

Predicting Populist Vote in Poland and France: Preliminary draft

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Data come from the World Value Survey, Wave 7. In Poland, the survey was conducted in In France was conducted in

At first, we retained all the questions regarding opinions and values and the variables regarding demographic data about the interviewed. Conversely, we discarded variables deemed as irrelevant, such as the job of the ancestors and a few others to remain with a total 119 survey questions. We defined as *populist voter* through the question: *Which political party appeals to you most?*. So, the populist voter is the one that supports a populist party. Next, a *populist party* is defined from the taxonomy contained in [?], or from the site [HTTP://POPU-LIST.ORG](http://popu-list.org), updated by the University of Amsterdam, otherwise from our personal interpretation. The opposite voter is defined as a *liberal*. After discarding the missing answers to the favorite party, we remained with 1243 statistic units for France, 830 statistic units for Poland. Missing data from all the other questions were replaced by average values.

We implemented the random forest as follows: At first, the random forest classifier tried to predict the populist voter using all the other 118 variables. Then, according to the Mean Decrease Index, the 10 most important variables are retained and prediction is attempted foagain. In this way, we have a final ranking about what is the importance of the predictors and results are interpreted. The

As far as Poland, the first run of the prediction concluded with 19.4% of voters that were misclassified (using the so-called Out-Of-Bag (OOB) error). When reducing the number of predictors to 10, the prediction concluded with 18.55% of misclassified voters. So, using just 10 predictors is a parsimonious information about the most important features that characterize the populist voter. The 10 selected predictors are divided into groups:

1. Group 1: Political Affinity. This group is composed by:
 - `dmc_cnt`: How democratically is this country being governed today? (1=not democratically, 10 = fully democratically).

- ps_sat: how satisfied are you with how the political system is functioning in your country today? (1 = not satisfied, 10 = completely satisfied).
- pol_sp: Self-positioning in the political space (1=left, 10 = right)
- c_gvr: Confidence in the government (1 = A great deal, 4 = None at all)

2. Group 2: Anti-Cosmopolitanism:

- c_eu1: How much confidence you have in the European Union? (1 = A great deal, 4 = None at all)

3. Religious Values:

- hom_prn: Homosexual couples are as good parents as other couples (1 = Agree strongly, 5 = disagree strongly)
- js_abr: How much justifiable is abortion? (1 = Never, 10 = Always)
- js_div: How much justifiable is divorce? (1 = Never, 10 = Always)
- js_hom: How much justifiable is homosexuality? (1 = Never, 10 = Always)
- c_chr: How much confidence you have in the Church? (1 = A great deal, 4 = None at all)

Regarding Group 1: Political Affinity, Poland is democratically ruled according to populists ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 7.26$) but not according to liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.92$). Consistently, populists are satisfied by democracy ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 7.26$), liberals not ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.92$); populists have confidence in the government ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 2.54$), liberals not ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.38$). Finally, the political position of populist is more in the right wing ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 7.45$) while liberals are more in the middle ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 5.19$). At the time of the survey, Poland was ruled by a coalition ruled by the populist party Law and Justice, therefore one may deem as tautological the confidence in the government and the satisfaction for the democracy of a populist voter: The government in charge reflects the voter's views. However, this is not fully consistent with the ideology that is often ascribed to populism. Populism is often associated with rejection of representative democracy and in favor of direct democracy, e.g. using referendum and similar call to people will. The finding that, when in charge, populist voters are confident in the government and satisfied by democracy outlines that the ideology of the people will is instrumental and contingent to the political debate. In other words, the will of the people is betrayed if and only if the populist party does not win the election. Finally, while most observers ascribe the Poland main party, Law and Justice, as right-wing, there is not a full agreement on that, as it is considered left-wing in the taxonomy contained in [?]. However, the fact that Polish populist voters positioned themselves on the right of the political spectrum suggests that Law and Justice should be considered as a right-wing.

	lib	pop	class.error
lib	207	88	0.29
pop	66	469	0.12

Tabella 1: Poland Confusion matrix

Regarding Group 2, Populist Anti-cosmopolitans opinions are represented only by the confidence in supranational organizations, populist voters are less confident in the European Union ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 2.84$) than liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 2.13$). This is consistent with all previous analysis of populism, that identifies the nation as the building block of the community. National identity implies rejection of supranational identity, and this finding supports the argument that populism heavily tapped on former euro-skepticism. However, it is interesting to observe that there are characterization of Anti-populism that are not present among the most important predictors, as there are no statements regarding immigration, job priorities, or other identitarian issues (the first found is When jobs are scarce, priority should go to national workers in position #13).

