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Neo-cleavage Theory and Democratic Backsliding in the European Union

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the extent to which neo-cleavage theory can explain democratic backsliding in the European Union, focusing on the role of the GAL/TAN cleavage and an alternative explanation, populism. It brings together different factors into a causal model based on the willingness-opportunity metatheoretical framework, which is then evaluated empirically using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). The results indicate that both TAN ideological stance and populism provide two alternative motivations for democratic backsliding, but do not produce backsliding in the absence of certain opportunities.

1. Introduction

This paper analyzes the extent to which neo-cleavage theory can explain democratic backsliding in the European Union. In particular, it focuses on the GAL/TAN (green-alternative-libertarian/traditional-authoritarian-nationalist; see Hooghe et al. 2002) cleavage as a potential explanation of political conflict around liberal democracy in Europe. It has been argued in the literature (e.g., Hanley and Vachudova 2018) that democratic backsliding, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, is driven by ideologically TAN parties which are characterized by exclusionary and polarizing discourse combined with attempts to undermine liberal-democratic norms and institutions in order to concentrate power. This strand of literature has largely treated TAN ideological stance as being inherently prone to authoritarian tendencies. In this paper, I problematize this implicit assumption and seek to determine under which conditions TAN parties in government engage in democratic backsliding understood as loss of democratic quality.

The paper aims to help bridge the divide between two this strand of literature and quantitative studies of the effect of right-wing populism on democratic quality. The latter have strived to establish different conditions which determine this effect. The paper brings these two approaches together and analyses the ways in which they can be combined theoretically. It draws on the metatheoretical willingness-opportunity framework (Most and Starr 2015) in order to systematize the factors found in the literature into an overarching causal model. It then proceeds to evaluate this model empirically using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA).

The paper proceeds in four sections. Firstly, I review the two strands of literature on democratic backsliding and loss of democratic quality. In the second section, I outline the research design and methodology. The following section includes the results of the empirical analysis and their discussion. The final section concludes with a brief summary.

2. Theory

2.1 Defining Democratic Backsliding

While the phenomenon of movement towards ideal-typical (e.g., fully consolidated, liberal) democracy is consistently termed democratization, there is little consensus in the literature regarding the appropriate label for the reverse phenomenon. Moreover, the phenomenon itself is often understood in different ways, which complicates the search for a common term: for instance, the concept of "autocratization" has been used to refer to the mirror image of democratization, namely, movement in the direction of closed autocracy (Cassani and Tomini 2019); in contrast, concepts such as "decline of democracy" (Erdmann 2007) and "de-democratization" (Bermeo 2016) have been used capture the kind of movement away from fully established democracy that takes place in initially democratic states. However, many scholars distinguish between various forms or degrees of this process, especially based on whether (and what kind of) regime change takes place. For example, Tomini and Wagemann (2018) make a distinction between "transition from democratic rule", which refers to regime change from democracy to a hybrid or authoritarian regime and could be divided further into "hybridization" and "democratic breakdown", and "democratic regression", which implies "transition within democratic rule" or, in other words, "loss of democratic quality" (see Bühlmann, Merkel and Wessels 2008) within the democratic regime. The latter phenomenon has also been termed "democratic erosion" (Huntington 1996, Bermeo 2016) and, contradicting the usage of the term by Bermeo (2016) as mentioned above, "de-democratization" (Bogaards 2018).

In order to capture the European trend, the concept of democratic backsliding seems to be used the most (e.g., Sedelmeier 2014, Greskovits 2015, Sitter et al. 2016, Hanley and Vachudova 2018, Meijers and van der Veer 2019). However, the term itself has been used inconsistently in the broader literature, referring to different understandings of the phenomenon described above. Bermeo (2016) defined democratic backsliding as "the state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy" (Bermeo 2016, 5), and outlined a classification of its various forms, one of which is of special relevance to the topic of this paper: executive aggrandizement. It occurs "when elected executives weaken checks on executive power one by one, undertaking a series of institutional changes that hamper the power of opposition forces

to challenge executive preferences" (Bermeo 2016, 10). At the same time, these changes are legal and carried out by democratically elected politicians who legitimize their actions with reference to the popular mandate. This seems to imply that this form of democratic backsliding, which is especially common in the EU (Hanley and Vachudova 2018), takes place within the democratic framework – even though Bermeo states that backsliding in general can lead to regime change, even if it does so in an incremental way. In contrast, Waldner and Lust (2018, 95) understand democratic backsliding as "a deterioration of qualities associated with democratic governance, within any regime. In democratic regimes, it is a decline in the quality of democracy; in autocracies, it is a decline in democratic qualities of governance".

