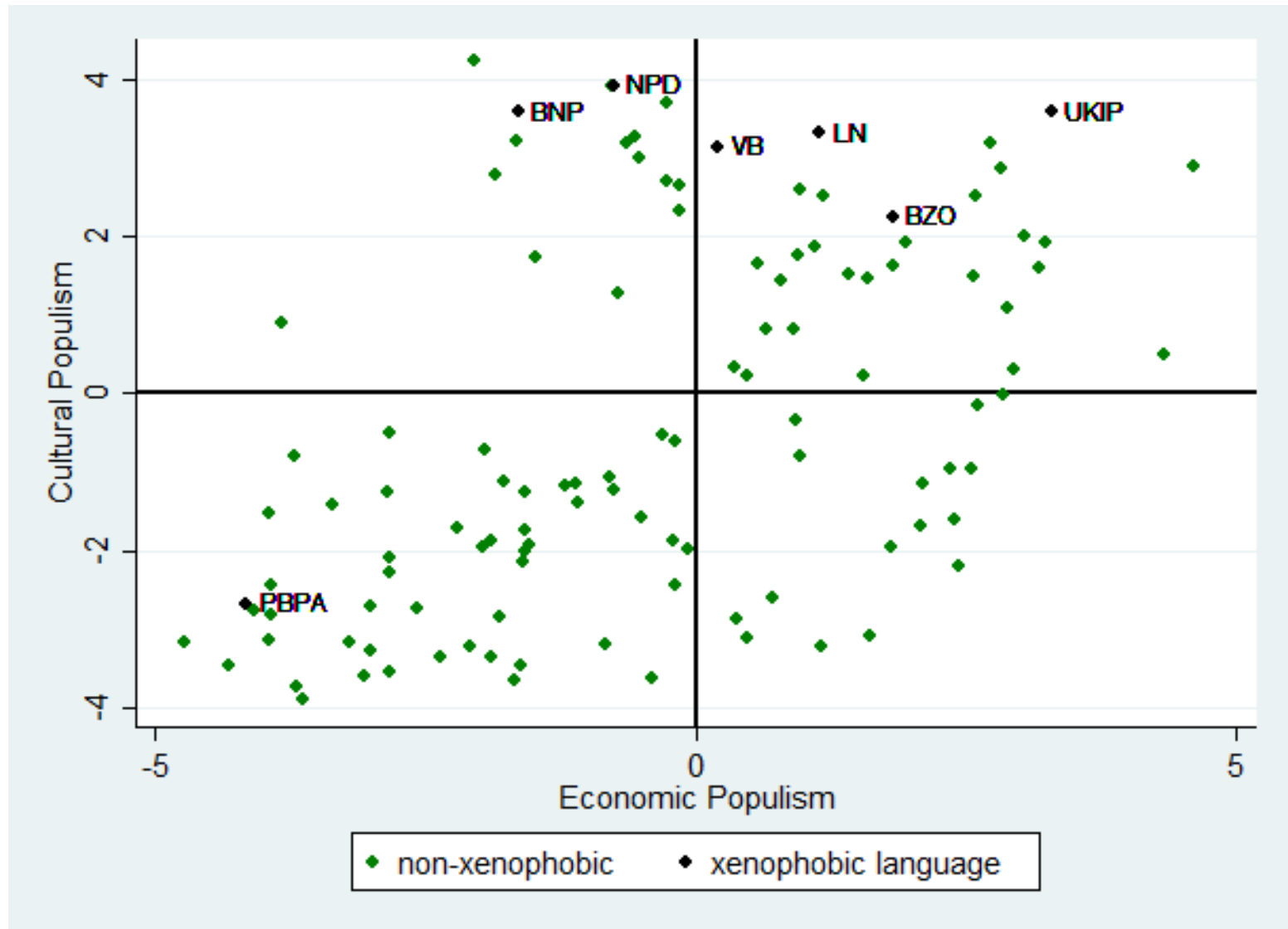


Figure 3. Use of populist communication strategies by parties on the left-right scale.
Ernst, Engesser, Buchel, Blassing, Esser (2017)

