CHAPTER 20:
THE GENDER DIMENSION OF POPULISM

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Introduction

Notwithstanding abundant literature on populists’ electoral success, their organisations and their impact on political discourse, public policy, party systems, as well as democracy more broadly, research on the relationship between populism and gender remains underdeveloped in both theoretical and empirical terms. This is due to two key shortcomings: First, our empirical knowledge is both scant and scattered. Discussions of existing works either focus exclusively on right-wing populist parties (RPPs) (for example, Mudde 2007), or, when they do include left-wing populist parties (LPPs), they limit themselves to a specific region (for example, Kammwirth 2010a). Second, recent attempts towards the integration of evidence from both poles of the ideological spectrum and across global regions are confined to ideology (for example, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). To date, no study has attempted a more holistic discussion of populism and gender that includes populist parties’ leaders, candidates, members and voters. With this chapter, we take a first step in this direction.

Based on Heinisch and Mazzoleni’s conceptual framework, this chapter explores the relationship between gender and populism and understands it as intrinsically ambivalent claims diffused by individual and collective actors in order to challenge the status quo in favour of people’s empowerment and elite change (ibid. in this volume). We begin by formulating some broad, empirically testable expectations regarding populism’s gender dimension, which frame our discussion of the literature. As we will show below, gender can act as a dependent or an independent variable in empirical analyses of populism.

Firstly, the populist gender model is likely to contain contradictory ideas. Although the inconsistency of the discursive frame may be electorally effective, it may also lead to unintended policy consequences in populist politics for women’s empowerment – which concern the relationship between populist discourse and practice (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, in this volume).

Secondly, the question of whether populists’ challenging of the status quo will translate into the promotion of gender equality depends upon how gender corresponds to populists’ Manichean division between ‘the people’ and/or ‘the elite’. Based on a homogeneous interpretation of the notion of people, populist parties might not differentiate between genders and thus not devote particular attention to any of them. Alternatively, populists are unlikely to pursue radical change in gender relations if feminism is regarded as part and parcel of an educated, privileged elite. However, if women are perceived as part of the populus (and especially of the marginalised, formerly excluded social groups) populists are likely to try to mobilise them, for example by incorporating gender aspects into their ideology and policy proposals.

The kind of issues populists will choose to emphasise may, in turn, impact on populists’ appeal to women or repel them as voters.
Which specific gender models and issues are likely to be integrated into populists’ ideology and policies, and how? These choices are likely to be context-dependent, given macro level developments in gender equality and in broader policy domains that affect women, for instance, the economy. Hence, populists’ relationships with gender and specific issues are likely to vary according to differences in opportunity structures – what Heinisch and Mazzoleni label as ‘exogenous conditions’ (societal and cultural change, institutional conditions, and so on). Hence, variation can manifest itself both within a country (or a region with similar characteristics, for example, Scandinavia) over time\textsuperscript{1}, and across countries (or regions).

Furthermore, the kind of gender issues integrated into populist frames may also vary across ideological camps. In their competition against other parties, populists on the right and left are likely to tie gender to the issue frames in which they have a good reputation\textsuperscript{2}. For instance, parties on the right are likely to link it to immigration, security, tradition and culture, while parties on the left are likely to connect it to social change, social justice and inclusion.

However, if leadership is highly individualistic (as is the case with many populist parties), gender models and the kind of discursive frame promoted by populist parties may be strongly dependent upon the views of a single person, such as the leader, and how she or he relates to gender—which is linked to populism’s ‘individual dimension’ (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, in this volume).

At the same time, gender may also feature among the key characteristics of the populist actor in the sense that specific gender models may facilitate or hinder the conversion of non-political capital into political capital (ibid.). Indeed, if populism concerns the politics of personality, then it has always been about gender and specific models of masculinity\textsuperscript{3} and femininity (Kampwirth 2010a: 1).

In addition, the relationship between populism and gender may be influenced by the extent to which populist organisations open up space to women as activists, members, candidates and leaders. This connects to what Heinisch and Mazzoleni label the ‘collective dimension’ of populism, which concerns intra-party democracy and resources. The role gender plays within the populist organisation, for example, involving women on the ground and/or increasing the presence of women in the party’s central and public offices, may impact on the way populists are perceived by the electorate and/or the press, and may also affect their appeal to female voters.

