Chapter 8: Populist Electorate without Populist Parties: The Curious Case of Montenegro

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1. Introduction

Researching populism is by no means a new phenomenon in social sciences. The field has been on a rapid expansion since the 1990s and has witnessed the (re)emergence of several populist parties across Europe and Latin America. Most scholars who investigate this phenomenon have focused on macro-level analyses of structural factors that enable the rise of populist parties. Apart from taking hold in diverse political environments, what makes this area of research more challenging and therefore interesting is the simple fact that populism crosses traditional ideological lines. Specifically, populism is suited for both right and left ideologies, as it combines its main message with the 'host' ideology (Rooduijn 2014). Along those lines, populism combined with nativism constitutes the populist radical right (Rooduijn 2014). Yet, it can also be constitutive of the populist radical left (social populism) (March and Mudde 2005).

While research on the rise of populist parties in Western Europe has been extensive, limited attention has been devoted to analyzing populism in the Western Balkans. Along those lines, Montenegro stands out as an interesting case, appearing on the surface to be a primary candidate for the emergence of populist parties. The political landscape of Montenegro has been dominated by the Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS) since the introduction of pluralism in 1990 up until the August 2020 election, and the DPS has established itself as the dominant political elite. What is more peculiar is the fact that populist sentiment is prevalent throughout the Montenegrin society. A casual observation of public discourse reveals a significant amount of discontent with the political processes and the economic landscape of the country. As poor macroeconomic performances are viewed as one of the principal sources of support for populist parties, these conditions in Montenegro are rather ideal for a populist party to emerge, yet no such party exists. Instead, some opposition parties have occasionally used populist rhetoric, but their usage of it has

been insufficient to be labelled as truly populist. This chapter explores the factors that have shaped Montenegrin politics, and the question of why, in a context which appears conducive to populism, a full-fledged populist party has failed to emerge.

The answer to this question begins with an in-depth examination of the structure of party competition in Montenegro. This chapter engages with a recent claim laid out by Džankić and Keil (2017) that the DPS is a peculiar case of state-sanctioned populism. In this context, the DPS has consistently used populist mechanisms to justify its clientelist methods. While there is some merit to this argument, the DPS is not a populist party, at least not according to the conceptual framework of ideational populism (see: Mudde 2007). By monopolizing the issue of state independence and creating an image of the DPS as a party which is protective over the state, I argue that the practice of 'othering' does not constitute a case of state-sanctioned populism but has instead been effective in preventing the emergence of a full-fledged populist party in opposition to the DPS. Therefore, the occasional flirtation with populist rhetoric on behalf of opposition parties should be perceived as an inability to clearly detach themselves from the 'anti-state' label given by the DPS, as opposed to a full-fledged populist platform.

In order to test these propositions, I look at electoral behavior. If the 'othering' mechanisms of the DPS are proven effective, then they will be successful in neutralizing the populist sentiment in the electorate. If, however, the occasional populist rhetoric of Democratic Montenegro (DCG) and Movement for Change (PzP) is successful, then it should result in a clear electoral advantage for these parties among the populist electorate. These mechanisms are tested by using the most recent database with populist items on individual level, the Montenegrin National Election Study (MNES) database from 2016.

2. The absence of populism in Montenegro

Although the field has suffered from lack of conceptual clarity over the years, a moderate consensus on what populism actually is has recently been reached. Initial attempts to define the phenomenon have conceived of populism as a tool that organizes the oppressed people against the ruling elite by emphasizing popular issues, thereby uniting those in opposition to the ruling elite (Laclau 1977). Here, it is evident that political parties utilizing

such a mechanism need to clearly delineate who and what constitutes as 'the people.' Along those lines, Canovan (1981) argues that what clearly creates an image of 'the people' is a focus on anti-elitism. These initial considerations have led to a more comprehensive approach, which, apart from the anti-elitist dimension, incorporates a strong adherence to popular sovereignty and creates an ethical claim about the nature of 'the people.' According to this ideational approach, populism is a "thin-centered 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" (Mudde 2007: 23). The 'good people' are contrasted with the evil and corrupt elite, who threaten the alleged purity and unity of the sovereign people (Akkerman et al. 2014). This conceptualization implies the existence of three separate, yet intertwined dimensions of populism: anti-elitism, people-centrism, and homogeneity and virtuousness of the people (Manichean worldview). In other words, while the definition implies the existence of distinct dimensions of populism, it is the combination of these, rather than one single idea, that constitutes populism. These dimensions are reflected on the individual level (demand side populism) in the form of populist attitudes (see: Stanley 2011). As these attitudes lack full ideological content, populism is neither situated on the left nor the right but can be attached to a variety of host ideologies (Rooduijn 2014).

Having laid out the definition of populism that this chapter utilizes, I now attend to the question of which factors enable the success of parties that have incorporated a populist outlook into their rhetoric. In his book on the success of populist right-wing parties in Europe, Mudde (2007) explores macro and micro level explanations. Among other factors, he evaluates several enabling conditions, such as the modernization hypothesis, the presence of political crises, and the categorization of parties and an authoritarian legacy (Mudde 2007). It can be argued that each of these conditions are somewhat present in Montenegrin society. First, the modernization hypothesis has been expanded to include the transition from state socialism to capitalist democracy (Othon 2000). While the importance of this hypothesis for the emergence of populism has received mixed results (Mudde 2007), Montenegro satisfies this condition, as it has undergone a process of state transition. Some argue it has not been consolidated yet (see: Vuković 2010), as the country experienced its first peaceful transition of power only in August 2020, following the end of the DPS's thirty-year tenure in power.

