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Protests, Long-term Preferences, and Populism. Evidence from 1968 in Europe*

Andrea Fazio[†]

Abstract

In 1968, young people grew up in an atmosphere of strong dissatisfaction and distrust against the status quo. We show that higher exposure to protests in 1968 leads to higher dissatisfaction toward national governments and raises the probability of voting for populist parties. Consistently with the impressionable years hypothesis, we find these effects valid only for those aged between 18 and 25 during 1968. Our results are robust to a series of placebo tests and to alternative definitions of our treatment and control groups. We find that our results are driven by individuals with a middle or low level of education. We also find suggestive evidence that the mechanisms driving our results can depend on individuals' level of education: within our treated cohort people with an elementary level of education appear more attracted by the populist rhetoric, while people with a middle level of education are more likely to care about traditional values.

Keywords: Populism, 1968 Protests, Log-term Preferences, Impressionable years

JEL Codes: P16, D72, Z10

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1 Introduction

In the last decades, populist parties have gained electoral consensus and the interest in the study of populism has increased accordingly (Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020). The literature suggests that populism is mainly driven by cultural or economic factors (Colantone and Stanig, 2019; Guiso et al., 2019; Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Pastor and Veronesi, 2018; Rodrik, 2020). Cultural changes (or economic shocks) raise people’s disapproval and feelings of frustration against the political elites, thus paving the way to a new political space that populist parties can occupy presenting themselves as those who can protect ordinary people from a corrupted political elite (Algan et al., 2017; Cerqua et al., 2023; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Dal Bó et al., 2021; Panunzi et al., 2020).

This mechanism is clearly explained by Guiso et al. (2020), according to which economic insecurity exerts a direct and an indirect effect on populism voting. The direct effect consists of the “demand of protection” against negative economic shocks, while the indirect effect is triggered by feelings of dissatisfaction toward political leaders.

Although a relevant portion of the literature suggests that political dissatisfaction and cultural backlashes lead to greater support for populist parties, this channel has not been widely tested empirically.

We contribute to this debate by exploring the link between dissatisfaction and support for populist parties in Europe. Previous studies find a positive correlation between political dissatisfaction and voting for populist parties (Betz, 1994; Lubbers et al., 2002; Lubbers and Scheepers, 2000; Norris, 2005; Schumacher and Rooduijn, 2013). However, such a relationship might easily hide spurious correlations due to the omitted variable bias or it might suffer from reverse causality issues since also populist parties fuel disapproval of political elites (Rooduijn et al., 2016). Therefore, the causal nexus between political dissatisfaction and support for populist parties is still unclear. To address these limitations, we build on past experience and we show that people who have been exposed to a cultural change and to an atmosphere of disappointment toward the political institutions during their young adulthood are more likely to support populist parties and to be unsatisfied with current governments.

To identify how exposure to dissatisfaction with political institutions affects populist voting, we combine unique data on the protests of 1968 with survey data from the European Social Survey. We find that higher exposure to an atmosphere of dissatisfaction during formative years leads to a greater likelihood of being dissatisfied with the current government and of supporting populist parties. To classify populist parties, we follow Rooduijn et al. (2019) which provide a classification of all the populist parties in Europe from 1989 onward.

Our identification strategy builds on the impressionable years hypothesis (Krosnick and Alwin, 1989), suggesting that people form their political opinions between ages 18 and 25. In 1968, younger generations were dissatisfied with the then political class, and the climate of dissatisfaction culminated in a wave of protests (Klimke et al., 2011; Klimke and Scharloth, 2008). According to the literature, the events and political actors

of 1968 are an early manifestation of modern populism, as the core idea of the protests was that of fighting the political elite and giving more power to ordinary people (Mudde, 2004). Furthermore, the movements of 1968 also triggered a cultural backlash in some strata of the population who were against the shift in values that the 1968 movements proposed (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). At the individual level, being exposed to a certain political atmosphere during young adulthood is plausibly exogenous with respect to the current political scenario, making the impressionable years hypothesis a credible strategy for establishing a causal nexus between dissatisfaction and populism.

Those who were in their impressionable years in 1968 share several common experiences in addition to the wave of protests. Hence, we exploit the cross-country variation in the intensity of protests in 1968 to control for cohort fixed effects and to rule out the possibility that our results are driven by general cohort trends. We also include the interaction between the year of birth and educational attainment, since in 1968 some universities abandoned the usual examinations and, as a result, the pass rate of examinations increased (Maurin and McNally, 2008). To capture the potentially confounding effect of household income, age, parental background, education, gender, religious belonging, and unemployment experiences, we include a broad set of controls. In addition, we control for the country and wave fixed effects.

We test the robustness of our results by employing two alternative specifications. In the main specification, we build a variable equal to one for those aged 18 and 25 in 1968 (zero otherwise). We interact this variable with the variable measuring the protests' intensity. In the second specification, we build a set of dummy variables that take a value equal to one for each five-year cohort from 1969 to 1970 and we interact each cohort with the intensity of the protests. We set as base category those who were between 13 and 18 in 1968, so as to have a control group most similar to our treatment group -people aged 19-24 in 1968.

We also check whether our main results are sensitive to the way in which we measure exposure to 1968 events. We use data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database (Coppedge et al., 2021a) to proxy the intensity of protests in 1968 with a mass mobility index and with the number of universities in each country. This last measure is motivated by the fact that the protests of 1968 usually started with university occupations. Finally, to rule out the possibility that our results are the fruit of a coincidence, we run a series of placebo tests. Consistently with the impressionable years hypothesis, we do not find significant effects for those experiencing the 1968 events in other ranges of age.