Finally, whether populists are in government or in opposition matters for how gender and populism can be analysed. While in the latter case, analysis is inevitably limited to party ideology and discourse, in the former case, research can also examine how gender plays out in policy programmes and/or assess the consequences of populist politics and governance for women’s emancipation and their professional advancement.

\textsuperscript{1} In Latin America, populism can be divided into three waves: classic populism (left-wing, redistributive), neo-populism (neo-liberalist) and radical populism (left-wing, against neo-liberalism but with fewer resources than classic populism). These engaged with gender differently, not only due to their underlying ideology but also because each was facing a different wave of feminism (Kampwirth 2010a).

\textsuperscript{2} See Lefkofridi and Michel (2017) about how radical right parties tie the issue of welfare expansion to an anti-immigrant frame.

\textsuperscript{3} Examples of such models used by populist leaders in their campaigns include, among others, the athlete, the military man and the father figure (Kampwirth 2010a: 10).
With these expectations in mind, we attempt the first comprehensive overview of nascent research on gender and populism and seek answers to the following questions:

- How do populists relate to gender?
- What kind of roles does gender play in their ideology, policies and organisations?
- Does left/right populism question the traditional roles of women as mothers and wives?
- Do populists promote female leadership and candidacies?
- To what extent does electoral support of and activism for populist parties exhibit gendered patterns?

In pursuit of these questions, we review existing knowledge and synthesise the insights gained from analyses on the populist left and right across the world.

In what follows, we begin by discussing how gender plays out in the ideology and policy programmes of populist parties, along with a critical assessment of the impact of populist politics on women’s emancipation. We proceed to the relationship between populism and women’s political engagement, whereby we discuss female members, activists, candidates and leaders of populist organisations. Next, we examine gender differences in electoral support for populist parties. In conclusion, we identify the key gaps in knowledge in the field and suggest directions for future research.

Gender in Populists’ Ideology and Policy Programmes

Most studies of the gender dimension of populist ideology, policy agendas and discourse focus on the populist right, while few study left-wing populist parties, and even fewer examine both (Rousseau 2010; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). With regard to geographic scope, the bulk of scholarship concerns successful RPPs in Northern and/or Central Europe⁴ (Towns et al. 2014; De Lange and Muggle 2015; Akkerman and Hagelund 2007); only a small body of research examines Latin American neo-populism (for example, Sosa-Buchholz 2010; Rousseau 2010). In what follows, we review these works in an effort to understand how populists relate to gender; we are particularly interested in their underlying gender models and images of women, and whether they challenge traditional gender relations.

Populist Right-wing Parties in Western Europe

Contrary to scholarship that relies on the assumption that RPPs regard women as inferior to men without empirically scrutinising it (for example Mudde 2007), recent studies of the extent to which RPPs’ ideology and discourse is gendered adopt a systematic empirical approach. Analyses of gender-related issues (such as equality, abortion and homosexuality) document an ambiguous relationship between RPPs and gender. Examinations of parties’ official documents and manifestos produce three key findings:

⁴ At the time of writing and to the best of our knowledge, no well-grounded empirical studies exist which analyse the US presidential election 2016 from a gender perspective. Therefore, since this chapter seeks to review existing research and point to avenues for future research, we will not address this election directly. The success of the populist leader Donald Trump, however, underscores again the importance and topicality of the gender dimension of populism.
First, RPPs tend to be more traditional than conservative parties. Most authors echo Akkerman’s (2015) findings about RPPs’ support of (large) families and opposition to same-sex marriage and abortion. Second, however, there is important variation within the RPP family. For instance, the Austrian FPÖ articulates more conservative positions on family issues than its Norwegian and Danish counterparts (Meret and Siim 2012). Moreover, a comparative analysis of RPPs and neo-liberal populists in the Netherlands and Flanders shows that some parties (for example, Partij voor de Vrijeheid (PVV)) exhibit more modern views on gender equality than others (for example, Parti Centrum Partij’86/CP’86) (De Lange and Mügge 2015). Few parties even seem to defend same-sex partnerships (for example, Dansk Folkeparti (DPP), see Meret and Siim 2012).