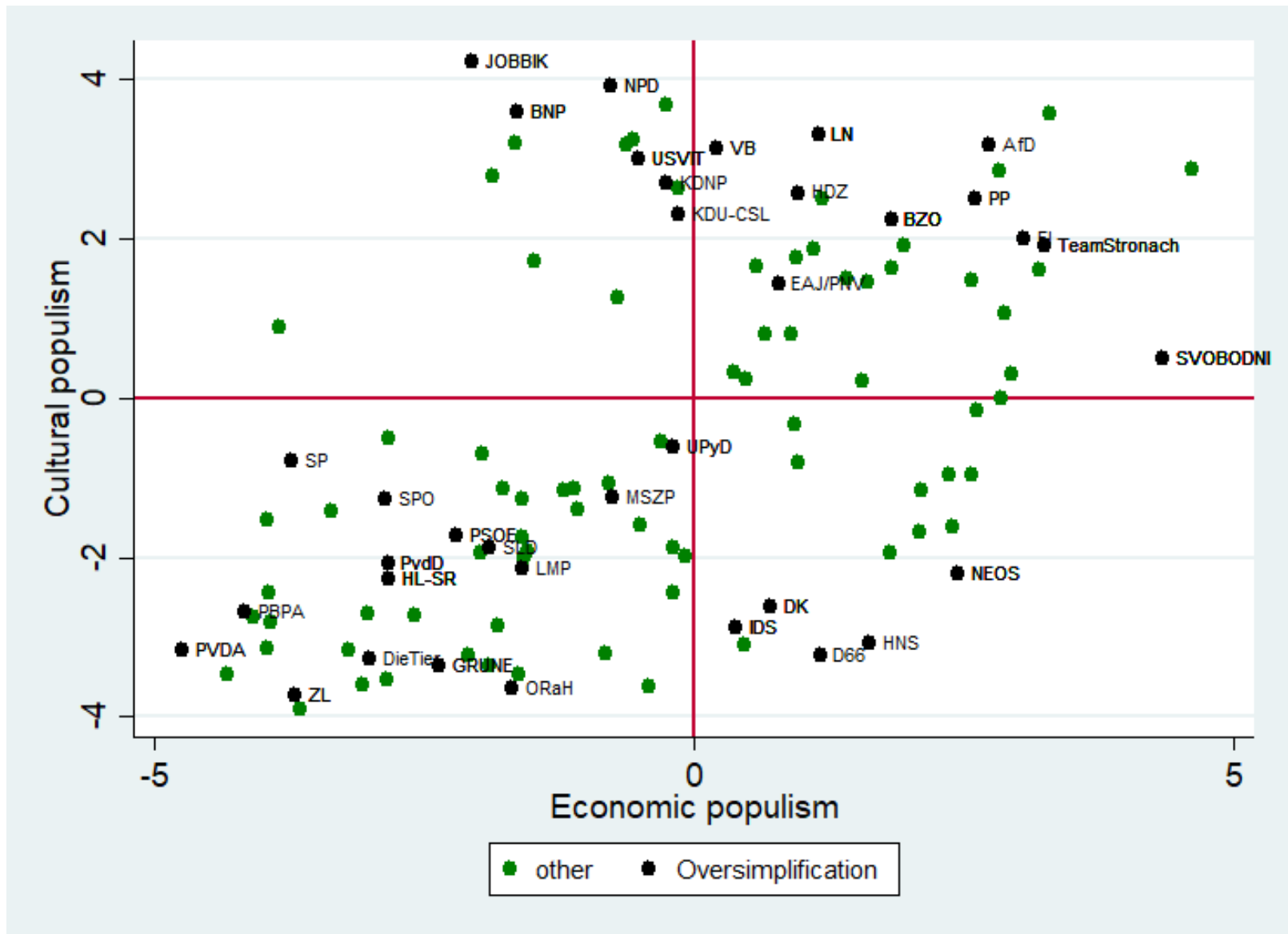
Populism *in content* and *in style* by Party size, Positioning EU, Government/Opposition