In principle, our results may be due to the activation of a latent or persistent preference. The literature suggests that when people are dissatisfied with political institutions, populist parties gain appeal because they present themselves as the alternative to the current political elites. As a consequence, anti-elite sentiment becomes a key driver of populism (Acemoglu et al., 2013). When digging deeper into the mechanisms of our findings, we show that the results are driven by individuals with middle or low education. This may be consistent with anti-elite sentiment being the driver of our results, as the literature shows that people with a lower socioeconomic background are more attracted by the anti-elite rhetoric (Marx and Nguyen, 2018). Also, it could be that

low-educated people were against the 1968 movements and developed a preference for parties that promoted the protection of traditional values and nationalism (Inglehart and Norris, 2016). We further investigate both these channels and we find evidence that individuals with an elementary education are more likely to vote for either right-wing or generic populist parties and to support direct democracy, which is a core feature of populist parties (Mohrenberg et al., 2021). Differently, we find that people with a middle level of education are supportive exclusively of right-wing populist parties and are more likely to care about traditional values and to develop conservative preferences. These results appear to suggest that the mechanism of our findings differs according to the level of education: within our treated cohort, people with a low level of education may be more attracted by anti-elitism, while people with a middle level of education may be more attached to traditional values.

Last, we bring additional evidence showing that support for populist parties was strongest starting from 2010 when the supply for populist parties increased. Overall these results appear to suggest that people exposed to cultural shifts, dissatisfaction with political institutions, and populist rhetoric during young adulthood are more likely to support populist parties later in life. However, the mechanisms behind our results seem to differ significantly according to educational levels and are worth additional examination.

Our paper contributes to several strands of the literature. First, we add to the literature on the drivers of populism (see e.g. Algan et al., 2017; Guiso et al., 2019). A paper close to ours is the one by Daniele et al. (2023). The authors use Italian data to show that the experience of a corruption scandal decreases institutional trust and increases the likelihood of voting for populist parties. We contribute to these findings by showing that those who experienced an atmosphere of frustration toward political institutions when young are more likely to vote for populist parties.

We add to the literature on the political economy of protests (see e.g. Battaglini, 2017; Passarelli and Tabellini, 2017), and -specifically- to the growing debate on the effects of the protests on attitudes and beliefs (El-Mallakh, 2020; González, 2020). Research shows that protests have long-term effects on individuals, by shaping their preferences (Mazumder, 2018). We add to this literature by showing how an exceptional year of protests influences long-term political preferences.

In a recent survey on the political economy of populism, Guriev and Papaioannou (2020) suggest that to improve the understanding of populism “it is worthwhile examining how experiences shape voting and ideology”. Our work is an attempt to contribute to this interesting line of research. We connect to the growing literature studying the long-term effects of pivotal experiences during the impressionable years on political attitudes (Ajzenman et al., 2020; Akbulut-Yuksel et al., 2020; Booth et al., 2019; Borghi et al., 2020; Conzo and Salustri, 2019; Costa-Font and Nicińska, 2023; Cotofan et al., 2021; Navajas et al., 2020; Saka et al., 2022). Booth et al. (2019) show that the exposure to market-oriented institutions rather than communist institutions shapes people’s willingness to compete. Roth and Wohlfart (2018) show that those who experienced higher economic inequality are less likely to support redistribution. Gavresi and Litina (2023)

show that exposure to macroeconomics shock may increase voting for populist parties. We add to this literature by exploring how exposure to dissatisfaction with political institutions affects voting behavior.

The paper develops as follows. Section 2 offers a brief description of 1968 in Europe, Section 3 illustrates the data used and the empirical strategy, Section 4 shows the results; Section 5 offers a brief discussion and concludes.

2 The 1968 in Europe

2.1 A year of protests

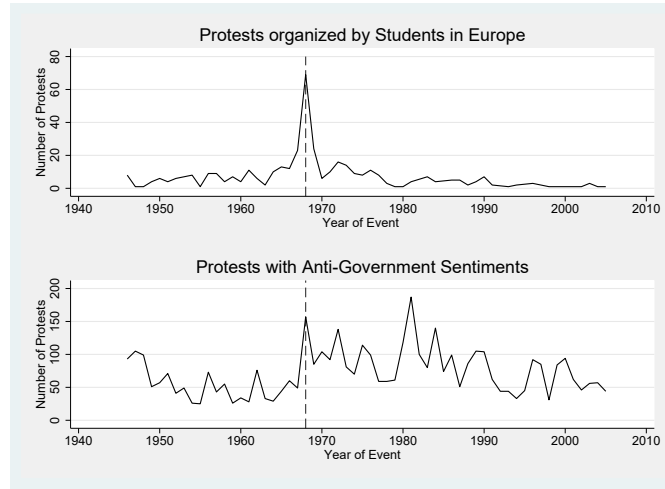
In 1968 many European countries experienced civil unrest. Protests were mainly participated by university students and in some cases workers took part in the protests. The main motivation behind the protests was a shared sense of revolt against the ruling institutions (Klimke and Scharloth, 2008). According to Inglehart (1971, 1977, 2015), the political intergenerational conflict of 1968 in Europe is due to a shift in moral values. The generations born after the Second World War grew up in a period of peace, had higher access to education and were satisfied in terms of primary needs. While the urge to essential needs led elder generations to focus on materialist values, young people felt closer to post-materialist values, such as environmental protection, gender equality, and freedom of expression.

Historical sources and data on protests document the strong intergenerational political conflict of that time and the change in values of younger generations. As an example, a 1969 report by the US Department of State described young Europeans as follows: *Armed with sophisticated knowledge of society's ills at an earlier age than ever before, more and more European young people are becoming actively hostile towards the prevailing values of their elders and towards the official government ideology in both East and West Europe. Evidence in several countries -notably France, Germany and Eastern Europe- indicates that radicalism has taken root in secondary schools where it was never known before. This is an important indication of what can be expected from future student generations* (Klimke and Scharloth, 2008, p. 7).