There seems to be no consensus in the literature as to whether democratic backsliding in the EU, with the discussion on this point mainly revolving around states in Central and Eastern Europe, results in crossing the line between democracies and non-democracies. Many scholars are somewhat ambiguous on this point, locating the backsliding states somewhere in the "grey zone between liberal democracy and fully blown authoritarianism" (Batory 2016, 300) or arguing that they are "reverting to semi-authoritarian practices" (Greskovits 2015, 28). Some seem to believe that at least some of these cases should be considered "illiberal, hybrid regimes" (Hanley and Vachudova 2018, 282) or, in the most extreme case, an "electoral authoritarian regime" (Kelemen 2017, 220). Yet many others argue that it is most appropriate to talk about democracies, albeit of various states and forms of deficiency (see a list of different adjectives attached to democracy in Bogaards 2018). In effect, the assessments cover the whole range of "illiberal democracy, semi-authoritarianism, competitive authoritarianism and quasi dictatorship" (Agh 2015, 6). To this list, liberal democracy should also be added, as studies of democratic quality in EU in general (e.g., Huber and Schimpf 2016, Spittler 2018) cover many cases of reduction in democratic quality in consolidated liberal democracies, especially in Western Europe.

Consequently, in order to encompass different conceptualizations found in the literature while retaining the focus on the European context, in this paper democratic backsliding is understood as a reduction in the quality of democracy which takes place in democratic regimes (liberal or otherwise), without making an assumption as to the end point or result regarding regime change. As Bogaards (2018) succinctly put it with regard to "de-democratization", it "indicates a starting point, democracy, and a direction, less democracy" (Bogaards 2018, 2). Moreover, democratic backsliding is conducted by "existing power-holders", as assumed in the literature (Hanley and Vachudova 2018, 278).

2.2 Neo-cleavage theory

Neo-cleavage theory proceeds from the observation of decline of traditional historical cleavages, first and foremost, the socioeconomic, distributional or class cleavage (Bornschier 2009, Marks et al. 2017). Political conflict seems to become less centered on socioeconomic issues, and individuals appear to become increasingly capable of independent individual choice when it comes to political preferences, as opposed to decisions based on the position in (largely inherited) social structure, on group membership. Instead of assuming that the process of dealignment takes place that results in destructuring of political competition, neo-cleavage theorists argue that a new cleavage has emerged and transformed the party-political landscape and dimensions of political conflict. This cleavage is generally described as a cultural one (Marks et al. 2017, Hooghe and Marks 2018), but there is no consensus as to what exactly constitutes it and how it could be best conceptualized. As a result, a wide variety of concepts has been coined to capture this cleavage, such as: post-materialism (Inglehart 1990), libertarian-authoritarian value conflict (Kitschelt 1994), libertarian-universalistic vs. traditionalist-communitarian (Bornschier 2010), demarcation vs. integration (Kriesi et al. 2012), and others. This paper, however, focuses on another conceptualization of this cultural cleavage, namely, GAL vs. TAN (Hooghe et al. 2002). The reason for this is the fact that the GAL/TAN cleavage has become the basis for systematic, large-N comparisons of party positions in Europe (e.g., Bakker et al. 2015, Polk et al. 2017), and, therefore, lends itself well for empirical research.

This new dimension of contestation is, according to the authors, focused on sociocultural issues such as "lifestyle, ecology, cultural diversity, nationalism, and immigration" with

political parties taking opposite stances on these questions, forming two sides of conflict: "[o]ne pole combines ecology (or Greenness), alternative politics (including participatory democracy), and libertarianism. We summarize this as the Green/alternative/libertarian (GAL) pole. The opposite pole combines support for traditional values, opposition to immigration, and defense of the national community. We summarize this as the traditional/authoritarian/nationalism (TAN) pole" (Hooghe et al. 2002, 976). In the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, the GAL/TAN classification is described in the following way: "Parties can be classified in terms of their views on democratic freedoms and rights. ''Libertarian'' or ''postmaterialist'' parties favor expanded personal freedoms, for example, access to abortion, active euthanasia, same-sex marriage, or greater democratic participation. ''Traditional'' or ''authoritarian'' parties often reject these ideas; they value order, tradition, and stability, and believe that the government should be a firm moral authority on social and cultural issues" (Bakker et al. 2015, 144).

Despite its arguably somewhat vague conceptualization, the GAL/TAN cleavage is widely used in studies of party stances on liberal democracy in Europe. In general, it is argued that GAL parties are ideologically committed to liberal democracy, while TAN parties oppose liberal norms and principles and might therefore be ready to undermine liberal-democratic institutions. For instance, Sedelmeier (2014) in his study of the reaction of the European Union to democratic backsliding in Hungary and Romania argues that one of the factors determining whether EU actors support decisive action against governments suspected of undermining liberal democracy is "normative commitment to liberal democracy" (Sedelmeier 2014, 109). As a proxy for this commitment, Sedelmeier uses the "ideological stance on democratic freedoms and rights" as measured by the GAL/TAN position of the party (Sedelmeier 2014, 110). He finds that while GAL actors, having a strong commitment to liberal democracy, are always willing to sanction governments that undermine it, TAN actors make strategic decisions, supporting action against their ideological rivals and protecting ideological allies. Similarly, Meijers and van der Veer (2019), in their analysis of later responses of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) to democratic backsliding in Hungary and Poland, argue that "MEPs from parties on the TAN pole are more likely to *agree substantively* with the illiberal reforms in CEE countries" (Meijers and van der Veer 2019, 4, italics in the original). The GAL/TAN stance determines whether actors will see the same events in Hungary and Poland as a case of democratic backsliding or a form of development of democracy.