Third, though gender issues’ salience in most RPPs’ manifestos (for example, Front National (FN), Vlaams Belang (VB)) was in decline in the 2000s (Akkerman 2015); more recently the latter paid renewed attention to gender issues within the framework of their anti-immigration agenda. Gender issues are—often exclusively—linked to the overarching subject of immigration (mostly from Muslim countries), and the notion of multiculturalism and/or integration (Towns, Karlsson, and Eyre 2014). In this context, RPPs even pose as champions of women’s rights and gender equality condemning religious practices (for example, veils, headscarves) as discrimination against women (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007; see also Meret and Siim 2012). They use the presupposed unequal status of women in Muslim countries to emphasise the clash of civilisations between Islam and the West (Meret and Siim 2012, Irvine and Lilly 2007). For instance, the FPÖ’s discourse portrays Muslims as pre-modern and Muslim men in particular as oppressors, who endanger Austrian society (Mayer, Ajanovic, and Sauer 2014).

What should we make of these inherent tensions in the commitment of RPPs to gender equality? Does the packaging of conservative views in liberal rhetoric (which appears to be a common feature across RPPs) signify a repositioning towards more liberal positions? RPPs’ revived interest in gender issues should not be interpreted as signalling change from conservatism towards liberalism. In fact, RPPs remain deeply traditionalist and conservative parties, and their rhetorical support for liberal principles only seldom translates into concrete policy proposals that foster gender equality. These parties’ “Janus face” (Akkerman 2015: 56) reflects somewhat conflicting appearances in different policy areas and points towards a rather instrumentalised commitment to liberalism, which is confined to their anti-immigration agenda. Importantly, gender framing by RPPs is consistent with our understanding of populism as “intrinsically ambivalent”.

Studies of RPPs are also instructive regarding possible interactions between endogenous and exogenous conditions and the credibility of the claims’ maker as a change agent in the given context (Heinisch and Mazzoleni, in this volume). Contextual (cultural and ideological) factors matter: the social setting in which they attempt to be electorally successful affects the language these parties use. Thus, to understand the fuzziness of RPPs’ gender discourse, we must consider that most case studies concern RPPs in advanced liberal democracies (for example, Northern Europe). At its core, RPPs’ conservative stance relies on freedom of choice arguments (for example, Mayer et al. 2014), whereby a ‘genuinely free’ choice for women requires more support for the traditional family. RPPs are, accordingly, critical of a state whose policies support women with jobs and careers but does not undertake action against economic constraints that ‘force’ women into the labour force in the first place. For example, the Sweden Democrats critically discuss the idea of gender equality (understood as pay gap, underrepre-
sentation of women etc.) in most contexts, except for immigration or multiculturalism (Towns et al. 2014).

Populist Left-wing Parties in Latin America

Research in the less liberal Latin American context reveals that even a backwards movement regarding women’s actual standing in society is possible, when RPPs in power shift their ideology towards more traditionalist positions (González-Rivera 2010). Contrary to previous Nicaraguan right-wing governments (for example, National Liberal Party, 1930s-1970s) that had fostered female employment, the Alemán administration (Constitutionalist Liberal Party, 1997-2002) was heavily influenced by socially conservative (and Catholic fundamentalist) forces in the US and thus placed more importance on family values. However, as we will discuss below, leftist populism in Latin America also seems to be deeply inculcated by the same family model and gender norms (for example, women are homemakers and men are breadwinners).

To begin with, Latin America’s classic leftist populism challenged neither machismo nor the status quo of gender inequality and had little to do with feminists, who, according to Eva Perón, belong to “another race of women” (Grammático 2010: 128). Although LPPs do assign women the role of crucial agents of social change and popular mobilisation, they do so by hailing them as mothers.

Early populist regimes (for example, Juan Perón in Argentina, Lázaro Cárdenas in Mexico and Getúlio Vargas in Brazil) developed a maternalist ideology that was—similarly to the European populist right—characterised by many contradictions. It aimed at reproductive control over women, while using them in economic terms and as agents of development (Fernandes 2010). Under the Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas (1930s), for example, it was development imperatives (rather than the desire to promote women’s emancipation) that problematised gender relations. Not surprisingly, the resulting policy programmes preserved gender differences, such as fixed family responsibilities or standards of sexual behaviour (Olcott 2010: 31–32).