Figure 1 helps to understand the atmosphere of dissatisfaction toward governments in 1968 displaying the number of protests organized by students and the number of protests characterized by anti-government sentiments in Europe from 1945 to 2008. Data are taken from the Social, Political, and Economic Event Database (SPEED) which collects socio-economic events from news reports (Nardulli et al., 2011)¹. As the figure shows, the number of protests organized by students in 1968 is not comparable with any of the following or previous years. The same happens for the number of protests characterized by anti-government sentiments, with the only exception of 1981. However, 1981 protests were mostly connected with local events, i.e. the number of protests in the United

¹The methodological aspects of this database are briefly mentioned in the next section. A complete description of this dataset can be found in Nardulli et al. (2015).

Figure 1: Number of Protests 1945-2005



Notes: Data are taken from the Social, Political and Economic Event Database (SPEED).

Kingdom (UK) in 1981, known as the “England Riots”².

The intensity of the protests in 1968 varied substantially across European countries. As an example, historians argue that albeit also in Scandinavia young people organized demonstrations and protests, the Scandinavian protests have been mainly integrated by the authorities, i.e. the Scandinavian authorities tried to accommodate students’ requests. Thanks to the high degree of social inclusion in the Scandinavian countries, the protests of 1968 cannot be considered similar to those of the rest of Europe in terms of civil unrest (Jørgensen, 2008). In other countries, such as France, Italy, West Germany, and the United Kingdom, the wave of protests was particularly strong, while in Switzerland or Belgium, the intensity of protests was moderate. Figure 2 shows the number of protests characterized by anti-government sentiments and an index that measures mass mobilization³ in 1968, in each country. Consistently with the literature, the figure shows that the intensity of the protests in 1968 varied substantially across European countries.

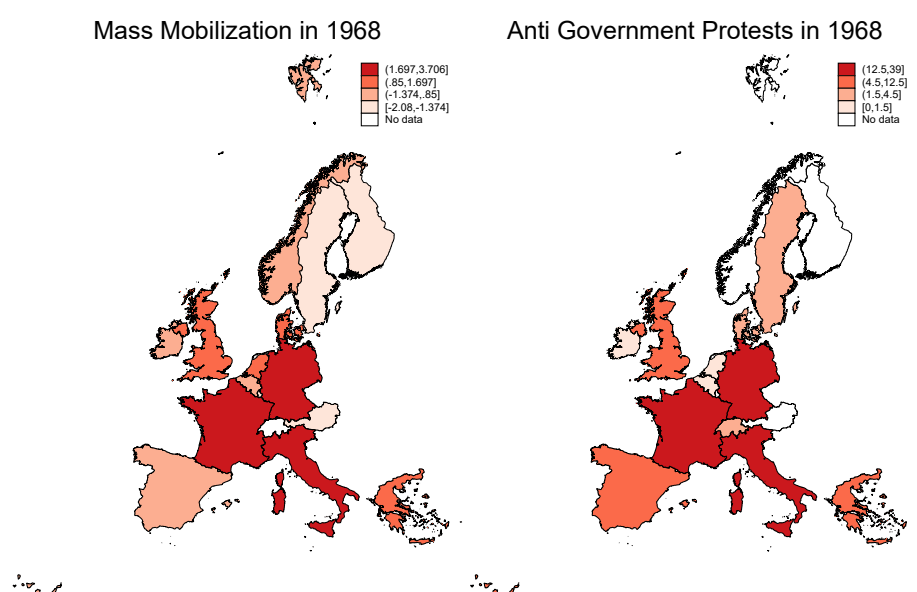
2.2 1968 and Populism

The literature suggests that the wave of protests characterizing the year 1968 is an early manifestation of modern populism (Mudde, 2004). This is because the intergenerational conflict of 1968 reflected a crucial aspect of modern populism: the “pure people” were fighting against the “corrupted elite”. In fact, although there are fundamental differences

²We show this in the Appendix by plotting the number of anti-government protests excluding the UK.

³This measure ranges from -4 to 4. Data about mass mobilization are taken from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database. We discuss in detail this measure in the next section.

Figure 2: Intensity of Protests in 1968



Notes: Data are taken from the Social, Political and Economic Event Database (SPEED) and from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Database. The mass mobilization index ranges from -4 to 4. For simplicity we use a map with today borders. Data on Germany refers to West Germany only.

between 1968 populist movements and today’s populist parties, *in classic populist fashion, the early Greens despised politics and ‘the political elite’*. In all ways – ideological, organizational, and participatory – they presented themselves as the exact opposites of the established parties (Mudde, 2004, p. 548).

Notwithstanding its populist nature, the strong shift in values proposed by the 1968 movements and its narrative are not always welcomed by today’s populist parties. Some of the current main politicians belonging to right-wing populist parties openly oppose the 1968 generation, depicting it as a leftist political generation that tried to build a cultural hegemony destroying the traditional values (Betz and Johnson, 2004). Indeed, the 1968 movements were mainly driven by the (New) Left and Green parties, and the proposed shift in values caused at that time a cultural backlash, which pushed some people to defend traditional values and which may itself be an additional driver of today’s populism (Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

Overall, young people in 1968 experienced diffuse dissatisfaction either against the status quo or against the new political movements. People who were in their impressionable years in 1968 were exposed to a political atmosphere presenting some fundamental aspects of populism such as the anti-elite rhetoric and the fight against the ‘establishment’. Furthermore, the shift in values related to the 1968 political movements might have triggered a cultural backlash against the political and societal changes that were happening at that time, pushing some individuals to be more attached to traditional values. In the following sections, we investigate whether and how the exposure to a strong sense of dissatisfaction toward the prevailing political class that was prevalent among young people in 1968, permanently affected the voting preferences of this generation.

3 Data and empirical strategy

In this section, we describe the data used, the main variables of interest, and the empirical strategy adopted to answer our research question.

3.1 Data

Our first source of data is the European Social Survey (ESS). Based on face-to-face interviews and administered every two years from 2002, the ESS measures European citizens’ beliefs, behaviors, and political attitudes. We use the nine available waves of the ESS (2002-2018). The questionnaire comprises a set of questions common to all waves and thematic modules administered in specific waves. The ESS does not include all the European countries every year. Some countries might be present in some waves and not in others.