Some scholars develop this link further and put emphasis on identity politics embedded into this cleavage. Hanley and Vachudova (2018) claim that "[b]acksliding in ECE and beyond has often been linked to ruling populist parties that combine scepticism towards the market with nationalism and social-authoritarianism (left-tan)" (Hanley and Vachudova 2018, 281). The authors argue that, in those ECE EU Member States that experience democratic backsliding, governing parties employ populist discourse and "have called for a return to national grandeur and conservative social values, and promised to defend the nation from liberals, the ex-communist left, foreign-owned big business, and the EU. (…) The result is striking – and intentional – polarisation in the party system on the social liberal (gal-tan) axis, often radicalising and intensifying earlier divisions. It is by claiming to defend the nation that the leaders of these ruling parties built the political cover to concentrate power and dismantle liberal checks and balances" (Hanley and Vachudova 2018, 279). In other words, it is TAN parties that are responsible for democratic backsliding, and it is exactly their TAN nature that leads them to pursue a strategy of populist polarization with the aim of concentrating power and delegitimizing opposition. Elsewhere, Vachudova explicitly argues that TAN stances indeed presuppose authoritarian tendencies, at least in ECE: mentioning that the TAN pole is alternatively described as "socially conservative" (as opposed to "socially liberal" GAL), she states that "this label tends to underplay the authoritarian and nationalism positions of the tan parties in the east" (Vachudova 2017, note 1). Inglehart and Norris (2016) also develop the link between TAN, authoritarianism, and populism further. They follow Mudde (2007) in conceptualizing populism as an ideology underpinned by three elements, anti-establishment, nativism, and authoritarianism, arguing that "populists also characteristically display authoritarian leanings, favoring the personal power exerted by strong and charismatic leadership which is thought to reflect the will of the people" (Inglehart and Norris 2016, 7). Thus, they view populism as one pole of the cultural cleavage, with cosmopolitan liberalism, which supports representative democracy, checks and balances, rule of law, and minority rights, being the other pole. Empirically, they also draw on the CHES, and while they construct their populism-liberalism dimension on the basis of party positions on various issues contained in the CHES, GAL/TAN is one of them, and, moreover, the rest of the issues which have been found to constitute the cultural cleavage, such as multiculturalism, liberal lifestyle, and nationalism, are closely connected to GAL/TAN conceptually (as can also be seen in the literature discussed above) and are highly correlated empirically (indeed, it is the reason why all these factors constitute a single dimension on the authors' analysis).

Consequently, it would arguably not be an oversimplification to argue that Inglehart and Norris believe that the TAN stance reflects a populist ideological position which is inherently authoritarian and illiberal.

2.3 Populism: An Alternative Explanation of Democratic Backsliding

In contrast, many scholars provide alternative explanations of democratic backsliding in the EU, some of the more prominent ones focusing on (mostly right-wing) populist parties, without referring to neo-cleavage theory. This literature is vast and is characterized by the lack of consensus regarding both conceptualization of populism and its relationship to democracy.

It has been noted sarcastically that "[i]t is something of a cliché to start a text on populism with the observation that agreement on a definition is lacking and that the term is used for many different types of actors through time and space" (van Kessel 2015, 2). One of the reasons for it is the fact that there are several competing approaches to understanding populism. The first one treats populism as a "thin-centered" ideology which is not as comprehensive as, for instance, liberalism, and lacks a "programmatic center", meaning that populism can – and, in fact, should – be combined with other, more comprehensive, ideologies (van Kessel 2015, 7). It should be emphasized that it does not mean that populism in this approach is seen as lacking ideological substance. Rather, "populism is understood as 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 volonte generale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, 543). These two groups, "the people" and "the elite", are "empty signifiers" insofar they can be filled with different meanings – and indeed, populists are strategic and often deliberately vague in choosing their preferred understanding of these groups (van Kessel 2015, 11-12). Nonetheless, this is not merely a rhetorical tool, but a defining ideological attribute which justifies the classification of certain parties as "populist" – even if not as a singular party family, but rather several party families for which populism is one of the core elements (see Mudde 2007).

Conversely, other approaches conceive of populism as an opportunistic strategy or even a communication style which involves, in particular, making use of feelings of resentment, ensuring a direct (unmediated by institutions) support of the masses by a personalistic leader, and using a polarizing discourse emphasizing “the will of the people” and simple solutions (van Kessel 2015, 7-8). It logically follows that, in principle, any party – or even an individual political actor – can use populism as an instrument of gaining or maintaining political power, which makes it inappropriate to associate populism with a particular type of parties. This approach, however, makes comparative empirical research problematic as it precludes a clear classification of parties; as a consequence, it is difficult to establish any definitive link between populism and democratic quality (Huber and Schimpf 2016).