Second, political crises are conducive to the success of populism, particularly in countries exhibiting high levels of unemployment and dissatisfaction with democracy (Mudde 2007). Both of these conditions are present and prevalent in Montenegro. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, data from the beginning of 2018 from the Employment Agency of Montenegro shows an unemployment rate of 20.40%, while 59.28% of respondents for the Montenegrin National Election Study (MNES) are dissatisfied with democracy. Furthermore, the country finds itself in a constant state of political crisis. Since 2015, there have been frequent protests, which culminated in religious protests against the content of the Law on Religious Freedoms in 2019 and 2020. In the case of the religious protest organized by the Serbian Orthodox Church, a significant number of citizens took to the streets to contest two provisions of the stated law. These included a provision requiring the registration of all religious organizations with the state authorities, as well as Article 62, which stated that all religious monuments built prior to 1918 lacking clear ownership deeds would be considered cultural heritage and in ownership of the Montenegrin state. These religious protests, popularly termed '*litije*' (a term usually referring to religious processions), more so than any other political issue, have demonstrated how strongly polarized Montenegro is, both within the electorate and among party elites. With a few exceptions, the party elites and an electoral body composed of then-opposition parties were against the Law on Religious Freedoms, whereas the pro-government structures were in favor of these developments. Further illustrating the extent of elite polarization and the inability to cross party lines were the parliamentary boycotts, which were frequently used by the opposition parties prior to the transfer of power in 2020.

Third, the cartelization of political parties is a favorable condition for the success of populism (Mudde 2007). It can be argued that, at times—but certainly not always—the nature of party competition in Montenegro has been organized along the lines of the government versus the opposition (seldom representing the independence vs. union politics) (see: Stankov 2019). After a brief period when some of the opposition parties had participated in the interim government in 2016, the nature of party competition soon reverted to its usual patterns of competition. This point can be illustrated with two examples. First, during the 2018 presidential election, almost the entire opposition grouped around a single presidential candidate, Mladen Bojanić, in hopes of successfully challenging the candidacy of the leader of the DPS, Milo Đukanović. Second, after the August 2020 parliamentary election, the new parliamentary majority consisted of traditional opposition parties and

quite clearly followed the institutionalized nature of the aforementioned party system.

Fourth, the remnants of an authoritarian legacy have been linked to the success of populism (Mudde 2007). The long-term rule of the DPS in combination with the party's previous ties to the League of Communists of Montenegro in 1991 indicates that some leftovers of the authoritarian legacy are still present. Here, I primarily refer to the capture of state resources by the DPS to incur an electoral advantage (see: Džankić and Keil 2017). However, perhaps even more troubling for the democratic consolidation of the country, the government which formed after the transfer of power in August 2020 seems to have followed the pattern of regime change outlined by Levitsky and Way (2010). Instead of carrying out a substantive regime change and democratization of the system, the newly formed government co-opted the state in a similar fashion to the DPS, namely, for its own political agenda.

Additionally, the success of populist actors during times of crises is facilitated by "the combination of persisting political resentment, a (perceived) serious challenge to 'our way of life,' and the presence of an attractive populist leader" (Mudde 2004: 547). Furthermore, the visibility of corruption scandals contributes to this feeling of persistent political resentment (Mudde 2004). Similarly, Inglehart and Norris (2016) provide evidence that cultural backlash and the challenge to 'our way of life' is the primary driver for populist support in the U.S. In addition to the briefly explained crises surrounding the Law on Religious Freedoms, Montenegro seems to satisfy these conditions rather well, namely, corruption is perceived as one of the main issues in the political sphere. According to the MNES, 80.6% of respondents stated that corruption is very or substantively present in the political system. Furthermore, the political adoption of values grounded in respect for human rights in areas of sexual freedoms and women's rights are perceived as a threat to traditionalism and have been openly opposed.

Considering these factors, Montenegro appears to be a primary candidate for the emergence of an attractive populist leader, yet no such leader appeared. What could be the reasons behind this? Through the lenses of the ideational approach to populism, I will analyze the rare occurrences of populism in the Montenegrin political context. This exploration begins with the well-established political elite, the DPS, followed by an examination of two opposition parties, the DCG on the left and the PzP on the right.

3. The ruling political elites: Democratic Party of Socialists

Democratic life of Montenegro has been dominated by the DPS. This is an oversimplification of the amount of control and influence that one party managed to exercise over the last thirty years. Džankić and Keil (2017) argue that one of the mechanisms that the DPS has employed to remain in power is a form of state-sanctioned populism. Building on the definition of Taggart (2000), Džankić and Keil (2017) emphasize five features that have enabled the DPS to remain in power: (1) control over the economy; (2) substantial development aid as the source of strong patronage and clientelist networks; (3) control of key state institutions; (4) corruption; (5) change of discourse in response to the demands of the population. As such, the DPS is not a populist party per se, but rather a party that exploits populist discourse when suitable. Here, the DPS has employed several populist messages to strengthen and legitimize its clientelist networks. First in line is a strategy of 'othering,' which has created an imagery of anti-state enemies and portrayed the DPS as 'the savior' of the Montenegrin independence and the state itself (Džankić and Keil 2017). In the process of 'othering,' the DPS has capitalized on ethnic cleavage-based politics, clearly distinguishing between 'us' (Montenegrins) and 'them' (Serbians), who would deny 'us' the right to live in 'our' own independent state. While this strategy was crucial during the immediate years prior to the referendum on independence from Serbia in 2006 (Džankić and Keil 2017), this discourse has remained constantly present, particularly leading up to the 2020 national parliamentary election. Recent examples of this strategy and how it has been utilized will be demonstrated in the following sections, which deal with opposition parties, the DCG and the PzP. The DPS has also included the following additional populist elements in their strategy: an emphasis on the 'heartland' (nationalizing policies including the change of language, state symbols, and so on), a constant state of crisis in which the DPS appears as the primary problem-solver, a chameleonic-like, vague party ideology, and the 'cult' of personality of the party leader, Milo Dukanović (Džankić and Keil 2017).