The ESS has been one of the most used surveys to investigate the individual determinants of populist voting since the wave of populism in Europe has begun (Algan et al., 2017; Boeri et al., 2018; Guiso et al., 2019; Hays et al., 2019; Inglehart and Norris, 2016).

Our second source of data is the Social, Political and Economic Event Database

(SPEED), which collects data on civil unrest episodes worldwide. The SPEED builds on a historical news repository that draws from tens of millions of news reports carried in the New York Times (NYT), the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, and the BBC’s Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) from 1945 to 2005 (Nardulli et al., 2015, p. 158). The SPEED employs a hybrid technology to collect and classify events, unifying a supervised machine learning approach with human coding. The usefulness of this dataset for our study is twofold: first, it covers our period of interest, while most of the available data on protests in Europe collect events from 1980 onward (see e.g. Clark and Regan, 2016; Francisco, 1996); second, the SPEED classifies the origin of the events, i.e. it categorizes whether a particular protest originates from anti-government sentiments or other drivers such as social animosity or class conflict. As we are interested in studying the exposure to dissatisfaction toward governments, this information is particularly useful for our identification strategy.

We also use data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) database (Coppedge et al., 2021a), which uses a new methodology to measure the level of democracy at the country level. The latest version of the V-Dem database covers 202 countries from 1789-2020. This latest version of the database includes a measure of mass mobilization, concerning the participation of citizens in events such as demonstrations, strikes, protests, riots, and sit-ins (Coppedge et al., 2021b, p. 226). This measure is built by using an expert survey. For each country, a series of experts have been selected and they were posed the following question to measure mass mobilization: “In this year, how frequent and large have events of mass mobilization been?”. Answers are originally in a 0-4 scale but are then recoded using the Bayesian item response theory measurement to try to get rid of possible biases (Coppedge et al., 2021c). We acknowledge that such a measure could suffer from subjective biases due to general trends, as suggested by (Little and Meng, 2023).

Hence, we use an additional measure to run our robustness checks, that is the number of university in each country in 1968. The V-Dem database gives access to the number of universities in each country (Apfeld, 2019). Since the 1968 protests started with several universities occupations, we use this measure as an additional proxy to measure the intensity of the protests in 1968.

3.2 Satisfaction with Government

Given the atmosphere of dissatisfaction with the incumbent political class in 1968, the first thing we want to test is whether the exposure to the 1968 events permanently affected the level of satisfaction with governments of those aged between 18 and 25 in 1968.

To measure satisfaction with governments we use answers to the following question: “Now thinking about the [country] government, how satisfied are you with the way it is doing its job?” Answers to this question are on a 0-10 scale with 0 meaning the lowest level of satisfaction and 10 the highest.

3.3 Populist voting

The first effort when studying voting for populism is to define which parties can be labeled as populists. We follow the classification of the PopuList project by Rooduijn et al. (2019). This project classifies all the populist parties in Europe from 1989 onward involving more than 80 European academics, and it is widely used to study populism in Europe (see e.g. Di Cocco and Monechi, 2021; Guiso et al., 2020). The PopuList project follows the definition of populism proposed by Mudde (2004), considering populist parties all those parties “*that endorse the set of ideas that society is ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people.*”⁴ This definition is a common approach in the literature and has also been chosen by Guriev and Papaioannou (2020) for their review on the political economy of populism. We use the most updated classification that refers to the beginning of 2020⁵.

In the ESS, individuals are asked both which party they voted for in the last national election and which party they feel closest to. In both questions, individuals have to choose from a set of possible parties. We draw on this information to build two dummy variables: the first variable takes a value equal to one if the respondent voted for a populist party and zero otherwise; the second variable is equal to one if the respondent feels close to a populist party and zero otherwise.

3.4 Control Variables and Countries

In our main analysis, we focus on the countries hosting one or more populist parties in the political arena, and on those countries for which we have data on protests or demonstrations in 1968. In particular, our analysis comprehends Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Denmark, Spain, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Sweden. We exclude the regions that were part of the German Democratic Republic and Eastern European countries since the 1968 events are not comparable with those in Western European countries (McDermott and Stibbe, 2018).

We include a broad set of controls to capture the potentially confounding effects of other drivers of our outcomes. Specifically, we control for years of education, household income, gender, age, religious identity, marital status, and unemployment experiences. We include a set of dummies to control for the employment status of the respondents’ parents when the respondents were 14 years old. Last, we include the year of birth, survey round, and country fixed effects.

3.5 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the full sample in the first two columns. In the following columns, the table shows the statistics for the countries that are categorized as low and high intensity in the level of protests in 1968 and the standardized difference of

⁴<https://popu-list.org/about/>

⁵A list of the populist parties can be found at the website www.popu-list.org.

the variables. To discriminate between countries with high and low intensity of protests we used the number of protests with anti-government sentiments in each country in 1968. Countries in which the number of protests was equal to or below the average are in the “low intensity” category and vice-versa.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
	Full Sample		Low Intensity		High Intensity		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Standardized Difference
Age	49.767	(17.928)	49.541	(17.925)	50.205	(17.926)	0.026
Income Decile	5.913	(2.677)	5.996	(2.645)	5.753	(2.730)	-0.064
Unemployed last 3 months	0.267	(0.442)	0.256	(0.437)	0.288	(0.453)	0.050
Male	0.489	(0.5)	0.493	(0.500)	0.483	(0.500)	-0.014
Years of Education	12.828	(4.168)	12.663	(4.302)	13.144	(3.876)	0.083
Married	0.509	(0.5)	0.523	(0.499)	0.482	(0.500)	-0.058
Religious Belonging	0.558	(0.497)	0.559	(0.497)	0.558	(0.497)	-0.001
Father Unemployed when 14	0.034	(0.18)	0.033	(0.179)	0.035	(0.183)	0.007
Mother Unemployed when 14	0.518	(0.5)	0.546	(0.498)	0.464	(0.499)	-0.117
Left-Right Scale	5.018	(2.087)	5.103	(2.086)	4.853	(2.079)	-0.085
Attend Public Demonstrations	0.089	(0.285)	0.086	(0.280)	0.096	(0.295)	0.025
Importance of Traditions	4.177	(1.397)	4.268	(1.348)	4.002	(1.471)	-0.133
Support for Direct Democracy	8.125	(2.048)	8.141	(2.049)	8.097	(2.044)	-0.015
Government Satisfaction	4.396	(2.367)	4.647	(2.375)	3.912	(2.274)	-0.224
Vote for Populist Party	0.064	(0.245)	0.066	(0.249)	0.060	(0.237)	-0.019
Feel Close to Populist Party	0.05	(0.219)	0.052	(0.221)	0.048	(0.214)	-0.011
Observations	122,650		80,795		41,855		