Consequently, this paper focuses on the conceptualization of populism as a thin-centered ideology. Yet, there are further theoretical differences among scholars working in this framework, which are also reflected in empirical research. Mudde (2007) focuses on “populist radical right parties, i.e. political parties with a core ideology that is a combination of nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (Mudde 2007, 26), and it is nativism that is the ultimate core feature of this party family, not populism. In other words, it is just one form of the radical right, albeit a prominent one. Mudde understands “right” as referring to the opposition to egalitarianism, primarily in the socioeconomic sense, and “radical” as opposition to the principles of liberal democracy. Huber and Schimpf (2016) base their empirical study on this approach, while Spittler (2018) modifies it in order to include some “borderline cases”, namely, right-wing populist parties which are not nativist and, hence, not radical. Van Kessel (2015) takes a different approach and uses a minimal definition, classifying parties as populist if they see “the people” as a homogeneous group, advocate popular sovereignty instead of elite rule, and juxtapose themselves with the elites which are seen do be acting against the will of “the people” (van Kessel 2015, 13). Thus, he deals with populist parties that are not necessarily right either in economic or cultural sense, even though nativism constitutes one prominent way of defining “the people”.

The relationship between populism and democracy, as was mentioned above, is controversial, with some scholars arguing that populism constitutes a clear danger to democracy, others seeing it as the purest form of democracy, and the third group stating that there are both positive and negative effects (see Huber and Schimpf 2016 and Spittler 2018 for a comprehensive discussion). Moreover, the effects can be direct and indirect, with the latter being contagion effects that cause mainstream parties to adopt

new policies to compete with populist parties; such policies could be beneficial for democratic quality if populist parties act essentially as “drunken guests at a dinner party” (Huber and Schimpf 2016), raising issues ignored by the mainstream and improving participation and representation; alternatively, they can be detrimental for democratic quality if their rhetoric contributes to xenophobia and undermined respect for rule of law (Spittler 2018, 102). The direct effects result from populist parties engaging in policy-making directly, either by participating in government or influencing the policy output as part of the opposition in the legislature. Populist parties are expected to have an especially negative effect on liberal democracy: populism is based on the idea of the primacy of the will of “the people”, which means that the power of the majority should be limited neither by individual rights and liberties nor by checks and balances, leading populist parties to undermine rule of law, separation of powers, minority rights, and freedom of opinion, in particular (Spittler 2018).

It should be noted that both Huber and Schimpf (2016) and Spittler (2018) follow Mudde’s approach in their case selection and deal only with populist radical right parties (PRRPs) and right-wing populist parties (RWPs), respectively. Spittler writes that “Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) convincingly argues that the most promising approach to describing the relationship between populism and democracy is to use a minimal definition of populism, which is less normative and does not presuppose a specific conception of democracy”, and such a minimal definition is exactly the one proposed by Mudde (2004). However, while the definition of populism used in these studies is minimal, the criteria for case selection are not – the authors have selected not all parties that have populism as part of their ideology, but only those which are also right-wing (Spittler 2018) and radical (Huber and Schimpf 2016). As a result, as the authors themselves recognize, any effect that these might have on democratic quality might not be the effect of populism per se; “instead, it might be attributable to the PRRP’s right-wing ideological components or even the combination of both populism and host ideology” (Huber and Schimpf 2016, 109); “therefore, the results cannot necessarily be generalized for other populist parties” (Spittler 2018, 101). One could argue that especially cultural issues are likely to be influenced by the nativist element of these parties’ ideology, and, consequently, it is not primarily their populism which is likely to be responsible for exclusionary policies.

Furthermore, the impact of populist parties on democratic quality can depend on other factors. For instance, it has already been mentioned that a populist party, if present in parliament at all, can be either in government or in opposition, opening up different ways

of influencing the political system and potentially having different effects on the quality of democracy. Moreover, the level of government inclusion of a party might differ, along with political opportunities provided to the party, which leads Spittler to "distinguish between four different gradations of government involvement: no involvement, support party for the government, minor party in government, and government leadership" (Spittler 2018, 108). Naturally, the more seats in parliament a party has, the higher its potential influence on policy output, therefore, he also includes seat share in parliament as an independent variable. Among control variables considered by the authors are democratic consolidation (Huber and Schimpf 2016), economic development, cabinet duration, and post-communism or Eastern European location (Spittler 2018).

In order to systematize the factors potentially affecting democratic quality, I draw on the metatheoretical willingness-opportunity framework (Most and Starr 2015). The general claim is that every political action originates from will to act and capability to do so, and thus willingness and opportunity are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for the outcome (political action). At the same time, in principle, there are various alternative causal pathways to both willingness and opportunity (the concept of "substitutability" or "equifinality"). Therefore, democratic backsliding can be treated, generally speaking, as a specific type of political action (most likely consisting of multiple actual actions) which requires both willingness and opportunity on the part of a political party. This paper will focus on the effect of political parties in government only, as the chosen conceptualization of democratic backsliding implies that it is carried out by existing power-holders; moreover, it has been argued, as mentioned above, that the most common form of democratic backsliding in the EU is executive aggrandizement which should, by definition, occur through the actions of the executive. Consequently, the willingness of a political party in government to erode liberal-democratic norms and institutions can come from its (radical) TAN ideology, populism (as understood in van Kessel 2015), or a combination thereof. Other factors discussed above determine the scope of opportunity a party has to actually carry out democratic backsliding[1]. In the

[1] One possible exception is post-communism or Eastern European location; since the studies discussed above did not elaborate on the possible causal mechanism underlying this factor, it could be taken to mean either opportunity, for example, by constraining the space of legitimate political alternatives available to politicians in Western European political cultures as opposed to Eastern European ones, or willingness, for instance, if one were to argue that politicians in post-communist counties have not internalized liberal-democratic norms to the extent their Western colleagues have, and thus are more willing to do away with liberal democracy. Similar argument could be made regarding democratic consolidation as well, even though Huber and Schimpf (2016) argue that democratic consolidation simply makes democratic institutions more resilient and capable of stopping populists from concentrating power.

following section, these factors will be discussed in more detail.