Regarding Group 3, Religious values, it can be seen that it is the most numerous. Populists reject homosexual parenthood ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 4.22$) more than liberals do ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.38$). Abortion is less justifiable by populists ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 2.74$ than by liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 4.82$), as well as divorce, $\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 4.30$ versus $\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 6.26$, and homosexuality, $\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 2.84$ versus $\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 5.00$. These stances are rooted in the country strong catholic background, as the confidence in Church is stronger for the populist ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 1.99$) than for the liberal ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 2.67$). This finding suggests also that the lack of confidence in the European Union is due to strong diverging opinion about genre issues.

In Table 1 the prediction confusion matrix is reported. As can be seen, the the overall prediction error is not evenly distributed. It is more easy to detect a populist voter, misclassified 12% of the times, rather than a liberal, misclassified 29% of the times. This suggests that the features characterizing a populist voters are common to liberal voters as well, rather than the reverse. Liberals can be religious too, but at the poll they do not follow the mainstream. It suggests that the cultural values characterizing populism are well-spread among all voters, to the point that it would be claimed that they form Poland’s national identity.

To summarize, populism in Poland can be interpreted as a rejection of the post-modern values supported by the European Union. This interpretation is partially consistent with the notion of the Cultural Backlash, even though the backlash suggests something that goes back, but this is not the case of Poland, to which applies most the notion of something moving slowly. As described in [?], Poland is moving towards a society characterized by more post-modern values, but slowly and at its own pace.

As far as France, the first run of the prediction concluded with 27.35% of voters that were misclassified (using the so-called Out-Of-Bag (OOB) error). When reducing the number of predictors to 10, the prediction error increased to 30.65%. So, using just 10 could have excluded some marginal useful predictors.

In comparison to Poland, characterizing the populist voter is more difficult. Nevertheless, the 10 selected predictors are divided into groups:

1. Group 1: Political Affinity. This group is composed by:

- c_gvr: See Poland above.
- pol_sp: See Poland above
- pol_rad: Political radicalization. It measures the distance between voter's political position and the centre of the political space. As in [?], it is measured as $(p_i - 5)^2$, where p_i is the variable pol_sp.
- dmc_cnt: See Poland above.
- ps_sat: See Poland above.

2. Group 2: Political vindications:

- imp_imm: Evaluate the impact of immigrants on the development of France (1 = very bad, 5 = very good).
- plc_eql: Income equality (1 = Incomes should be made more equal, 10 = We need larger income differences as incentives).

3. Group 3: Dissatisfaction of Democracy:

- el_tv: TV news favors the governing party (1 = very often, 4 = not at all).
- el_fair: Votes are counted fairly (1 = very often, 4 = not at all).
- el_rch: Rich people buy elections (1 = very often, 4 = not at all).

Regarding Group 1, those variables coincides with what has been found in Poland. Nevertheless, at the time of the survey France was ruled by a liberal government so that confidence and satisfaction follow a different pattern than in Poland. Indeed, populists are more unconfident of the government ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 3.22$) than liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 2.63$), they consider France less democratic ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 5.85$) than liberals think ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 5.85$), they are less satisfied of the political system ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 4.19$) than liberals are ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 5.51$). Regarding the political positions, populists tend to be more left-wing ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 4.84$) than liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 5.39$), but in general, they are more radicals ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 6.74$) than liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 6.74$). However, data about left-right political position must be carefully interpreted. Indeed, the random forest is a non linear predictor, so that the political position is used for both to separate the populist right from the rest of the voters, and next to separate the populist left from the middle voters (or viceversa). As a result, the variable political position is important to predict the populist, but it works in two directions.

Regarding Group 2, and following the remark above, the two revendication variables reflect two separate political cleavages, as pursuing equality is usually a salient issue of the left, while immigration is a salient issue of the right. When the two variables are used to predict the populist/liberal cleavage, populists are

	lib	pop	class.error
lib	627	140	0.18
pop	241	235	0.51

Tabella 2: France confusion matrix

more inclined to income equality ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 4.48$) than liberals ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 5.43$), and they tend to give a more negative impact to immigration ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 2.93$) than liberals do ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.14$). Nevertheless, the same *caveat* as the political space applies here: As the random forest is a non-linear classifier, it could be that income equality separates the populist left from the other voters, while immigration separates the populist right from the rest. This issue will be investigated later.