Notes: Standard errors are clustered at the country level. Survey year fixed effects are controlled for. Low (high) intensity refers to countries where the number of anti-government protests in 1968 was lower or equal (higher than) to the average.

On average, individuals in our sample are 50 years old and the sample is gender-balanced -49 percent of the sample is formed by male individuals. The mean level of satisfaction with national governments is quite low -4.4 on a scale from 0 to 10. Around 6 percent of the sample declares to have voted for a populist party, while around 5 percent of individuals feel close to a populist party.

The standardized difference shows no systematic differences between the group of individuals living in countries where the intensity of the 1968 protests was low and individuals living in countries where the intensity of the 1968 protests was high, meaning that the two groups are comparable in terms of observational characteristics -the threshold level of 25% is never violated (Imbens and Wooldridge, 2009).

3.6 Empirical Strategy

Ideally, to uncover the causal relationship between discontent with governments and populism, we should run an experiment where the experimenter exogenously decreases the level of government satisfaction to a group of people and not to others. Then, we should see whether the treated group -those with a lower level of satisfaction- vote for populist parties. It is unlikely to run such an experiment in reality. Hence, we build on past experience and, in the perspective of our study, the exposure to the atmosphere of government dissatisfaction of the 1968 is the “treatment” -i.e. is the factor that decreases

satisfaction with governments to a group of people.

According to the impressionable years hypothesis, people form their long-term opinions when they are between 18 and 25 years old (Krosnick and Alwin, 1989). If this hypothesis is true, we should find that the feelings of dissatisfaction toward governments and political elites that characterized the 1968 have long-lasting effects only for those aged between 18 and 25 years old during the year 1968. The challenge of our empirical strategy is to identify the effect that the exposure to the 1968 protests has on those who were in their impressionable years in 1968. This challenge arises because those who were between 18 and 25 in 1968 might be exposed to a number of different experiences or events that might have shaped their preferences or attitudes.

To try to get rid of this limitation, we merge the ESS data with the SPEED data. We add to the ESS data the number of protests with anti-government sentiments that took place in 1968 in each country. We then build a dummy variable equal to one for those countries with a number of anti-government protests higher than the average and zero otherwise so that we differentiate between countries that experienced a high level of government dissatisfaction with those who experienced a low level of government dissatisfaction⁶. In fact, as explained in the previous section, although the 1968 protests have been a European phenomenon, the intensity of this phenomenon varied from country to country. Table A1 in the appendix reports the number of anti-government protests in each country. We then interact the dummy variable capturing the intensity of protests in 1968 with a dummy variable that takes a value equal to one for people aged between 18 and 25 in 1968 and zero otherwise. Hence, we deem “treated” only those who were in their impressionable years in 1968 in a country with a high intensity of dissatisfaction with governments⁷. This identification allows us to control for the year of birth fixed effect, since we have individuals who are between 18 and 25 in 1968 who are not treated as they are in a country with a low intensity of government dissatisfaction. We also include the interaction between the year of birth fixed effect and the educational attainment, since in 1968 some universities abandoned the usual examinations and, as a result, the pass rate of examinations increased (Maurin and McNally, 2008). Furthermore, we can also control for country fixed effects, so as to exclude that the results are driven by some fundamental differences between countries with a high number of protests in 1968 and countries with a low number of protests in 1968.

In a nutshell, we estimate the following linear model:

$$Attitudes_{ict} = \alpha + \beta Impressionables_i * D_i + \gamma X_{ict} + C_i * Educ_i + \sigma_c * \eta_t + \epsilon_{ict} \quad (1)$$

Where $Attitudes_{ict}$ is our outcome variable that is either satisfaction with government or populist voting for respondent i at time t in country c ; $Impressionables_i$ is a variable

⁶We use a dummy variable to facilitate the interpretation of the results. In Table A3 we replicate the main results. Results do not change significantly also when the variable of interests takes different functional forms.

⁷Unfortunately, we have no access to more detailed data on protests. We can only use cross-country variation, this is a limitation of our study.

that takes a value equal to one for those who were between 18 and 25 years old in 1968 and zero otherwise; D_i is a variable taking value equal to one for the countries with a number of anti-government protests higher than the average; X_{ict} is a series of individual controls including gender, age, age squared, years of education, parents' employment when the respondent was 14 years old, religious belonging, marital status, and unemployment experiences; $C_i * Educ_i$ are year of birth fixed effects interacted with education; σ_c and η_t are country and time fixed effects.

We restrict our sample only to respondents who declare to be born in the country where they currently live. This should ensure that respondents spent the impressionable years in the same country where they live (and vote) now. With our broad set of covariates, we try to control for additional factors that might drive our results. The inclusion of the dummy variables concerning parents' employment when the respondent was 14 years old should control for the economic situation of the respondent during his/her impressionable years. The interaction between the survey year and the respondents' country should capture any country and time-specific shocks, such as elections or natural disasters.