3. Research Design

In contrast to statistical models employed in the abovementioned empirical studies, which are based on the assumption of linear and independent effect of the factors on democratic quality[2], the willingness-opportunity framework based on necessary and sufficient conditions warrants the use of Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) as a method of empirical analysis. QCA, being rooted in set theory, is specifically designed for taking into account causal complexity such as equifinality and conjunctural causation (see Schneider and Wagemann 2012). The paper uses fuzzy-set QCA (fsQCA) which does not require dichotomization of all variables, relying instead on continuous membership scores from 0 to 1.

The outcome of interest is democratic backsliding. Since in the EU context one deals with highly developed democratic countries, as argued by Huber and Schimpf (2016, 108), it is necessary to adopt a broad concept of democratic quality in order to have enough variance on the dependent variable (outcome) and capture subtle degrees of difference. Following Huber and Schimpf (2016) and Spittler (2018), this paper relies on the Democracy Barometer (Merkel et al. 2018). Its midrange conception of democracy is based on three principles, freedom, control, and equality, each of which is further divided into three "functions": individual liberties, rule of law, public sphere, competition, mutual constraints, governmental capability, transparency, participation, and representation, respectively. This paper follows Huber and Schimpf (2016) in choosing only particular democratic functions that represent liberal democracy, not democracy in general (in other words, that reflect the specifically liberal character of liberal democracy). These functions are: individual liberties, rule of law, mutual constraints, and transparency. They also reflect the most commonly mentioned transgressions against liberal democracy in the EU (see, e.g., Hanley and Vachudova 2018). However, unlike Huber and Schimpf (2016), this paper does not use the subcomponent "effective access to power of minorities", which is a part of the "representation" function; since it is a single subcomponent, it arguably should not have the same weight as all the other functions, each of which is measured through numerous components and subcomponents, but including the whole

[2] Even though Huber and Schimpf (2016) did use several interaction terms as well.

"representation" function would not be in line with the goal of specifically capturing liberal democracy, as this function includes subcomponents that are arguably contradicting it, for instance, "constitutional provisions for direct democracy". Moreover, it is especially difficult to say whether parties that seek to undermine the access to power of minorities do so due to their populist, nativist, or radical ideological nature, or because of their majoritarian democratic preferences.

The conditions affecting democratic quality can be divided into two groups based on whether they represent willingness or opportunity. As discussed in the previous section, two broad approaches to the question of reasons why parties would be inclined to engage in democratic backsliding can be identified: neo-cleavage theory which highlights the TAN ideological stance as the explanatory factor, and populism. With regard to the former, this paper draws on the CHES (Polk et al. 2017), specifically, on two indicators: *galtan* and *galtan_salience*. The first indicator captures the ideological position of a party itself while the second one reflects the importance the party assigns to the GAL/TAN cleavage. Arguably, the account of the negative effect of TAN parties on democratic quality assumes that these parties actually put significant emphasis on their TAN position, and that is the reason they might pursue a strategy of polarization on the GAL/TAN cleavage (cf. Hanley and Vachudova 2018). Consequently, one would expect that, firstly, ideological radicalization (radical TAN stance), and secondly, high salience of the GAL/TAN cleavage both affect democratic quality. Moreover, one could further hypothesize that, in order to produce the outcome (that is, democratic backsliding), these two conditions need to be present simultaneously (apart from being combined with an opportunity condition as well).

The third willingness condition represents an alternative way of explaining the motivation behind democratic backsliding – populism. As discussed in the previous section, in order to isolate the effect of populism from the effect of right-wing ideology which should already be captured by the TAN score, populist parties should be classified based on a minimal definition. Consequently, this paper uses the list of European populist parties created by van Kessel (2015). In line with the willingness-opportunity framework, one could expect this condition to be able to produce the outcome (combined with an opportunity condition) on its own, without the presence of the other two willingness conditions. However, based on Huber and Schimpf (2016) and Spittler (2018), one might expect, in contrast, that populism needs to be combined with other conditions.

The opportunity conditions include, firstly, government lead – since one could expect a party to be able to conduct democratic backsliding more easily if it leads the government rather than participates in it as a minor partner. It is measured by the *government inclusion* variable from Splitter's dataset[3] (Spittler 2018). Secondly, I expect a large seat share in parliament to matter, as it reflects the party's ability to influence law-making as well as its relative political weight in the governing coalition. It is operationalized through the *seat share in parliament* variable from Splitter's dataset (Spittler 2018). Thirdly, I would argue that the ability of a TAN party to pursue policies undermining liberal democracy is severely limited if it shares power with a GAL party, which can be expected to have a strong normative commitment to liberal democracy (cf. Sedelmeier 2014). This condition is coded by the author based on the data on the parties in a ruling coalition. It should be noted that it is the GAL/TAN stance of other parties in the cabinet period that is taken into consideration. Finally, one could expect the new EU member states to be more prone to democratic backsliding, possibly also capturing the lower level of democratic consolidation (cf. Huber and Schimpf 2016). This condition is measured through the *eastwest* dummy variable from the CHES, which distinguishes parties (and their respective states) from EU-15 and newer EU member states from Central/Eastern Europe.

