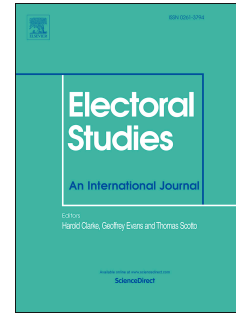


Accepted Manuscript

Expressing or Fuelling Discontent? The Relationship Between Populist Voting and Political Discontent

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PII: S0261-3794(16)30144-5

DOI: [10.1016/j.electstud.2016.04.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.04.006)

Reference: JELS 1710

To appear in: *Electoral Studies*

Received Date: 5 June 2015

Revised Date: 11 April 2016

Accepted Date: 11 April 2016

Please cite this article as: Rooduijn, M., van der Brug, W., de Lange, S.L., Expressing or Fuelling Discontent? The Relationship Between Populist Voting and Political Discontent, *Electoral Studies* (2016), doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2016.04.006.

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Date

June 5th 2015

Title

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Estimated word count

8330

Abstract

Many studies have found that political discontent and populist voting are positively related. Yet, an important shortcoming of these studies is that they interpret the correlation between these two phenomena as evidence that existing feelings of political discontent contribute to the support for populist parties. We argue that there is also a causal effect in the opposite direction: Populist parties fuel political discontent by exposing their supporters to a populist message in which they criticize the elite. Our study links individual level data on political discontent of voters to the populist message of the party they intend to vote for, employing various operationalizations of populism. Based on a 6-wave panel study from the Netherlands (2008-2013), we conclude that political discontent is both cause and consequence of the rise of populist parties. Our findings imply that the effect of political discontent on populist voting has been overestimated in many previous studies.

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