Besides this, populists in the 1930s linked their advocacy of both women’s rights (including women’s suffrage) and policies that benefitted women specifically to motherhood. What qualified women to take part in political life was precisely their maternal role (Grammático 2010, 129). To be part of the ‘people’, women in Juan Perón’s Argentina (1946–1955) had to demonstrate “self-abnegation, sacrifice, love, and selflessness, all of which were tied up with the image of the mother” (Grammático 2010: 128). Furthermore, the labour policy promoted by the Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas (in office 1930–1945), which included the obligation for factories’ to provide separate spaces for women to nurse their babies, was based on his ideological conviction that womanhood and, especially, motherhood were “goods that need state protection” (Wolfe 2010: 79).

During the 1970s, women’s role as cultural tradition keepers and unpaid producers of industrial labour force was preserved (for example, compare the Cardenas and Echeverria administrations; Olcott 2010). In Nicaragua, the leader of the Sandinistas not only endorsed the ‘protection model’ of gender relations, which essentially confined women’s emancipation to a more
‘effective’ performance of their traditional roles, but even sided with the Catholic Church on the issue of abortion (Kampwirth 2010b).

The case of the Sandinistas under Ortega is very instructive for the broader study of gender and populism also because it manifests a transition from revolutionary to populist politics, whereby the models of masculinity and femininity shift as Sandinista politics becomes increasingly populist (ibid.). Kampwirth (2010b: 163–4) argues that the connection of a revolutionary agenda, an agenda of social justice and social change to one individual (populist leadership) may undermine feminist gains for two reasons: first, the agenda narrows as the leadership of the movement moves from being more collective to more individual; second, the shift from collective revolutionary leadership to individual leadership of one person and his immediate family results in the fate of women becoming dependent upon the views of that one person.

Ultimately, conventional models of gender relations carried on into the new millennium and contemporary left populists’ gender discourse remains inconsistent, though it is now tied to different frames. Bolivian President Evo Morales (Movimiento al Socialismo/MAS, 2006) uses a strong anti-colonial tone, whereby gender inequality becomes a means with which to blame Bolivia’s social problems on colonial influences (Rousseau 2010). Machismo (and consequently gender inequality) are considered foreign to Andean culture and ‘imported’ from the imperialists—similarly to European RPPs that warn against Muslims importing gender inequality. At the same time, however, Morales refers to women as symbols of motherhood, affection and honesty as well as family unity—in the Catholic sense of being self-sacrificing for the sake of the family (Rousseau 2010).

Due to the changing relationships between labour and capital, contemporary populism’s maternalist ideology is “no longer rooted in developmentalist concerns of labour discipline” (Fernandes 2010, 206). Latent ideological constructs in the Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez’s (1999-2002) rhetoric portray women as nurturers and caregivers (Fernandes 2010), whereas his emphasis on “women’s rights as a marginalised group” is restrained to both socialism and his own image as “the liberator of women”, who values “their sacrifices and struggles to care for their families and communities” (Espina and Rakowski 2010: 192). In Chávez’s view, Venezuela needs ‘revolutionary mothers’ to advance social change (ibid.). While a subset of Chavista discourse and symbols is developed especially for women, its ideas are diverse and conflicting: women should act as self-sacrificing housewives and as leaders and volunteers in community projects (Espina and Rakowski 2010: 197).

To summarise, existing research reveals that when gender issues are emphasised, they aim at preserving the image of women as mothers, caregivers and homemakers rather than advancing feminist demands. Right and left populism focuses on feminine, rather than feminist issues. As long as the utilisation of gender serves populists’ ideology and policy purposes in other domains (for example, immigration and development) they integrate it into their discourse and policy programmes—though often in contradictory ways. Although not necessarily fundamental to their ideological profile, gender is undoubtedly instrumentalised by both right and left populist parties.
Populist Politics and Women’s Political Engagement

Women exhibit different patterns of political engagement in populist politics. While some are involved with RPPs or LPPs as members and activists, others assume more visible roles as candidates, representatives or party leaders. These diverse forms of support are reflected by the few existing studies in this field, which we review in the following.