This paper takes the dataset created by Spittler (2018) as the baseline. He draws on the "Elections, Parties, Governments" dataset (WZB 2017) in order to construct the sample. However, I apply different criteria for case selection. Instead of choosing parties from the list of RWPs, I identify all parties in the 1999-2014 which have a *galtan* value higher than 7.5 (on a 0-10 GAL/TAN scale) in at least one wave of the survey (1999, 2002, 2006, 2010 or 2014). The 7.5 threshold is somewhat arbitrary as it is simply the middle between 5 (center) and 10 (maximal TAN). However, this criterion makes it possible to establish "the likely suspects" – parties which have at least once in the time period in question held significantly TAN stances. It filters out parties without consistent TAN ideological core that could have scored slightly above 5 due to measurement error or, for example, strategic positioning in a particular election, as well as seemingly moderate center-right parties. Out of all the governments with participation of these parties, I choose only those formed in 2000 or later, because of the time period of the CHES. I also include only governments in EU member states, including the cases when a country joined the EU

[3] I thank Marcus Spittler for kindly providing me the dataset.

during this government period. In doing so, I aim to exclude the causal influence of EU conditionality (in the case of candidate states) on the democratic performance. Furthermore, I exclude all cabinets which have reigned less than 730 days. This is a strict criterion, as Spittler (2018) only excludes cabinets that lasted less than 182 days. However, I would argue that it is justified both theoretically, because democratic backsliding is supposed to be incremental as opposed to abrupt change, and practically, since it makes it possible to establish stable trends of changes in democratic quality and not potential fluctuations, especially the ones caused by the fact that some of the indicators used in the dataset measure the state on the 31st of December while others – on the 1st of January. Finally, if there was more than one TAN party in government in the cabinet period, the party with the strongest involvement in government (i.e., leading the government) is considered, following Spittler (2018); if these parties are all minor partners in a coalition, then I use the values of the one with the highest TAN score in the cabinet period. For the CHES data, values from the survey wave temporally closest to the government formation are used.

In order to conduct the fsQCA, it is necessary to calibrate the conditions and the outcome first. It requires choosing a threshold value, a qualitative anchor that serves as a 0.5 membership score, thus drawing a line between the cases for which a condition (or the outcome) is considered to be present and the ones for which it is not (see Schneider and Wagemann 2012). The minimum and the maximum value need to be chosen as well: they determine the value at which the minimal and maximal membership scores are assigned. The results are described in the following table.

Table 1. Calibration of conditions

Condition	Variable name	Threshold, max value, min value	Comments
Radical TAN ideology	radicaltan	7.5, 10, 5	
Salience of the GAL/TAN cleavage	tansalience	6, 10, 1	Threshold slightly higher than sample and CHES average of 5.9
Populism	populism	dichotomous	
Government lead	govlead	dichotomous	
Large seats share in parliament	largeseats	25, 50, 5	Threshold justified by the gap in the data between 15 and 25; percentage of total seats.
No sharing governmental power with GAL parties	onlyTAN	dichotomous	
New EU member state	east	dichotomous	

Calibrating the outcome is somewhat more complicated. Firstly, the change in the democratic quality is calculated by summing the differences between the value of every Democracy Barometer function used in the first and the final years of the cabinet period[4]. The threshold for the resulting variable is 0, delineating positive and negative change in democratic quality. The maximum value is -9 while the minimal is 9, meaning that the outcome (democratic backsliding) is present when the change is negative. These values were chosen based on data distribution: the standard deviation of this variable is 8.6.

4. Empirical Analysis

The following analysis will rely on intermediate solution terms. As opposed to conservative solution terms which do not make any assumptions about logical remainders (configurations without empirical referents), and parsimonious solution terms that make such assumptions to produce the least complex solution, intermediate solution

[4] Since the Democracy Barometer seems to show the state on the 31st of December of the current year, if a government is formed in in January-June of year N, I start reporting the Democracy Barometer scores with year N-1 (it shows the state prior to government taking power); if in July-December of year N, I start with year N.

terms rely on theoretically informed decisions of the analyst to simplify the results (Schneider and Wagemann 2012). As implemented in fsQCA3.0 software which has been used to conduct this analysis, intermediate solution terms require the user to explicitly make assumptions whether each individual condition should, based on theory, lead to the outcome if present or absent. In the models used here, all the conditions should lead to outcome (democratic backsliding) if present and to the absence of outcome if absent. This decision reflects the theoretical expectations regarding the direction of causal link discussed previously. The consistency cutoff used was 0.7.