While there is some merit to the claim that the DPS has utilized populist strategies at times by 'othering' political opponents, utilizing the leader's charisma, and emphasizing the heartland (Džankić and Keil 2017), the party has undoubtedly remained in control of the political processes and mechanisms of representative democracy. Furthermore, the uninterrupted rule gradually led to a state of captured institutions, thereby allowing the

DPS to exercise political influence over the judiciary, the economy, the state-owned media, and so on. The party's wide-reaching influence, combined with the electoral winning streak, has created an image of invincibility (Komar and Živković 2016). Along these lines, although they have used populist mechanisms to exercise control, they do not qualify as a populist party, at least not according to the ideational approach. 'Them' in this context are not the political elites, but rather state enemies (both foreign and domestic). It is not the *volonté générale* that will ensure Montengero's independence, but rather the control wielded by the DPS over state institutions. Unlike a populist party, the DPS is a party of the political establishment that is accountable for the (perceived) failures of representative democracy. The party remains notorious for its clientelist network and corruption scandals. In contrast to Džankić and Keil (2017), what I propose here is that these strategies do not constitute a form of state-sanctioned populism but can be useful in understanding why opposition parties in Montenegro have not taken on the mantle of full-fledged populism. The elaboration of this argument follows in the next sections on the DCG and the PzP.

4. Populist flirtation of Democrats in Montenegro

At the forefront of populist rhetoric in Montenegro is a left-wing party, the DCG. The party emerged as a new political actor in 2015, when a part of the Socialist People's Party of Montenegro (SNP)[1] seceded and adopted the role of a fresh and politically untainted force on the Montenegrin political scene. In the initial months, the DCG established a complex internal organization with a central headquarters accompanied by committees in every local municipality in Montenegro (Demokrate Crna Gora 2018). Here, the DCG established the party's Congress as the main decision-making body responsible for the party's program, which would be scheduled to convene at least once every four years. In between the regular congressional sessions, the Executive Committee is the chief managing body of the party, consisting (among others) of the party leader, vice presidents, and

1 Socialist People's Party. The party emerged in 1998 following a split in the DPS to the supporters of Milo Đukanović and supporters of Momir Bulatović. Internal party conflict reached its culmination with both political leaders running for president in the 1997 Montenegrin presidential election. After Bulatović had a relative majority of votes in the first round, Đukanović managed to win the Montenegrin presidency in a head-to-head runoff two weeks later.

presidents of the municipal party committees. Furthermore, the Executive Committee is balanced with a quota system in place for at least 30% women and 30% of members under the age of thirty.

While the visibility of the party is primarily reliant on the visibility of the party leader, Aleksa Bečić, the presence of local councils is felt due to the party's extensive door-to-door campaigning strategies, social-media platforms, and adherence to local issues. As such, several campaigns run by the DCG at the municipal level represent a newfound approach to campaigning on local issues and problems via a community-based strategy, rather than confronting political opponents in more general public settings. Along these lines, local elections in Montenegro have been dominated by the same issues of state loyalty and ethnic affiliation, as previously mentioned. Here, instead of continuing the tradition of cleavage-based politics, in 2016, the DCG used the slogan *Pobjede, ne podjele!* (Victory, not division!) in their national campaign. In 2020, they used the slogan *Mir je naša nacija!* (Peace is our nation!). At a municipal level, instead of focusing on national issues as most parties often do, the DCG emphasized local issues. Their campaign strategy in the city of Herceg Novi is indicative of this approach, where the party focused on the introduction of a decentralized system of local decision-making, preservation, and modernization of the Meljine hospital, as well as the complete overhaul of infrastructure that would facilitate a successful tourist season in the summer months (source: Demokrate Crna Gora 2018).

By utilizing these strategies, the DCG was relatively successful on a national level. The party managed to secure 10.01% support the first time they ran for election, i.e., in the 2016 parliamentary election. Furthermore, the DCG continued to establish a strong base and build party infrastructure at the local level, which resulted in successful political appearances on seven local elections in 2016 and 2017. Here, the DCG was able to secure significant local support in larger Montenegrin towns (Herceg Novi 24.22%, Budva 19.5%, Mojkovac 17.16%) while they were less successful among the smaller communities (Petnjica 3.25%, Tuzi 5.3%) (State Electoral Commision 2018). Lastly, the party was clearly consolidated after it managed to increase its electoral support at the national level in 2020, when it won 12.53% of the votes in the 2020 parliamentary election.