Female Members and Activists of Populist Parties

Literature on female activists and members of populist parties reveals that even if populists do not challenge conventional gender models, they do try to mobilise women. The inherent tensions in their ideology, discourse and policies, however, may prove consequential for women’s emancipation. In this regard, research on Latin American populists in power provides critical insights into populists’ impact on women as political actors. Though neither RPPs nor LPPs in Latin America intended to advance a truly ‘progressive’ gender agenda, they opened up opportunities for women to respond to their political exclusion. Women’s emancipation often came as a side effect of populist politics and policies (Kampwirth 2010a).

As Grammatico (2010) shows, in Argentina, the Montoneros5 created the front Agrupación Evita (Evita Group) to use women’s nurturing and caretaking capacities. Despite Peronism’s dismissal of feminism, women’s experience as political activists in Agrupación Evita—an organisation that did not intend to emancipate them—led women to question their roles and rethink the relations between men and women in daily life and politics (Grammatico 2010: 138).

Similarly, in the Mexican case, the Cardenas (1930s) and Echeverria (1970s) administrations encouraged women leagues but could not stop the tide: women organised themselves to articulate specific demands that went beyond what populists had imagined. Instead of confining themselves to wage, labour and population control, as envisioned, women demanded sexual rights and alleviation of their unpaid labour obligations (Olcott 2010). In sum, the social order that the populists’ ambivalent (maternalist) ideology represented enabled women to critically reflect on their social status and to react to their political marginalisation. Despite populists’ unwillingness to alter conventional gender norms in many Latin American countries, they could not control how women exploited the new opportunities presented to them.

Turning to the literature on membership, women’s engagement in populist party organisations in Europe suffers from a lack of reliable information. While gender-focused research on RPPs and LPPs’ membership is generally scant, an overview of women’s role in five European RPPs during the 1980s and 1990s is provided by Amesberger and Halbmayr (2002). More recent studies focus on the individual level: based on interviews with party insiders, they explore women’s positions in RPPs. Félix (2015) studies female activists in the Hungarian Jobbik and the Greek Golden Dawn. In both cases, female members played a prominent role in the mobilisation of new supporters and female voters. Crucially, these parties’ ‘far right’ image was moderated by their female members, who helped the party place itself closer to the mainstream.

5 A revolutionary organisation tied to Peron while he was in exile in Madrid.
The ambivalence observed in populist discourse at the party and leadership levels is reflected in the ideological tensions faced by RPPs’ female activists. Petterson’s (2015) analysis of female politicians’ discourse in Swedish and Finnish RPPs reveals a smouldering conflict between their somewhat feminist positions and their parties’ ideological stances. The RPPs’ female activists’ ambivalent discourse exposes a double standard (Bacchetta and Power (2013). Scrinzi’s (2014) study of female politicians in the Italian Lega Nord and the French FN further indicates that their self-conception can indeed be anti-feminist and pro-women’s rights at the same time. They advocate certain rights for women, but not universally—rather, they demand them exclusively for the women of ‘their community’—thus promoting “exclusive solidarity” (Lefkofridi and Michel 2017).

Latin American populists made efforts to recruit women through programmes they launched and organisations they specifically founded for this purpose. Venezuela provides a contemporary example of women’s successful recruitment. Although no data on the exact percentage of women participating in the programmes introduced by the Chávez administration (for example, casas alimentarias, soup kitchens) are available, the large majority of participants in health committees were women⁶ (Fernandes 2010: 210), and they were the main beneficiaries of the educational misiones⁷ (social policy outreach programmes) (Espina and Rakowski 2010: 190). Also, two main national organisations targeted women for participation under Chavista populism: the Inamujer (the state women’s institute) and Banmujer (the women’s bank)⁸ (Espina and Rakowski 2010: 190-1).

Female Candidates and Leadership of Populist Parties

Another aspect of women’s participation and engagement in populist parties relates to their more active roles as candidates, representatives and party leaders. Although female party leadership is a rare phenomenon, some European RPPs are or were led by women, including the German Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) (Frauke Petry), the Danish DF (Pia Kjærgaard), the French FN (Marine Le Pen), the Norwegian Fremskrittpartiet FrP (Siv Jensen) and the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) (Susanne Riess-Passer and Ursula Haubner). This implies that populist leadership can by no means be considered an exclusively male affair.