Table 2. Causal paths to democratic backsliding

	~tansalience* ~govlead* ~onlyTAN	radicaltan* tansalience* east* ~onlyTAN	~radicaltan* largeseats* govlead* east	largeseats* govlead* ~east* onlyTAN
Raw coverage	0.278839	0.245577	0.204529	0.222222
Unique coverage	0.242746	0.0962492	0.0912951	0.222222
Consistency	0.726937	0.85679	0.774799	0.931751
Covered cases	BE2011 (0.83,0.64), BE2009 (0.83,0.55), BUL2005 (0.72,0.97), AUS2008 (0.6,0.95)	SLO2006 (0.79,1), FIN2011 (0.67,0.98), LITH2008 (0.6,0.59)	BUL2009 (0.67,0.97), HUN2010 (0.58,0.97), FIN2003 (0.57,0.73),	ESP2000 (0.96,0.91), IT2008 (0.91,0.99), AUS2003 (0.9,0.72), AUS2000 (0.6,0.8)
Contradictory cases	-	-	SLE2004 (0.53,0.24), FIN2007 (0.51,0.4)	-
Solution coverage	0.80184			
Solution consistency	0.809286			

Source: author's own calculations.

*Notes: ~ denotes logical negation, * - conjunction (logical AND). The cases are named according to their country's acronym and the year of government formation. The first value in parentheses is the membership score in the path, the second one is membership in the outcome.*

The first path is the one most difficult to substantially interpret. It covers cases of TAN parties that are minor partners in coalitions including GAL parties; moreover, these parties do not consider the GAL/TAN divide to be of high importance to their positioning. Nonetheless, under these governments, democratic backsliding has taken place, and while both Belgian cases could be written off as potential measurement errors due to their low values of democratic backsliding (-0.61 and -1.67 in BE2009 and BE2011, respectively), the other two governments are among the most prominent cases of democratic backsliding in the sample (-8.71 and -10,46 in AUS2008 and BUL2005, respectively).

The second path encompasses three radically TAN parties which also put a lot of emphasis on their TAN stance. At the same time, they are partners (minor in case of Slovakia and Finland and leading in Lithuania) in coalitions with GAL parties. These are also all new EU member states. The Slovakian case is the most dramatic case of democratic backsliding among all analyzed with -17.87 points. These cases are characterized by a strong combination of two willingness conditions. A potential substantial interpretation is that, given vulnerable democratic institutions in new EU member states, TAN parties especially determined to undermine liberal democracy are able to do so even if they share power with GAL parties.

The third path covers parties in the East that were both leading governments and having a large presence in the legislature, in conjunction enjoying a significant scope of opportunities for concentrating power. It is especially true in the Bulgarian and Hungarian cases, with GERB in Bulgaria controlling 48.3% of the seats and Fidesz in Hungary having an absolute majority in parliament – and together with its satellite KDNP, even a constitutional two-thirds majority. Moreover, democratic backsliding in these two cases is highly pronounced: the values are -10.37 in Bulgaria and -10.22 in Hungary. None of the three covered parties is considered to be radically TAN during the government period in question, but both GERB and Fidesz are in the list of populist parties. However, this path also features two contradictory cases, including a Finnish government led by the same party (Kesk) as in the covered case. It should also be noted that the membership score of these cases in the path is only slightly higher than the threshold number of 0.5, which could mean a potential measurement issue.

Finally, the fourth path is similar to the third insofar it covers prime minister parties with strong presence in the legislature (even absolute majority in case of Spain). However, there are significant differences: firstly, all the cases are in Western Europe, and secondly, these parties did not share power with GAL parties. Indeed, both Austrian governments were coalitions of the ÖVP with more radically TAN FPÖ and BZÖ in 2000-2003 and 2003-2006, respectively; in Italy, the more radically TAN LN was the minor partner of the ruling PdL; and in Spain, the PP ruled alone. The path is also notable for the absence of willingness conditions. One might hypothesize that the last two paths reflect substantially the same causal pathway, but with the Eastern cases being more conducive to democratic backsliding, making it possible even in coalition with GAL parties.

Table 3. Causal paths to the absence of democratic backsliding

	govlead* ~onlyTAN* ~populism	tansalience* ~largeseats* ~east* ~onlyTAN* ~populism	radicaltan* ~tansalience* ~largeseats* ~govlead* ~east* ~populism	~radicaltan* ~largeseats* ~govlead* east* onlyTAN* ~populism	radicaltan* tansalience* largeseats* govlead* east* ~populism
Raw coverage	0.235431	0.260295	0.282051	0.0567211	0.156177
Unique coverage	0.114996	0.101787	0.128982	0.056721	0.041181
Consistency	0.606	0.890957	0.957784	1	0.873913
Covered cases	FIN2007 (1,0.6), SLE2004 (1,0.76), UK2010 (1,0.99)	NL2007 (0.7,0.76), SV2010 (0.69,0.58), SV2006 (0.69,0.95), GE2005 (0.53,0.99)	POR2002 (0.83,0.91), POR2011 (0.83,0.95)	LAT2011 (0.73,0.85)	EST2003 (0.53,0.97)
Contradictory cases	FIN2003 (1,0.27), LITH2008 (1,0.41)	GE2009 (0.53,0.39)			LITH2008 (0.6,0.41)
Solution coverage	0.717172				
Solution consistency	0.795004				

Source: author's own calculations.