The main ideological messages of the party have revolved around the issues of economic inequality, social justice, and dignity of the 'common worker.' Sometimes, attached to this leftist ideological approach are ideas

of people's unity, popular sovereignty, and the rejection of the corrupt and incompetent political elites. At the founding assembly, the party's leader, Aleksa Bečić, said that one of the primary goals of the party would be the reconciliation of 'the people' and the restoration of faith in politics and politicians. Moreover, Bečić stressed the catastrophic socio-economic conditions of the country and blamed the DPS for systemic corruption.[2] More recently, in a meeting with the Estonian diplomat and former head of the EU delegation in Montenegro, Aivo Orav, Bečić stated that the established political elite cannot implement the necessary reforms in the EU accession process, as doing so would imply dealing with a corrupt system which they themselves had established and are a part of. Furthermore, he emphasized that Montenegro is in dire need for pure, competent, and fresh political figures to fulfill the dream of the people, that is, acquiring EU membership (Demokrate Crna Gora 2018).

In addition to prominent leadership figures, party members at the local level have also articulated populist messages. In reaction to the DPS's characterization of the DCG as a party which seeks to exploit the spoils of office, the local committee from the city of Nikšić stated that the DCG had been primarily established 'to free' the country from the mafia's embrace of the DPS, whereby 'the boss,' Milo Đukanović, has promoted himself, his family, and his colleagues into the elite echelons of society, meanwhile, an increasing number of common folks have been forced to turn to communal kitchens for food (Vijesti 2018). Similarly, when commenting on a state-owned ferry operator, Barska Plovidba AD, the vice president of a local committee in the multiplicity of Bar, Dragan Tufegdžić, stated that he believes there are competent people in the company who are being prevented from doing their jobs, due to the short-term benefits presented by the clientelist network of the DPS (Vijesti 2018). Last but not least, following a good electoral result in the local elections in the city of Kotor, members of the local parliament from the DCG refused to receive monetary compensation for their work, citing the slogan, "Serving the people!" (Demokrate Crna Gora 2018).

We have thus far identified all three constitutive elements of populism in the political agency of the DCG. Occasionally, they emphasize the 'good' nature of 'the common people,' who they depict as being divided and

2 'It is not enough that they have eaten our past and our present, but under a smoke curtain of societal division, they would like to eat away our future too' (*Portal Analitika*, 2018).

ruled by the corrupt and incompetent elite (mafia). Yet, despite this, they describe them as if they are holding out for the implementation of 'real' democratic principles and adherence to 'the will' of 'the people.' Here, an effort can be identified to construct the notion of 'the people' as all citizens of Montenegro, a classification devoid of ethnic identity. However, while these elements are indeed present, they are not used consistently enough for these political actors to qualify as full-fledged populists. Instead, the party typically refers to specific policy issues in their campaigns on both the local and national stage, whereby populist mechanisms are seldom utilized to strengthen the main political messages of the party. The DCG has utilized populist messages to justify their competence in matters of economic development and social policy, while simultaneously trying to distance themselves from the cleavage-based nature of the system.

Nonetheless, the DCG is still under attack by the DPS for being an anti-state party. Here, the DPS has relied on the strategy of 'othering' in order to construct a suspicious political history of the party. As a primary example of this mechanism, the DPS's president Milo Đukanović, at the party convention held days prior to the local election in Mojkovac (2017), emphasized the 'dark history'of the DCG and the party from which they seceded, SNP. Specifically, he argued that they are trying to present themselves as a new political force while hiding their true identity: the identity of those who tried to deny Montenegro its independence, who organized violent demonstrations and persecuted Montenegrin youth, and who openly oppose the euro-Atlantic value system. Therefore, their 'new' appearance cannot erase the fact that their interests regarding the future of the country are dubious (Radio Televizija Crne Gore 2017). This small demonstration gives more merit to the dominant political strategy of the DPS while at the same time sheds additional light on reasons why Montenegro does not have a full-fledged populist party. Even with its ideological content and campaigning on issue positions, the DCG is still entrenched in the cleavage-based politics of the DPS. Full-fledged populism would be counterproductive as it would expose the lack of clear issue stances the party identifies with, presenting a simple anti-elitist (anti-DPS) approach to politics. In a scenario with no substantive political message, the DPS would much more easily argue that such a party is actually anti-state rather than anti-establishment.

5. Anti-establishment of Movement for Change

Another candidate for consideration is a right-wing party, the PzP, founded in 2006, when an NGO, Group for Change, institutionalized as a political subject. In the 2006 parliamentary election, the PzP enjoyed relative success (13.14% of votes) followed by a rapid decline in 2009 (6.03% of votes), as the party leader Nebojša Medojević (and other opposition candidates) lost the presidential race in a sweeping victory of the DPS candidate, Filip Vujanović (State Electoral Commision 2018). The results of the presidential election in 2008 signaled the inability of the PzP to substantively challenge the dominance of the DPS. Furthermore, it appears that by that point, the party had lost its credibility as a new political force and a catalyst for a political change. While still nominally existing as a separate political entity, prior to national parliamentary election in 2012, the PzP joined a loosely organized political association, the Democratic Front (DF).[3] In the following years, the PzP acted on the political scene as an equal partner to the other large constituting members of the DF, a Serbian nationalist right-wing party, New Serbian Democracy (NOVA) and Democratic People's Party (DNP).

Several features of populism can be identified in the political discourse of the PzP. The PzP has emphasized the criminal and conspiratorial nature of the regime by focusing on its close ties with drug and tobacco smuggling organizations, which has resulted in these criminal structures plundering 'the common people.' This can be observed in several statements of Nebojša Medojević[4] as well as statements made by the party's VP, Branko Radulović, who has emphasized the regime's lack of legitimacy, as it has not followed the electoral will of 'the people.' The former has maintained that the DPS functions as a political version of the Pink Panthers which, instead of gold, steals 'the electoral will' of 'the people' (Portal Analitika 2018), whereas the latter has characterized its policies not as a product of the electoral will, but rather of 'captured institutions' that are used in the process of state robbery (Večernje Novosti 2017). In addition to making accusations of economic robbery, the PzP has consistently claimed electoral fraud through various mechanisms (Vijesti 2018). Here, we see that the

3 By 2018, any distinction between the constituting members of *DF* would be hard to disentangle.

4 On 19 September 2016, Nebojša Medojević tweeted: Not all members of *DPS* are thieves, but all thieves are members of *DPS*.