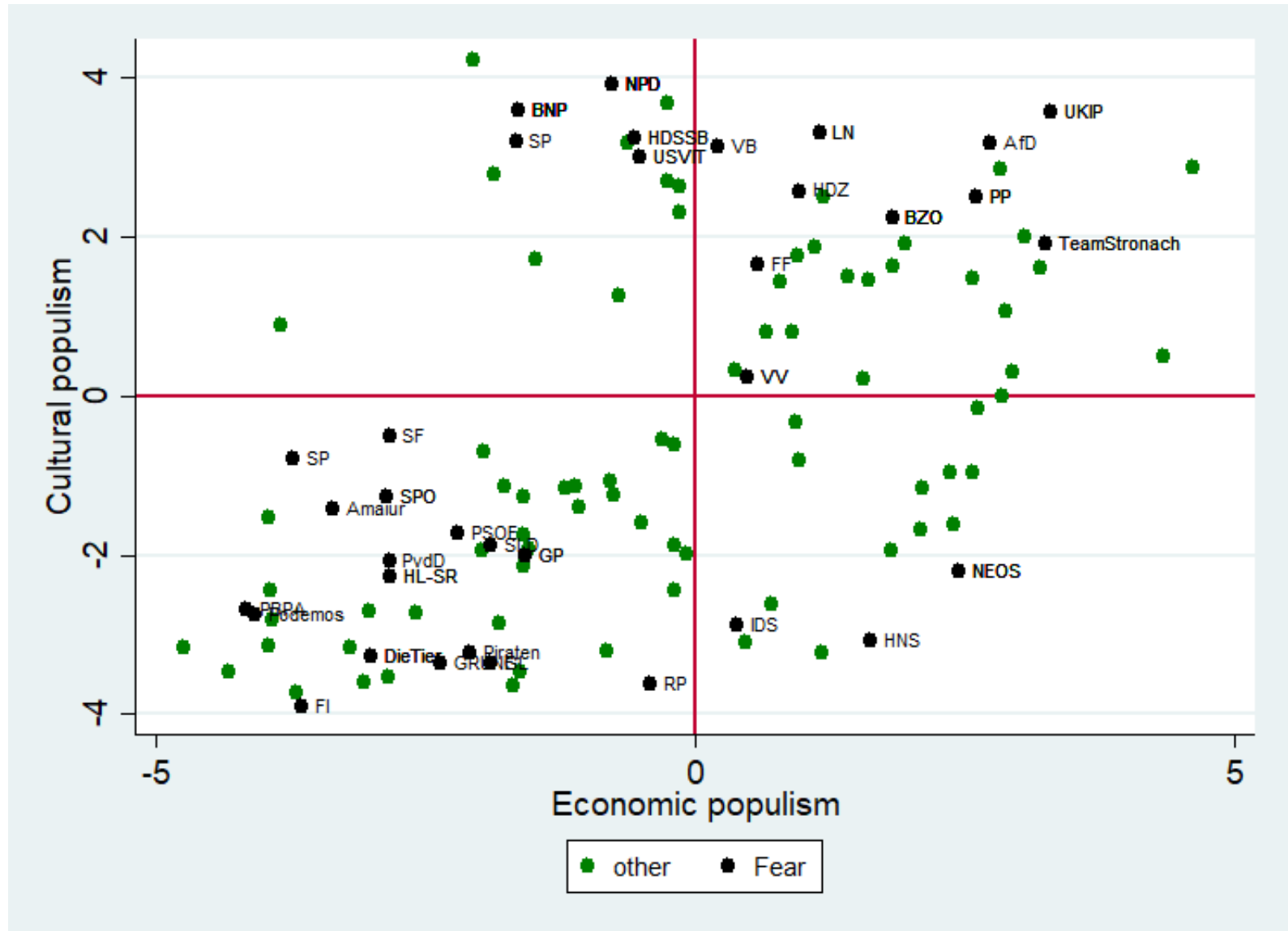
Populism *in style*: Xenophobia



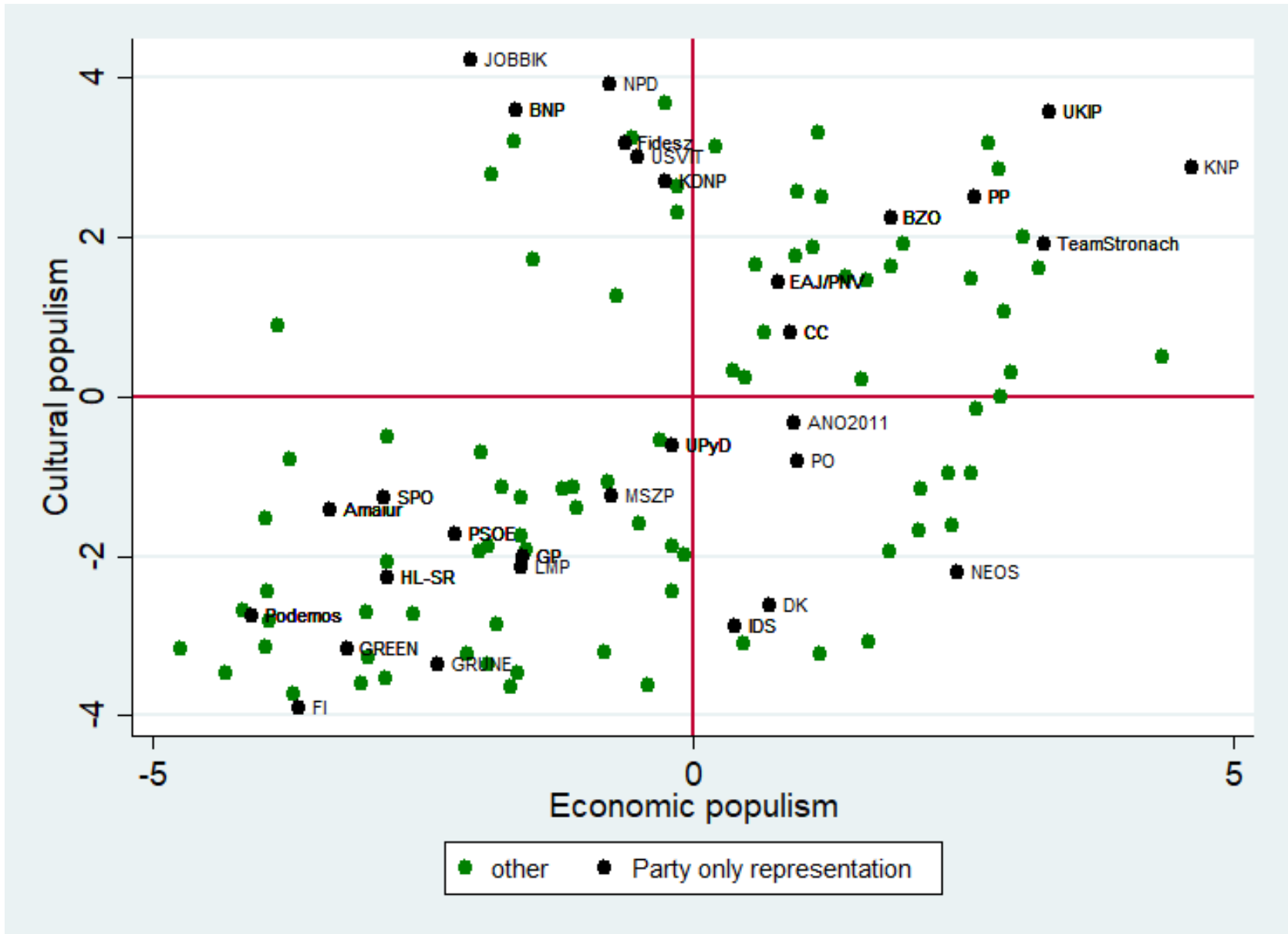
Populism *in style*: Oversimplification



Populism *in style*: Fear



Populism *in content*: Party only representation of citizens



- controlling for
 - Country fix effects
 - Facebook affordances
 - post format (photo/video/link/text, interactions),
 - time of post (days/hour),
 - time till election,
 - time from and till next/previous post,
 - previous reactions,
 - hourly-daily reactions
 - Party characteristics (size / ID position / EU position / gov-opp)

Negative binomial regression

		LIKE	SHARE	COMMENT
RESPONSE from party		.422 ***	.466 ***	.779 ***
Populism in content				
THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE PEOPLE	people as the origin of power demand more power for the people			
ADVOCATING FOR THE PEOPLE	party as true representative of people			
ATTACKING THE ELITES	Political elites Economic elites Media elites Supranational elites Legal elites			- .408 ** - .335 **
OSTRACIZM	anti (them) accusing of the ostracism		.595 **	
INVOKING THE HEARTLAND	historical symbolism			
COMBINING THE PEOPLE AND THE ELITE	other parties as NON-representatives of the people party as only true representative of people	.372 **	.510 **	.594 **
Populism in style				
STAGECRAFT	emotions Informality intimidation (unofficial story) negative affect (fear) simplification storytelling taboo breaker vulgarism	.353 ***	.464 *** .442 **	.304 *** .145 ** .399 ** .419 ** .295 ** - .266 * .587 ** .461 **