It should be noted that all five paths contain one common condition – that the party in question be not a populist one. In other words, the absence of populism is a necessary condition of the absence of the democratic backsliding with regards to TAN parties. It is worth emphasizing that the opposite is not true, namely, populism is not a necessary condition of democratic backsliding, with this condition not even appearing in any of the causal paths to the outcome.

The first path represents ruling non-populist parties leading a coalition with GAL participation. The consistency of the path is rather low, with two contradictory cases explained by the second and the third paths to democratic backsliding.

In contrast, the second path covers minor partners in Western Europe with a relatively insignificant presence in parliament. Even though the GAL/TAN cleavage is salient for them, they seem to lack any opportunity to undermine democratic institutions. The only contradictory case is the second Merkel cabinet, but it is questionable whether the CSU, the party in question, was actually engaging in democratic backsliding; it is possible it is a case of measurement error, with membership score and the scope of negative change in democratic quality being rather low.

The third path encompasses two Portuguese cases with radically TAN non-populist parties lacking opportunity for democratic backsliding and not prioritizing the GAL/TAN cleavage. The absence of the outcome seems to be overdetermined in these cases.

The fourth path explains a single case which thus could be treated as a special case. However, the absence of the outcome seems quite logical: the party lacked both willingness conditions (unless one considers *east* to be such) and significant amount of either executive or legislative power.

Finally, the fifth path also explains only one case, but one which is a lot more difficult to interpret. Even with five conditions being present and thus favoring democratic backsliding, the absence of populism seems to explain the lack of outcome – one contradictory case, and once again the Lithuanian one, notwithstanding.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that, even among the TAN parties selected on the basis of scoring more than 7.5 on the TAN stance at least once, not all are responsible for democratic backsliding. Indeed, the analysis has covered 15 cases of backsliding and

12[5] cases of increasing democratic quality, often by a substantial amount. Moreover, the model for the absence of the outcome has produced a necessary condition – lack of populism. The external validity of this result is arguably somewhat limited due to the fact that only 4 populist parties are present in the sample. However, what follows from this result is that there seem to be indeed two alternative ways of achieving willingness concerning democratic backsliding, one in line with neo-cleavage theory and the other – through populism (even though, in order to test this hypothesis, one would need to analyze populist GAL parties as well). Furthermore, it seems clear that not all TAN parties in power actually undermine democratic institutions, and not only because they lack the opportunity to do so – sometimes they are not willing to. In other words, it might be the case that it is TAN parties that are responsible for democratic backsliding (the conducted analysis does not allow to test this hypothesis), but it is not true that TAN parties in government necessarily lead to backsliding; it might be a necessary condition, but not a sufficient one.

Consequently, it seems that it is necessary to qualify the link between TAN ideology and democratic backsliding: the relationship is not a deterministic one. Apart from the conditions included in the analysis, naturally, numerous other factors might influence this relationship, for instance, agency. While the opportunity side of the willingness-opportunity framework is relatively clear-cut, willingness is intrinsically tied to human agency. Even if the corresponding conditions are present, decision-makers might still make a different choice – perhaps even one which contradicts their party's ideological position.

The analysis generally confirms the findings of Huber and Schimpf (2016) and Spittler (2018) that the effect of certain parties on democratic quality is conditional on factors reflecting the political opportunities these parties have, namely, the level of government involvement and presence in parliament. The CEE location of the country has also been identified as a significant factor which can contribute to democratic backsliding, even though this factor requires further elaboration with regard to its conceptualization and possible underlying causal mechanisms.

One further limitation of this analysis, although shared with others, is the fact that the use of aggregated indicators might obscure a lot of variation between the components. Differently put, the loss of democratic quality in one dimension can be compensated by

[5] With one, CZE2007, being unexplained by either of the paths.

gains in another one. Conceptually, I find this somewhat problematic because it does not correspond to the approach taken when defining democracy in general; democratic backsliding should imply undermining at least some set of democratic institutions, not the average effect. Even though this problem is partly mitigated by choosing a subset of indicators of democracy, it still leaves the question open: why parties undermine some dimensions of democracy but not others? Possibly, the inconsistencies in the results discussed above have their causes in this issue.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the implicit assumption found in the literature that TAN parties are inherently prone to authoritarianism and therefore democratic backsliding can be explained by their ideological position is more fruitfully replaced by the question under which conditions government participation of TAN parties leads to democratic backsliding. I have drawn on the literature on right-wing populism and, in particular, on quantitative studies of the effect of populist parties on democratic quality. I have argued that these two strands of literature can be theoretically combined, with the discussion of different conditions affecting the impact of populist parties on democracy providing a useful framework for elaborating the argument concerning similar effect of TAN parties. I have outlined a causal model based on the metatheoretical willingness-opportunity framework and tested it using fsQCA.

The results of the analysis allow to make a hypothesis that TAN ideology and populism constitute two alternative reasons for parties to engage in democratic backsliding. On their own, however, it is not enough: they need to be combined with certain capabilities. The analysis seems to confirm the results of quantitative studies stressing the importance of leading position in government and significant presence in parliament for the (negative) effect on quality of democracy. TAN ideological stance, however, does not necessarily lead to undermining democratic institutions. Overall, the analysis shows a complicated picture than requires complex causal explanations which are yet to be developed.

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