PzP constructs the notion of 'the people' as the citizens of Montenegro who are not a part of the DPS's criminal organization, but instead those who have been exploited and robbed by the political elites for their own personal interests. Furthermore, by focusing on electoral fraud, the PzP clearly identifies the bending of the *volonté générale*.[5] Their anti-elitism is not a general populist tendency against elites of representative democracy as such, but a specific opposition to the DPS as the political establishment. Furthermore, by entering in alliance with a Serbian right-wing nationalist party, NOVA, their anti-elitism increasingly becomes blurred and portrayed by the DPS as an anti-state approach.

Recent developments following the national parliamentary election have shed light on this process of melting and on the inability of the PzP to clearly distinguish itself as a populist anti-establishment from an anti-state party. The election day was marked by a failed coup d'etat, which is currently in stages of getting a judicial epilogue. Namely, several members of NOVA and DNP were charged with providing logistic and political support to a group of foreign mercenaries to take over state institutions on the eve of elections and to potentially assassinate the DPS's leader, Milo Đukanović. Furthermore, there are some indications that the process was supported and even partially funded by Russian nationals with close ties to the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation. The DPS skillfully used these events to create a discourse which framed the attack as one against the state rather than against a rival party, one ultimately aimed at reviving the statehood issue and potentially leading to reunification with Serbia. As part of the DF, the PzP found itself caught in the crossfire, implying at least an unintentional involvement, where their anti-elitist approach has increasingly been perceived as an anti-state agenda and the betrayal of national interests. Taken in conjuncture, these developments indicate an inability on behalf of the PzP to distinguish themselves from the nationalist segment of the DF and to utilize clear populist rhetoric.

5 Through the period of co-functioning within *DF* the strategies of political actions significantly changed for *PzP*. While populist tendencies can be identified here, they are embedded in a deeper structure of a mafia state concept. While still insisting on the issues of deep and systemic political crises, caused by the capture of state institutions and mafia state, alongside its partners from *DF*, *PzP* engaged in organizing several protests in 2013, 2015, 2016 and even boycotted the Parliament on the basis of electoral fraud.

6. Voting behavior in Montenegro

With the political context of Montenegro in mind, I now turn to the possible effects that populist attitudes (the demand side of populism) could have on voting preferences. The exploration begins with a question: What attracts people to populist content that spans across multiple ideologies? Ultimately, the question is whether these attitudes actually translate into support for populist politicians. On the one hand, the appeal of populist politicians has been associated with a low social and economic status (Lubbers et al. 2002; Arzheimer and Carter 2006; Spruyt et al. 2016), dissatisfaction with democracy (Bowler et al. 2017), ideological proximity (Van Der Brug et al. 2000), political cynicism (Schumacher and Rooduijn 2013), conspiratorial thinking (Castanho Silva et al. 2017), feelings of discontent (Rooduijn et al. 2016; Spruyt et al. 2016), anger (Rico et al. 2017), membership in stigmatized social groups (Spruyt et al. 2016), declinism, and personal vision of society (Elchardus and Spruyt 2016). Recently, populist attitudes on the demand side have been found to consistently relate to support for populist politicians in circumstances when relevant policy considerations on both the left and the right are included (Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018).

Following Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018), I arrive at the first assumption, namely, that the presence of populist attitudes is predictive of voting for a populist candidate/party. Here, I build on the proposition of Stenner (2005), namely, that populist attitudes interact with the political context and produce distinct patterns of behavior. In the case of general loss of confidence in political elites (Stenner 2005), populist attitudes can be activated, thereby resulting in an increased likelihood of voting for a populist candidate. Simply put, populist individuals vote for populist candidates. This assumption is almost tautological. However, the evidence from the sparse literature on this relationship is quite ambivalent (see Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018). In their analysis of nine European countries, Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018) provide further support to the claim that populist attitudes are robust predictors of support for populist parties (on both the left and the right). However, the question of what is the precise mechanism that translates populist attitudes into voting behavior still remains unanswered. Are populist politicians a natural match for people with populist attitudes, or are they the only available option for punishing the elites? Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018) argue in favor of the former, namely, that voting for populist parties goes beyond a

protest vote against the elite. This is based on the empirical observation that populist attitudes are relevant when issue positions are considered and are found to moderate the effects of issues on populist party support, especially for median voters (Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018).

How can we properly evaluate this question in the case of Montenegro when there are no full-fledged populist parties currently in existence? An implicit assumption of the activation model of Stenner (2005) is that populist attitudes should not exert any influence on the political system if not activated. In a context where some parties occasionally use populist rhetoric, we can assume they are the only ones capable of attitude activation. Along these lines, if they are successful in activating populist attitudes, their populist rhetoric should result in a positive evaluation of the party among populist individuals. Furthermore, if the political strategies of the DCG and the PzP are more successful than the DPS's strategies of 'othering,' it should result in a clear electoral advantage among populist voters against the DPS and other opposition parties. In other words, we would expect populist attitudes to form a part of a natural vote for the DCG or the PzP, thereby decreasing the likelihood of voting for the DPS.