We also employ an alternative identification by restricting our sample to those who were between 1 and 48 in 1968, so to compare only individuals who experienced the 1968 events. Specifically, we build a set of dummy variables that take a value equal to one for each six-year cohort from 1969 to 1970 and we interact each cohort with the dummy variable measuring the intensity of the protests. Our base category comprehends those who were between 13 and 18 in 1968, so to have a control group most similar to our treatment group (people aged 19-24 in 1968). The rest of the specification is identical to equation (1). This last estimation is in the spirit of a study event. If the impressionable year hypothesis is true, we should find that only the treated cohort significantly differs from our base category.

We then run additional robustness checks and placebo tests. First, we estimate our main results using alternative measures to proxy disappointment with the political class in 1968. We take advantage of the measures in the V-Dem database and proxy the intensity of dissatisfaction in 1968 with a measure of mass mobilization and with the number of universities at the country level. Second, we replicate our main specification by estimating the effect of having been in other ranges of age -outside the impressionable years- in 1968 on our outcome variables. We then check whether the exposure to government dissatisfaction affects other unrelated outcomes. Last, we restrict our sample by excluding one country at a time to rule out the possibility that the results are driven by a particular cohort in a certain country or by the composition of the control group.

4 Results

In this section, we report and discuss our main results. We also show robustness checks and placebo tests to support the validity of our results.

Table 2: Main Results

	(1) Government Satisfaction	(2) Feel Close to Populist Party	(3) Vote for Populist Party
Aged 18-25 x High level of protests in 1968	-0.185*** (0.057)	0.006* (0.003)	0.014** (0.005)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	122,650	122,650	122,650
R-squared	0.205	0.076	0.076
Mean Dep. Var.	4.396	0.050	0.064

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

4.1 Government Dissatisfaction and Populist voting

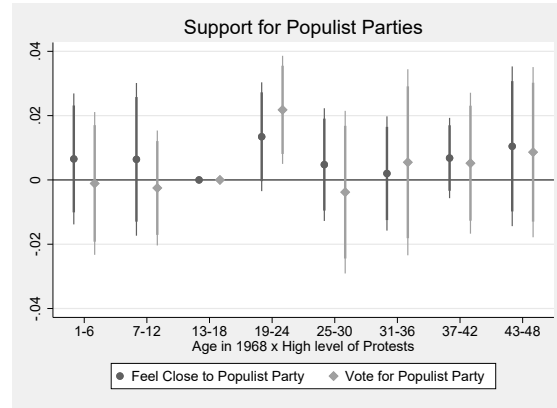
Populist parties usually build their consensus on a widespread feeling of dissatisfaction toward the incumbent political class (Kitschelt, 2002; Oesch, 2008), however showing a causal effect of dissatisfaction with incumbent governments on populism voting is a challenge. Our empirical design helps to overcome the usual problems that undermine the uncovering of a causal relationship since we build on past experience: having experienced the 1968 atmosphere of dissatisfaction is plausibly exogenous to the current wave of populism.

The results in Table 2 show that those who were most exposed to the 1968 anti-government protests are less satisfied with current governments and are more likely to feel close to or vote for a populist party. Specifically, having experienced the 1968 events during the impressionable years lowers government satisfaction by 0.185 ($p<0.05$) units -that is 4% of the sample mean-, increases the probability of feeling close to a populist party by around 12% of the sample mean -0.6 percentage points ($p<0.10$)- and increases the probability of voting for a populist party by around 21% of the sample mean -1.4 percentage points ($p<0.05$)⁸.

We then show the results of our alternative specification in Figures 2 and 3. In this case, we focus on those who were between 1 and 48 years old in 1968 and we build a set of dummies for each six-year cohort. The base category includes those who were between 13 and 18 years old. The results of Figure 2 are very similar to our main estimation and show that those who were in their impressionable years in 1968 and who have been most exposed to the protests are more likely to vote for populist parties ($p<0.05$). Consistently with the impressionable years hypothesis, we do not find any significant effect on the other cohorts. We find similar results also when investigating the probability of feeling close to a populist party. Figure 3 shows the effects of being exposed to the 1968 events on government satisfaction. We find that being exposed to 1968 protests decreases the

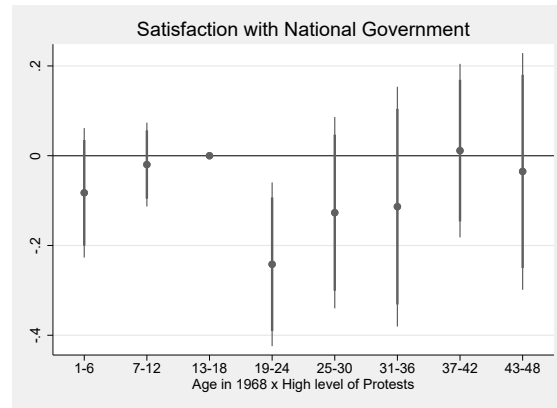
⁸These effects are quite in line with other studies on populism using survey data (see e.g. Guiso et al., 2020).

Figure 3: Exposure to 1968 events and Support for Populist Parties



Notes: The figure plots the coefficients of a linear model. The base category of the regression comprehends individuals aged 13-18 in 1968. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging, and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. Confidence intervals are at 10 and 5 %.

Figure 4: Exposure to 1968 events and Government Satisfaction



Notes: The figure plots the coefficients of a linear model. The base category of the regression comprehends individuals aged 13-18 in 1968. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging, and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at the country level. Confidence intervals are at 10 and 5 %.

satisfaction toward national governments ($p < 0.05$). Again, this effect is true only for those who were in their impressionable years in 1968.