Furthermore, Konstadinova and Mikulska’s (2015) study of Bulgaria and Poland challenges a common hypothesis in the field of gender and politics, namely that left-wing parties promote female candidates more than other parties. They find that big populist parties in Bulgaria and Poland managed to elect more women to the national legislature than the main leftist parties, and did much better in ranking women high on the list. The fate of female candidates is, however, entirely in leaders’ hands due to these parties’ centralised organisations (see Heinisch and Mazzoleni on the ‘collective dimension’ of populism). Women are promoted if the leader is sympathetic to nominating them; this implies that leadership change (or a change of strategy of the same leader) could alter female candidates’ chances of nomination and success (Kon-

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6 Based on her own fieldwork.
7 For example, 75 per cent of participants in Caracas were women, while the ‘madres de Barrio’ programme (targeting women exclusively) included hundreds of thousands of women (Espina and Rakowski 2010: 190).
8 In mid-2008 the Inamujer website placed the number of the puntos de encuentro (encounter points, for instance groups of three to five women) at 17.761, and the number of women organised in puntos at 177,610 (Espina and Rakowski 2010: 190-1).
Populism is not necessarily a masculine characteristic, as Coniff’s (2010: 120) research into the Brazilian case suggests. However, female populists are to be found primarily in the lower echelons of government than at the top—and this is perhaps because of the difficulties women face in competitive politics in general.

The importance of the personal opinions of the leader in the relationship between gender and populist politics common to LPPs and RPPs is evident in the case of Bolivian MAS’ President Morales. He increased the presence of women in politics by appointing a number of female ministers and successfully introducing gender parity as a principle on party lists for the constituent assembly election (Rousseau 2010: 156). Also, despite stark opposition from key political parties, including his own, the Peruvian neo-populist President Alberto Fujimori reformed the electoral code, mandating that one quarter of party candidates for congress and municipal elections be women (Rousseau 2010: 145). Although he cultivated a masculine image by surrounding himself with the lightly dressed female dancers on stage during his political rallies, he appointed more women as ministers, vice ministers or to other high executive positions in state agencies than any Peruvian ruler. Fujimori gave both female ministers and congresswomen a higher profile, and these women, in turn, became his most fervent defenders and helped him appeal to women’s motherly concerns (such as security). Their gender allowed them to claim that they truly understood mothers’ needs (Rousseau 2010). Hence, populist parties’ ambivalence may not only concern ideological inconsistency but also incongruity between the leadership’s gender-related images and their practices.

While male populist party leaders strongly affect the success of female candidates, they also use their mothers, wives and daughters electorally, for example, as female symbols intended to influence their election campaigns (Conniff 2010: 120). A famous example is the wife of Juan Perón, Eva. Her role as a politically active and important woman was connected to the image of the beauty queen, the mother and wife, and she always emphasised that Juan Perón was everything and she was nothing (Grammático 2010: 128). 9

Perception of Female Leaders of Populist Parties

A related question concerns the ways female populist leaders are perceived by their party base, the general public and the press; and whether they are judged differently compared to their male counterparts. In patriarchal societies, as is the case in Latin America, the presumption that men are better leaders is not surprising. Coniff’s (2010) research on Brazil indicates that when discussing populist leadership, ordinary individuals made family analogies in which the president (for example, Vargas) was represented as the father figure of the country and the citizens as his children. Besides the father figure, other models used by populist leaders in their campaigns include, among others, the athlete, the military man, the Catholic priest or even Jesus Christ himself, who comes to ‘save’ the people (Kampwirth 2010a: 10).

Crucially, however, women have a much harder time getting leadership roles (not only in politics but also in business), and when they do, they are often harshly judged for their performance. This is because, based on gender stereotypes, they are assumed to be compassionate and soft, while leadership requires ‘toughness’. This has two consequences: first, women are

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9 Eva Perón never held elected office but headed the campaign for women’s rights that led to women’s enfranchisement in 1947. She founded the Partido Peronista Femenino (1949), which was opposed to feminism (Grammático 2010: 127).
assumed to be less fit for leadership; second, if women are tough leaders, they are judged harshly because they do not conform to the gender stereotype, which expects them to be gentle and kind. To be successful, female leaders have to constantly find a balance between images of masculinity and femininity.