7. Data, measurement, and methods

To test the proposed hypothesis, I rely on data from the MNES survey, collected in November and December 2016, during the months following the October parliamentary election.[6] The sample consists of eligible voters, all eighteen years of age and older, who were interviewed face-to-face and selected through a stratified random sampling procedure. The sample consists of 1,213 respondents, averaging 47 years of age, with a gender distribution of 51.02% male and 48.911% female. The median household income category ranges from €401 to €450 per month, while the ethnic distribution of the sample is careful towards bias (Montenegrins = 48.16%, Serbs = 30.23%). Overall, the sampling procedure resulted in a representative sample that closely reproduces the demographic distribution, according to the latest census data.

6 While the rest of the chapter dwells into political processes that extend to more recent elections in 2020, here I am limited with data availability. Namely, to the best of my knowledge, there are no publicly available datasets with both data on voting preferences and populist attitudes for more recent elections in 2020.

Dependent variables: To operationalize evaluations of parties and their leaders, the study uses questions from MNES surveys which ask about general impressions on an eleven-point scale. Here, I recoded the variables so that higher numbers indicate more favorable evaluations.

For parties, the study uses variables on the DPS, the DCG, and the DF. For party leaders, I use questions on Đukanović (DPS), Bečić (the DCG), and Medojević (PzP). As for vote choice, a series of dummy variables was created from the question: "Who did you vote for in the 2016 parliamentary election?"

Independent variables*:* The main independent variable, populism, is an additive average index created from various items available in MNES to measure populism. Out of seven available items, I retained five with good measurement reliability scores. This reduction increased the levels of Cronbach's Alpha from initially 0.62 to 0.8 overall. This question asked respondents to signal whether they agree with the following statements: (A) what people call compromise in politics is really just selling out on one's principles; (B) most politicians do not care about the people; (C) politicians are the biggest problem of Montenegro; (D) people, not the politicians, should make the most important political decisions; (E) most politicians care only about the interest of the rich and powerful. Further important concepts were operationalized through the incorporation of questions on the perception of the quality of government on a four point scale, satisfaction with democracy (four points), perception of corruption (five points), interest in politics (four points), as well as whether Montenegro should become an EU and NATO member state (dummy variables).

Control variables*:* An additional pool of socio-demographic variables in the analysis include gender, education, income, as well as dummy controls for Montenegrin and Serbian ethnicity. The analysis begins with likability of each political party as the dependent variable. The models were fitted using OLS procedure and produced in all three cases satisfactory level of model fit.[7] Next, by retaining the same model structure, I look at candidate evaluations. As a final step in the analysis, I evaluate the relationship between populist attitudes and voting in a logistic regression setting. Apart from evaluating vote choice against all parties in the competition, I look

7 Regression assumptions were satisfied in all models, although small issues were encountered with collinearity when Serbian ethnicity and support for NATO were both included.

at whether populist attitudes have provided an electoral advantage to the DCG and the DF among the voters of opposition parties.

8. Results

The results indicate that when controlling for important factors of success of populist parties, populism decreased the likability of the DPS by -0.41*** (R^2= 0.71), while it was positively related with the evaluations of the DCG 0.35** (R^2= 0.17) and DF 0.48*** (R^2= 0.32) (Table 8.1). The results also show that overall satisfaction with the state of Montenegrin politics (government and democracy), as well as support for EU and NATO membership increases the likability of the DPS, while the perception of corruption works in the opposite direction. As for the DCG and the DF, the results show a positive effect of interest in politics and Serbian nationality, while support for EU decreases the likability of the DF and the DCG. Furthermore, support for NATO membership is negatively correlated to the likability of the DF. One result that stands out is the negative relationship of Montenegrin ethnicity and the evaluations of both the DCG and the DF. While the DCG has emphasized the non-ethnical nature of their policies and party ideology, and the DF has constituent members that were pro-independence and played a decisive role in the 2007 constitution change (PzP), the results indicate that the DPS's strategy of portraying them as anti-state parties has been successful and further alienated members of Montenegrin ethnic groups.

The results for candidate evaluations are relatively similar, as populist attitudes reduced the likability of Đukanović by -0.33** (R2= 0.66), while having a positive effect on the likability of Bečić 0.45** (R2= 0.2), and Medojević 0.36** (R2= 0.28) (Table 8.2). Here, satisfaction with the state of democracy and the government of Montenegro and support for EU and NATO membership positively relate to Đukanović, while perception of corruption demonstrates a negative effect. Interest in politics and Serbian ethnicity both increase the likability of Bečić and Medojević, while Montenegrin ethnicity and support for EU membership demonstrate a negative effect. Here, following the same pattern as in the previous models, the results show that ethnic cleavages are an important factor in determining party and candidate support in Montenegro, further validating the 'othering' strategy of the DPS.