Regarding Group 3, those variables reflect discontent about the real (or?) material (or?) actual French democracy. Populist voters ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 1.90$) believes that news about elections are not reported fairly by TV media, while liberals assess them as more neutral ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 2.32$). The populists also believe that the wealth can manipulate the voting outcomes ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 2.88$), while liberals do not ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.29$). Finally, votes are not counted fairly in the populist opinion, ($\hat{\mu}_{pop} = 3.06$), they are in the liberal view ($\hat{\mu}_{lib} = 3.36$). Apparently, the WVS questions are formulated so plainly that they sound naive. However, they reveal a serious discontent about the real mechanisms underlying the electoral competition. The assertion that votes are not counted fairly could be referred to prime ministers elected using majoritarian rule and after two turns. The result is that usually the French Prime minister is supported by a low percentage of all the electoral body, and even among them, the minister is just considered the lesser evil. Moreover, a not trivial percentage of French voters are inclined towards the right-wing parties that are excluded by political alliances by all the other mainstream parties, and this phenomenon occurred regularly at least since the election XXX in which XXX. Therefore, the assertion that votes are not counted fairly may refer to a well motivated discontent about how representatives are elected The majoritarian scheme, conversely to the proportional, widens the difference between elected and elector. Next, the questions about media and wealth could refers to the plain fact that when money talks, people listen, and political candidates are no exception. The answers to the questions seem to point against a well established elite, formed by the major companies and the state media, materially supporting candidates that do not question the intricate bonds between the public and the private sector.

In Table 2 the prediction confusion matrix is reported. As can be seen, the the overall prediction error is not evenly distributed. It is more easy to detect a liberal voter, misclassified 18% of the times, rather than a populist, misclassified 51% of the times. This suggests that the features characterizing a populist voters are not common among the France society. Many people that were predicted as liberals vote for a populist party instead. It means that their opinions diverge form what are the most relevant populist argument. Most

peculiarly, it suggests that the severe opinions about the France democracy are not yet agreed by the majority of the voters.

We conclude the chapter attempting to compare the Poland to France. In both case we found some predictors/variables that are associated to the populist main appearance. Among them we found the appreciation of country's democracy and the confidence to the government. It may be claimed that it is consistent with the populist critique to the representative democracy and to the power of clergymen. But this is not the case: populist voters are unconfident of a liberal government but confident of a populist one! Overall, this argument casts a doubt about whether the populist call to direct democracy to surrogate corrupted elite is an important feature characterizing the ideology. Surely not for their voters. For them, the confidence to institution seems not descending by a view of life, but rather, it is an aspect of the political position of the institution.

Next, the case Poland highlights the role of cultural values to predict the voters. But it has been found that these cultural values coincides largely with the religious dictates of the Catholic Church, to the point that one could argue that the Poland populist government is instead a *catholic* government. With this in mind, then the lack of confidence in the European Union should be interpreted as opposing the *secular* policies of the Union rather than an anti-cosmopolitan stance.

Conversely, the case of France shows that the populist vote is not religiously characterized as in Poland, but not even characterized by any other strong values system. Rather we found two vindications: the negative assessment of immigration, whose role in shaping the populist attitudes has been largely advocated and documented and the quest for income equality, a rather general issue that can be ascribed both as populist and evangelical. Next, we found that the populist vote is characterized by a sense of disappoint about the elections. They are deemed manipulated by the rich and the TV media, popular vote aggregated in an unfair way. One may interpret this finding as confirm of the populist critique to democracy, but we think it would be wrong, as there are other questions on the WVS by which respondents can express a critique to democracy. Instead, these questions are pointing to the particular mechanism of the elections and how political competition is biased. It is more a mature political statements rather than a rough simplification, as the flaws of modern democracies are well documented.

The least that we can deduce from the two nations is that their populism is very different, to the point that the real political phenomena underlying the conservative Poland and the *jelles jaune* revolts are also very different. In Poland we observe a nation with a strong cultural heritage, the Catholic Church, that is reluctant to comply the secular recommendations of the European Union, while in France possibly we are observing the crisis of a mature democracy that is incapable to provide a legitimate representation of voters issues disconnected by the political mainstream. The two phenomena are so different that claiming they both are caused by the populist revolt against the elite appears, yes... a populist oversimplification.