4.2 Robustness checks and Placebo Tests

To test the robustness of our results, we adopt alternative measures to proxy the intensity of dissatisfaction in 1968. First, we use the measure of mass mobility that refers to the year 1968. Such a measure could suffer from subjective biases due to general trends, as suggested by (Little and Meng, 2023). Hence, we also use the number of universities in 1968 as a proxy for exposure to 1968 events. Both measures are at the country level and are taken by merging the ESS with the V-Dem database (Coppedge et al., 2021a). With these specifications, we are also able to include a higher number of countries in our sample⁹. The summary statistics that refer to this sample can be found in Table A2 in the Appendix.

Table 3 shows the results of being exposed to the 1968 events measured by the mass mobility index in the V-Dem database. We find that an average exposure to the 1968 events increases the probability of feeling close to a populist party by 0.1 percentage points¹⁰, that is around 3% of the mean ($p < 0.05$), while it increases the probability of voting for a populist party by 0.1 percentage points, that is 3% of the mean ($p < 0.05$).

Table 4 shows the effect of the exposure to the 1968 events as measured by the number of universities per country. The results suggest that being between 18 and 25 years old in a country with an average number of universities in 1968 increases the probability of feeling close to a populist party by 0.5 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), corresponding to the 10% of the sample mean. While being during the impressionable age in a country with an average number of universities increases the probability to vote for populist parties by 1 percentage points ($p < 0.01$), corresponding to the 14% of the sample mean. We find no effects on government satisfaction.

Table 3: Main Results Mass Mobilization

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Government Satisfaction	Feel Close to Populist Party	Vote for Populist Party
Aged 18-25 x Mass Mobilization in 1968	-0.0081 (0.0184)	0.0028** (0.0011)	0.0038** (0.0016)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	155,443	155,443	155,443
R-squared	0.1855	0.0642	0.0742
Mean Dep. Var.	4.463	0.0521	0.0709

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

We also run a standard test in the literature and show the effects of being aged

⁹The countries covered in this case are Austria, Belgium, West Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden.

¹⁰This number is obtained by multiplying the regression coefficient with the mean of the mass mobility index.

Table 4: Main Results Number of Universities

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Government Satisfaction	Feel Close to Populist Party	Vote for Populist Party
Aged 18-25 x Number of University by Country in 1968	-0.0009 (0.0005)	0.0001*** (0.0000)	0.0002*** (0.0001)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	155,443	155,443	155,443
R-squared	0.1856	0.0643	0.0743
Mean Dep. Var.	4.463	0.0521	0.0709

The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

outside the impressionable years in 1968 on our outcome variables. We use the whole sample -i.e. we include also individuals born after 1968- and we estimate a different regression for each cohort aged outside the impressionable years in 1968. Consistent with the impressionable years hypothesis we do not find any effect comparable with our main results. We also include those who were between 14 and 18 years old since young people in high schools were particularly active during 1968. However, we do not find any effect of being between 14 and 18 years old in 1968 on our outcomes.

Table 5: Other Age in 1968

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Government Satisfaction	Feel Close to Populist Party	Vote for Populist Party
Aged 2-9 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.071 (0.048)	0.003 (0.004)	-0.004 (0.005)
Aged 10-17 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.030 (0.065)	0.004 (0.005)	0.003 (0.006)
Aged 14-18 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.004 (0.073)	0.001 (0.005)	0.005 (0.004)
Aged 26-33 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.140 (0.089)	0.003 (0.008)	0.001 (0.011)
Aged 34-41 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.006 (0.101)	0.002 (0.009)	0.008 (0.009)
Aged 42-49 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.028 (0.077)	0.001 (0.006)	0.003 (0.007)
Aged 50-57 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.215 (0.153)	0.017 (0.014)	0.024 (0.018)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	122,650	122,650	122,650

Notes: The table reports the main results for the other cohorts in 1968. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table 6: Other Outcomes

	(1) People Trust	(2) People Fair	(3) Redistribution
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.019 (0.046)	0.028 (0.059)	0.062 (0.050)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	122,529	122,398	121,651
R-squared	0.142	0.155	0.137
Mean Dep. Var.	5.432	6.020	2.253

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

As a placebo test, we regress our main results on a set of outcomes that should be unrelated to the 1968 events, namely interpersonal trust and preferences for redistribution. The results in Table 6 show no effects of the exposure to the 1968 events on interpersonal trust or preferences for redistribution. Last, we replicate our main results by dropping one country at a time. The results are shown in Table A3 in the appendix and do not change significantly with respect to our main results. This should ensure that our main results are not driven by a particular cohort in a particular country.

4.3 Mechanisms

The results and robustness checks presented so far suggest that people aged 18-25 in 1968 are more likely to support populist parties today. Our hypothesis is that the exposure to an atmosphere of distrust against political institutions might have persistently shaped the preferences of those who were in their impressionable years in 1968. However, the wave of protests in 1968 also caused a cultural backlash among individuals who were less prone to cultural change. Furthermore, there are two fundamental differences between the 1968 movements and today's populism: 1) 1968 political movements were mainly driven by left-leaning movements 2) 1968 movements demanded higher democratic participation and it was contrary to authoritative leaders (Mudde, 2004). Hence, many questions may arise: do our results apply equally both to left and right populism? Who is driving the results? What is the link between populism in 1968 and today's populism? This section tries to bring some evidence to answer these questions.

The role of education First, we are interested in understanding how our results might apply to different strata of the population. For this reason, we show our main results

by dividing the sample into three main groups, depending on the level of education: those with elementary education (less than 9 years of education), with a middle level of education (between 9 and 13 years of education), and with a high level of education (more than 13 years of education). Table 7 shows that our results are driven by individuals with a low and middle level of education. This finding is in line with the literature suggesting that populist parties are supported by people with a low level of education. However, there could be several mechanisms underlying our results. The literature shows that low-educated people are more likely to be attracted by the populist rhetoric and to vote for populist parties (Inglehart and Norris, 2017; Spruyt et al., 2016). Also, people with a low socioeconomic background are more likely to have a cultural backlash and are more attracted by the anti-elite rhetoric (Inglehart and Norris, 2016; Marx and Nguyen, 2018). These aspects were all present in 1968. To try to pinpoint the different drivers that could have pushed low-educated-individuals to vote for populist parties we further explore individuals' long-term individual preferences and whether people vote for some specific form of populist parties.