'REGISTER' DIMENSION	aggressive language ironic language encouragement to further discussion			.635 *** .601 **
Party Economic Populism Index		.071 *		.073 **
Party Cultural Populism Index		.116 *		

Conclusion

- Populism *in content* or *in style* is present in 1/3 of the communication made via Facebook by political parties > the comparison with the leaders populist communication is not that clear
- Major fringe parties (on the edge of getting into the national parliament) are more likely to use populist style, extreme right wing parties use populism more, however the pattern is not that clear across the ideological spectrum;
- populism *in content* is more evenly distributed among parties (regardless of characteristic) than populism *in style*
- Using economic/cultural cleavages (CHES) the ‘populist parties’ (*in content* and *in style*) are on extreme right on vertical scale (cultural) but rather neutral economically
- Taking separately each item of populism *in content* or *in style* ‘xenophobia’ is the only item distinctive for populist parties (culturally, still not for all of them) >> for other populist elements, more centered parties also adapt them to their communication strategies
- Populist communication has almost no influence on Facebook community activity (liking or sharing) > with the exception for ‘us-them’ elements
- Community interactivity (comments) is influenced mainly by populism *in style* (except for storytelling “bullshitting”?)
- Consistent influence of *emotional tone* of the post and *Representing The People* elements on community activity and interactivity

Thank you