Table 8.1 Regression results: Evaluation of political figures

	Dependent variable:		
	DPS	DF	Demokrate
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Populism	−0.408***	0.476***	0.351**
	(0.133)	(0.179)	(0.177)
Democracy	1.102***	−0.254	−0.286
	(0.146)	(0.190)	(0.187)
Government	1.341***	−0.057	0.067
	(0.148)	(0.192)	(0.189)
Interest in Politics	0.229**	0.813***	0.559***
	(0.114)	(0.148)	(0.145)
Corruption	−0.451***	0.278	0.325
	(0.155)	(0.212)	(0.208)
NATO	2.155***	−0.946**	−0.483
	(0.281)	(0.367)	(0.364)
EU	1.356***	−0.706**	−0.757**
	(0.276)	(0.344)	(0.342)
Serbian	−0.198	2.168***	0.799*
	(0.322)	(0.416)	(0.413)
Montenegrin	0.286	−0.666*	−1.038***
	(0.257)	(0.348)	(0.342)
Male	−0.322*	−0.438*	−0.358
	(0.195)	(0.258)	(0.253)
Education	−0.174***	−0.042	0.244***
	(0.065)	(0.087)	(0.084)
Income	−0.059***	−0.009	−0.041
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Constant	0.693	0.421	1.251
	(1.009)	(1.346)	(1.322)
Observations	571	551	587
R^2	0.713	0.335	0.187
Adjusted R^2	0.707	0.320	0.170
Residual Std. Error	2.248 (df = 558)	2.908 (df = 538)	2.949 (df = 574)
F Statistic	115.774*** (df = 12; 558)	22.549*** (df = 12; 538)	11.037*** (df = 12; 574)
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Source: Author's own data, own calculations

Table 8.2 Regression results: Party leaders evaluation

	Dependent variable:		
	Đukanović	Medojević	Bečić
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Populism	−0.328**	0.357**	0.454**
	(0.143)	(0.158)	(0.178)
Democracy	1.168***	−0.029	− 0.217
	(0.157)	(0.166)	(0.188)
Government	1.294***	0.072	0.021
	(0.159)	(0.166)	(0.189)
Interest in Politics	0.147	0.596***	0.647***
	(0.122)	(0.131)	(0.146)
Corruption	−0.345**	0.240	0.305
	(0.167)	(0.186)	(0.208)
NATO	1.749***	−0.467	− 0.252
	(0.300)	(0.320)	(0.365)
EU	1.693***	−0.988***	− 1.040***
	(0.295)	(0.300)	(0.343)
Serbian	−0.523	1.766***	1.138***
	(0.344)	(0.359)	(0.413)
Montenegrin	0.425	−0.912***	− 0.946***
	(0.277)	(0.304)	(0.344)
Male	−0.207	−0.308	−0.554**
	(0.209)	(0.226)	(0.254)
Education	−0.123*	0.070	0.261***
	(0.070)	(0.077)	(0.085)
Income	−0.074***	− 0.013	− 0.044
	(0.024)	(0.026)	(0.029)
Constant	0.178	−0.354	0.926
	(1.086)	(1.184)	(1.340)
Observations	574	549	591
R^2	0.673	0.296	0.214
Adjusted R^2	0.666	0.280	0.198
Residual Std. Error	2.422 (df = 561)	2.540 (df = 536)	2.968 (df = 578)
F Statistic	96.307*** (df = 12; 561)	18.802*** (df = 12; 536)	13.133*** (df = 12; 578)
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Source: Author's own data, own calculations

In contrast with the previous results, populist attitudes had no effect on voting behavior, except for providing an advantage to the DF against the opposition block in 2016. The only consistent predictor is support for NATO membership, which works in favor of the DPS and against the DF and the DCG. Additionally, satisfaction with democracy increases the likelihood of voting for the DPS and decreases the likelihood of voting for the DCG.

Finally, interest in politics is a predictor of electoral support for both the DF and the DCG, while Serbian ethnic affiliation was significant only for the DF. Similarly, Montenegrin ethnicity is a positive predictor of electoral support for the DPS.

Table 8.3 Logistic regression results: Voted for a party

	Dependent variable:		
	DPS	DF	Demokrate
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Populism	−0.408***	0.476***	0.351**
	(0.133)	(0.179)	(0.177)
Democracy	1.102***	−0.254	−0.286
	(0.146)	(0.190)	(0.187)
Government	1.341***	−0.057	0.067
	(0.148)	(0.192)	(0.189)
Interest in Politics	0.229**	0.813***	0.559***
	(0.114)	(0.148)	(0.145)
Corruption	−0.451***	0.278	0.325
	(0.155)	(0.212)	(0.208)
NATO	2.155***	−0.946**	−0.483
	(0.281)	(0.367)	(0.364)
EU	1.356***	−0.706**	−0.757**
	(0.276)	(0.344)	(0.342)
Serbian	−0.198	2.168***	0.799*
	(0.322)	(0.416)	(0.413)
Montenegrin	0.286	−0.666*	−1.038***
	(0.257)	(0.348)	(0.342)
Male	−0.322*	−0.438*	−0.358
	(0.195)	(0.258)	(0.253)
Education	−0.174***	−0.042	0.244***
	(0.065)	(0.087)	(0.084)
Income	−0.059***	−0.009	−0.041
	(0.022)	(0.029)	(0.029)
Constant	0.693	0.421	1.251
	(1.009)	(1.346)	(1.322)
Observations	571	551	587
R^2	0.713	0.335	0.187
Adjusted R^2	0.707	0.320	0.170
Residual Std. Error	2.248 (df = 558)	2.908 (df = 538)	2.949 (df = 574)
F Statistic	115.774*** (df = 12; 558)	22.549*** (df = 12; 538)	11.037*** (df = 12; 574)
Note:			*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Source: Author's own data, own calculations

The results presented here follow a certain logic. Regarding the focus of this chapter, populist attitudes are related to support and positive evaluations of parties and leaders, but they do not clearly translate to behavioral outcomes. In other words, while populist individuals disproportionally dislike the DPS and Đukanović and disproportionally like the DCG and Bečić, as well as the DF and Medojević, these positive/negative evaluations do not exert any influence on actual vote choice. Instead, other factors take on greater importance. Party preferences are still dominated by ethnic cleavages, where Serbian ethnic affiliation and opposition to NATO are the most consistent predictors of support for opposition parties. These results imply that the DPS's tactics of 'othering' have been effective in shaping party competition and freezing it to the domain of ethnic cleavages,[8] and the future of the (resolved) statehood issues. Here, the occasional populist flirtation of the DCG and the PzP appears inefficient in mobilizing populist sentiment, and their electoral base is still largely ethnically defined. I argue that this piece of evidence is demonstrative of the success of the DPS's strategies and explains why, despite the presence of enabling conditions, Montenegrin parties are not full-fledged populist.