One of the scarce in-depth studies in this field (Meret 2015) concerns Pia Kjærsgaard, who headed the Danish right-wing People’s Party from 1995 to 2012. Though her populist style and rhetoric did not seem to differ significantly from those of her past or contemporary male colleagues, some female gendered elements were clearly overemphasised and often reproduced both in the party literature, in official and non-official biographies and in the mainstream press. On the one hand, she displays a “professional, hard core and despotic leadership” in the public political sphere; on the other hand, she shows a “motherly, ordinary, over-emotional and straightforward” image of the ‘private Pia’—both a woman and a mother (Meret 2015: 101). This last gendered construct aimed at compensating for her authoritarian, bureaucratic and, in some cases, tyrannical leadership style.

Gender and Electoral Support for Populist Parties

Women’s electoral support for populist parties varies strongly according to the political orientation of the parties and the region under scrutiny. While left-wing populist parties in Latin America enjoy strong support among female voters, men still constitute the majority of voters of right-wing populist parties in Western Europe. The subsequent part of this chapter discusses these different trends.

Electoral Support for Left-wing Populist Parties in Latin America

Peruvian women’s enthusiastic support for the neo-populist Alberto Fujimori is assumed to be related to his promotion of women in politics (Rousseau 2010: 147). His women-friendly strategy proved to be fruitful electorally: after 1995 the percentage of his female supporters increased consistently compared to the percentage of his male supporters. In contrast, Sosa-Buchholz (2010) suggests that women’s (and men’s) support for Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador was based on purely utilitarian motivations. Ibarra’s populism used political clientelism with the result that men and women got rewards for their support (for instance, electricity, potable water); also, while men got jobs, women got education, which also led to employment (Sosa-Buchholz 2010: 48).

The Radical Right Gender Gap in Western Europe

However, research on support for European RPPs reveals that these parties still mostly appeal to men (such as, for example, the FPÖ in the second run-off of the Austrian Presidential election in 2016), a phenomenon labelled “the Radical Right Gender Gap” (Givens 2004). This debate is distinguished by a case-selection bias: while France, the Netherlands and Belgium
have been extensively studied, other—especially South Eastern European and Balkan—countries have often been neglected.

Accounts of this gap rely on differences between male and female voters with regard to socio-structural characteristics such as age, education, occupation and religiosity. To begin with, men are overrepresented in the industrial sector, where blue collar workers are more directly affected by the negative consequences of globalisation (Givens 2004). As the structure of occupation is changing, however, women in precarious part-time jobs may be as vulnerable as men in the industrial sector (Mayer 2015). Furthermore, religiosity matters because Christian churches mostly denounce RPPs’ anti-immigrant stances, thus discouraging their—mostly female—followers from supporting RPPs (Sineau 2004; Mayer 2015). Although the aforementioned socio-structural variables exert some influence, their effect varies across countries; crucially, none of them fully explains the gender gap.

More recent works assume that men and women differ with regard to their policy attitudes and positioning on those issues, which are important for RPP support, such as immigration or dissatisfaction with politics (cf. Spierings and Zaslove 2015). Research that combines socio-structural explanations and attitudes produces mixed findings (de Bruijn and Veenbrink 2012; Fontana et al. 2006), while often pointing towards other influential factors (Rippeyoung 2007), for example RPPs’ programmatic appeal (Johns et al. 2011); their extremist or outsider image, which could repel female voters (Immerzeel et al. 2015); RPPs’ ideological distance from other rightist parties (Harteveld et al. 2015) and the existence of a viable conservative alternative (Montgomery 2015). To date, however, this debate remains inconclusive.

Latest research demonstrates the gender gap narrowed in the 2012 French presidential election (Mayer 2015), which is likely due to the FN’s leadership change (from father to daughter) and the party’s normalisation strategy (see also Mayer 2013). The evolution of the gap in French politics raises the question of which factors can account for change over time and whether or not similar processes are underway in other countries.

To the best of our knowledge, no inquiry specifically devotes itself to the gender aspects of support for the populist left. Yet, some studies draw interesting conclusions regarding what influences women’s support for leftist populists. For example, Coniff’s (2010) fieldwork in Brazil shows that Ivete Vargas and Heloisa Helena functioned as role models that attracted women voters and opened up spaces for them in the administration. Interviewees also concurred that physical appearance does sway voters, perhaps women more than men; gender characteristics (masculinity, femininity) influence how the public perceives populists (Coniff 2010: 120).

