

Dissertation Review

Name of the student:	Inxhi Brisku
Title of the thesis:	The Influence of Economic Decline in the Rise of the Right-Wing Populist Parties in Europe – Two Case Studies
Reviewer:	Dr. Javier Arregui

1. KNOWLEDGE AND CONNECTION TO THE FIELD

(relevance of the research question, research objective, literature review):

The research question of this dissertation bring an interesting topic that clearly deserves more research. However, it is formulated in a rather inaccurate way. The question introduces the notion of correlation which is a statistical concept. However, with just two cases it is hard to talk about correlation. So, I believe a better question for the research developed here would have been: “To what extent there is a relationship between the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis and the electoral success of right wing populist parties?”. Once we know there is a relationship we could calculate whether there is (or not) a correlation (with a higher number of cases) and later whether there is or there is not causality between both phenomenon (through statistical analysis). The research objectives are clearly specified and they look convincing enough. The literature review is in a pretty good shape, it brings into the paper not just a concise definition of what populism is but also the most relevant explanations that there are in the literature to explain populism. Perhaps it is a little bit too long since it has over twenty pages.

2. ANALYSIS

(methodology, argument, theoretical backing, appropriate work with sources):

In relation to the research design, I like the two selected cases in order to answer the research question. However, in the text there is a poor justification of their selection. Basically, the justification is that because France and Italy have faced hard economic crisis (and their consequences), we should select the main populist parties of these countries. This logic could be also applied to almost any country in Europe that has recently suffered an economic crisis (which is almost everyone). Further, for the selected case we also need some variation. So there is clearly more room here for a better justification of the cases. It is evident that each populist party has its own characteristics, but I also think that there is a division line between Western European and Eastern European populist parties (for obvious historical reasons). So it would have perhaps been interesting to include a populist party from the Eastern European part in the analysis. It would have provided more variation and, therefore, more capacity of explanation of the relationship under study. Both developed cases, the Italian and the French, are nicely illustrated in terms of background information, as well as in terms of empirical descriptive data that looks at the relationship under study. I believe the dissertation would have been in a better shape if some hypotheses had been formulated. This would have provided a more theoretical and explanatory leverage to the research. I believe the used sources are very good and that they are finely employed in the dissertation.

3. CONCLUSIONS

(persuasiveness, link between data and conclusions, achievement of research objectives):

Conclusions are always a consequence of the good matching of the theory developed and the systematicity and quality of the cases analysed. In this particular piece, I see that the conclusions are too general. Because the paper lacks hypotheses, it basically discusses the relationship between the consequences of the 2008 financial crisis and the success of right-wing populist parties. It is nice in the sense that it brings some good arguments about why the League achieved electoral success. The French case, however, is not so clear. In any case, I miss a further development in the conclusions that explains to what extent these two analysed cases (and the explanatory factors identified) could be extrapolated to other circumstances. This would be the only way to really improve the theories we already have to explain these complex phenomena. Thus, I miss a broader perspective in the conclusions.

4. FORMAL ASPECTS AND LANGUAGE

(appropriate language, adherence to academic standards, citation style, layout):

Overall, the thesis language is appropriate and well written. The structure of the paper is in line with required standards, although I miss more development of some important parts such as a research design section, a more developed research question (including some hypotheses) and perhaps a shorter section for the literature review. Citations are well-structured and the references are also of good quality and updated.

5. SUMMARY ASSESSMENT

(strong and weak point of the dissertation, other issues)

The strong points of the dissertation are:

- The research question deals with a substantive theoretical and political topic
- Good literature review
- A good descriptive and explanatory analysis of the selected cases

The weak points are:

- Research question could have been formulated in a better way
- No formulation of hypotheses
- Case studies are interesting and substantive, but poorly justified.
- Conclusions are too little ambitious.

Grade (0-10):	7,7
Date:	Signature:
25/08/2020	Javier Arregui