9. Discussion

The previous section presented evidence to the argument that the absence of electoral advantage from populist voter/party linkage is what limits the success of populist ideology in Montenegro. While this is a valid explanation, this chapter cannot provide causal evidence in support of that claim, nor does it automatically disregard other potential factors that could be of importance. However, recent developments in the Montenegrin political landscape seem to follow this logic rather well. It would seem that much more than COVID-19, the alternation of power in August 2020 opened up the space for populism to emerge. The newly formed parliamentary majority consisted of an ideologically diverse set of three coalitions loosely

8 Additionally, it is clear from the analysis that satisfaction with the political elites, and the support for the proclaimed euroatlantic foreign policy goals provide a clear-cut advantage for the ruling *DPS*. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with the elites does not spill over to clear cut support for occasionally populist *The DCG* and *PzP*. Here, dissatisfaction with democracy was positively related only to voting for *The DCG* without having any effect on overall party and leader evaluation. What these results indicate is that dissatisfaction with democracy in Montenegro fostered electoral support for *The DCG* because they were a new political party, rather than because they were populist.

connected by their opposition to the previous regime: (1) For the Future of Montenegro; (2) Peace is our Nation; (3) Black on White. Apart from an adversary position towards the DPS, there was very little common ground in terms of domestic and foreign policy priorities. The deadlock resulted in an experimental executive structure termed 'expert government' (technocratic) that saw the exclusion of all party leaders and politicians from ministerial positions apart from Dritan Abazović (URA-Black on White), who became Vice Prime Minister.

In other words, both Prime Minister Krivokapić and other Ministers in the government were politically unknown with no (visible) party affiliation. Unbound[9] by voter linkages and party structures, government officials quickly adopted a populist framework. Three frames could be identified here. First, they refer to themselves as the representatives of 'the people,' rather than the citizens or the electorate. Since February 2022, this is especially true in the case of the former Minister of Finance and Social Care, Milojko Spaić, and the Minister of Economic Development, Jakov Milatović.[10] Second, they have positioned themselves as 'guardians of the people' against the criminal and corrupt political elites. Not only the DPS, but also other political elites, are included in this category, albeit to a lesser degree. Third, as the protectors of 'the will of the people' they are 'the forces of good, fighting against the forces of evil.' I argue that this outline adds validity to the argument presented in the previous sections, namely, since government officials in an 'expert government' did not compete in elections and were not political representatives of any party,[11] they would be less susceptible to the strategy of 'othering.' In a sense, they were competing for positive attitudinal evaluations, not behavioral (electoral) outcomes. In that regard, extrapolating from the empirical analysis of this chapter, populist rhetoric would serve that purpose rather well.

9 At least in the perception of the Prime Minister and the expert Ministers in the government, as they managed to last a little more than a year in power, with the parliament of Montenegro passing a vote of no-confidence in February 2022.

10 As an example, on 23 January 2022, Jakov Milatović joined protests against the parliamentary session that had a vote of no confidence on the agenda. Twitting about his involvement in the protests Milatović said: 'We came back for *the people,* and we work for *the people*! It is a great pleasure when *the people* recognize our efforts. It provides for additional strength.'

11 After the vote of no confidence in February 2022, Spaić and Milatović anounced that they will be forming a political movement.

10. Conclusion

This paper evaluated the structure of party competition in Montenegro according to the ideational approach to populism. I focused on evaluating the role of the DPS, especially the strategy of 'othering' and how this restrains the maneuvering space of its political rivals. I argue that this strategy is grounded on the structure of ethnic cleavages, which constitute the primary basis of party competition, thereby limiting the ability of rival parties to develop into full-fledged populist parties. Instead, populist rhetoric is seldom utilized by the DCG and the PzP, to the extent that they cannot be labelled as populist. Primarily, I argue it is the consequence of their inability to clearly distinguish themselves as anti-establishment parties without being caught in the ethnic-based anti-state rhetoric of the DPS. This argument is supported by empirical evidence, as the DPS was able to demobilize populist sentiment in the electorate and freeze party choice to issues related to ethnic affiliation. In other words, the DCG and the PzP were unable to activate populist attitudes of the electorate and use them to their advantage.

This chapter contributes to the existing literature on populism in several ways. First, it is one of the rare explorations of populist practices in Western Balkans, particularly in Montenegro. Second, I explore the question of why no populist party has emerged in Montenegro, despite the presence of conditions which are likely to favor the rise of populist parties. Here, issue-based party competition embedded in a wider web of ethnic cleavages was sufficient in disabling the emergence of populist parties. Finally, this chapter demonstrates that even though populist attitudes are prevalent in the electorate, they do not exert any sort of identifiable effect on the political system of Montenegro. The populist political parties were unable to activate these attitudes and establish a populist electoral base.

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