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have tried to chart the nascent field of gender and populism by looking at right- and left-wing populist parties and their governments. This field is not only underdeveloped, but it is also uneven, with LPPs being less examined than RPPs. We discussed the role of gender in populists’ ideology, discourse and policy programmes, their organisations (from the lowest to the highest ranks) and their electoral support (gender gap). Our review reveals that
the gender dimension of populism is highly complex and rather unexplored (Meret and Siim 2012). In what follows, we point to the specific gaps we have identified.

Firstly, the debate about gender issues in populist parties’ ideological profiles remains inconclusive. For some scholars, they constitute fundamental characteristics of RPPs’ ideology and contribute to their electoral appeal (Kitschelt and McGann 1995; Akkerman 2015), while for others they are unimportant to the concept of populism (Mudde 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2015). Most, however, agree that RPPs recently tend to devote less attention to family policies and more to gender inequality tied to immigration. Crucially, the populists under study (European RPPs and Latin American LPPs) have an uneasy relationship with feminism; though the advancement of women’s empowerment is not part of their ideology, the ambivalence of their ideology, discourse and policies may result in feminist gains.

Yet, we lack studies of contemporary left-wing populism beyond Latin America (for example, SYRIZA in Greece, Podemos in Spain) and on right-wing populism beyond Europe (for example, Donald Trump in the US context; for an overview of contemporary populism in the US see Vergari, this volume).

For this purpose, future research should employ a comparative approach to research: first, both poles of the political spectrum and, second, populist vs. non-populist parties. Perhaps populist parties’ engagement with gender may differ less from the mainstream than typically assumed. Moreover, we need a robust theoretical framework (including novel hypotheses) about why and how ideologies are gendered. In this context, we should question our assumption about a fixed set of women’s interests and preferences. Current research is limited to traditional women’s issues, such as family policies or abortion, but does not include women’s preferences in other policy areas.

Secondly, we lack research on RPPs’ and LPPs’ members and activists due to the absence of reliable numbers and data sources for their shares of female membership. Large comparative studies are, to date, absent. Single case studies are instructive but allow us neither to generalise nor to assess whether and how RPP and LPP membership differs from other parties. Why would ‘populist women’ be different?

Furthermore, it would be appealing to conduct comparisons between populist and non-populist parties, as well as between the populist right and left, regarding the percentages of women nominated on their electoral lists, included in their cabinets and so on. As the tiny amount of research literature on gender and LPPs concentrates mostly on Latin America, we lack knowledge of European left-wing populist parties, such as the Greek SYRIZA or the Spanish Podemos. These cases are crucial to our understanding of LPPs because they operate in a much more liberal context compared to Latin America. Both SYRIZA10 and Podemos11 do not seem to promote women more strongly within their cabinet or electoral lists compared to other parties—despite their self-proclaimed mission to bring about radical social change.

Thirdly, research should pay more attention to the models of gender relations and images of femininity and masculinity constructed and practiced by party leaders. The field would greatly benefit from comparisons between female populists (for example, Marine Le Pen and Siv

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10 SYRIZA is in government together with the populist right ANEL (Independent Greeks) since 2015, and women constitute only 17.5 per cent of their cabinet.

11 Compared to other Spanish parties, Podemos nominated more women than men in total; however, only 19 per cent of those female candidates were at the top of their electoral lists in 2016.
Jensen) and their male counterparts given that their leadership styles and gendered representations seem to have significantly contributed to the profiling of populist parties (Meret 2015, 102). Again, current examples, such as the 2016 presidential elections in the US or the race for the French presidential chair, provide fertile ground on which to analyse not only the ideological dimension of populism and gender but also to what extent the campaigns of candidates belonging to different poles of the political spectrum are gendered and try to appeal to women.

Last but not least, more work is needed on what explains electoral support for populists; very few studies investigate the development of the gender gap over time, while many (for instance, Eastern European) countries still remain uncharted territory. Similarly, Donald Trump’s unforeseen electoral success in the 2016 presidential election fuels the debate on how a candidate managed to attract a large section of female voters despite or precisely because of his misogynist attitude. Thus, the success of populist parties amongst women voters proves to be a promising avenue for new studies.

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