Table 7: Main Results by Education Level

	(1) Government Satisfaction	(2) Feel Close to Populist Party	(3) Vote for Populist Party
Panel A Low Education			
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.053 (0.105)	0.004 (0.006)	0.026*** (0.004)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	16,082	16,082	16,082
R-squared	0.184	0.126	0.123
Mean Dep. Var.	4.396	0.0504	0.0641
Panel B Middle Education			
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.255*** (0.060)	0.014** (0.006)	0.015** (0.005)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	56,654	56,654	56,654
R-squared	0.214	0.091	0.083
Mean Dep. Var.	4.396	0.0504	0.0641
Panel C High Education			
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.145 (0.099)	0.002 (0.006)	0.010 (0.011)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	49,915	49,915	49,915
R-squared	0.214	0.050	0.066
Mean Dep. Var.	4.396	0.0504	0.0641

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Heterogeneity on Populist Parties To better understand whether those who were aged 18-25 in 1968 were more likely to support some specific forms of populist parties we classify whether a populist party is far-right-leaning, far-left-leaning, or not. Again, we follow the categorization by Rooduijn et al. (2019). We present our results by dividing the sample by education levels. Table 8 shows some interesting differences in populist voting, depending on the level of education. Highly educated individuals are not very supportive of populist parties. If anything, the results appear to suggest that highly educated individuals are more likely to support far-left-leaning populist parties. Individuals with a middle and a low level of education both are supportive of populist parties. However, while the former are more likely to vote exclusively for far-right populist parties, the latter are more likely to vote for right-wing and other generic populist parties. This result might suggest that the drivers of populist support differ between individuals with a low and a middle level of education.

Table 8: Main Results (heterogeneity on populist parties)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Voted for Populist Party	Voted for Left Populist Party	Voted for Right Populist Party	Voted for Other Populist Party
Panel A				
	Low Education			
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.026*** (0.004)	0.001 (0.004)	0.014 (0.008)	0.011 (0.009)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	16,082	16,082	16,082	16,082
R-squared	0.123	0.052	0.089	0.170
Mean Dep. Var.	0.0641	0.0173	0.0358	0.0110
Panel B				
	Middle Education			
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.015** (0.005)	0.003 (0.003)	0.012* (0.006)	0.000 (0.001)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	56,654	56,654	56,654	56,654
R-squared	0.083	0.069	0.071	0.179
Mean Dep. Var.	0.0641	0.0173	0.0358	0.0110
Panel C				
	High Education			
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.010 (0.011)	0.010 (0.007)	0.003 (0.007)	-0.002 (0.005)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	49,915	49,915	49,915	49,915
R-squared	0.066	0.067	0.032	0.157
Mean Dep. Var.	0.0641	0.0173	0.0358	0.0110

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Long-term Preferences One way to interpret our results is that the people with a middle level of education could have developed more conservative preferences. Possibly, among those who were in their impressionable years in 1968, individuals with a middle level of education might have been against the shift in values that the 1968 movements

proposed. If this is the case, the cultural backlash might be the common experience linking 1968 events with today’s populism. The same reasoning cannot be applied to people with a low level of education as they are more willing to support populist parties in general. As low-educated individuals appear to be more supportive of populist parties in general, the possible driver linking 1968 movements with today’s populism is the anti-elite sentiment.

Unfortunately, we do not know whether individuals were supportive of or against the 1968 political movements. To shed light on these mechanisms, we look at long-term preferences. First, we try to understand whether those who experienced the 1968 protests are more likely to develop conservative preferences and might have been more supportive of the 1968 protests. To do this, we look at three different outcomes, namely: 1) self-positioning on a left-right scale¹¹; 2) willingness to participate in public demonstrations¹²; and 3) attachment to traditions and customs¹³. Outcome 1) is motivated by the fact that the 1968 movements were mainly left-leaning. Hence, we expect that people supportive of those movements may still today be more willing to self-position on the left, and vice-versa. Outcome 2) is motivated by the fact that if people were supportive of the 1968 protests, they might be more willing to join public demonstrations later in life. Outcome 3) is meant to measure a possible cultural backlash. People who were against the cultural shifts proposed by the 1968 movements might be more attached to traditional values.

In addition to these three outcomes, we try to understand the extent to which anti-elite sentiment might be the common experience -which is driving our results- between the 1968 events and today’s populism. For this purpose, we exploit a question in the 6th round of the ESS which asks respondents about their support for direct democracy¹⁴. Support for direct democracy is a core feature of populist parties, since -according to populist rhetoric- it gives voice to the ‘volonté générale’ (Mohrenberg et al., 2021). Again, we show all these results for each level of education.

The results show interesting differences between the three different levels of education. Specifically, Table 9 shows that people with a middle level of education who were exposed to 1968 protests are now more likely to self-position on the right, are less likely to join public demonstrations, and are more attached to traditional values. On the other hand, people with a low level of education are more likely to self-position on the left (although this result is not significant), do not show particular attachment to traditional

¹¹The original question asks: “In politics people sometimes talk of ‘left’ and ‘right’. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?”

¹²The original question asks the respondents whether they took part in lawful public demonstrations in the last 12 months. From this question, we create a dummy variable which takes value equal to 1 if the answer is yes and zero otherwise.

¹³The original question asks the respondents how much they feel to be similar to people thinking that it is important to follow traditions and customs. Answers are on a 1-6 scale, we re-coded the answers so that 6 corresponds to “very much like me” and 1 corresponds to “not like me at all”.

¹⁴The question asks: “And still thinking generally rather than about [country], how important do you think it is for democracy in general that citizens have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums?”. Possible answers are on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means ‘Not at all important for democracy in general’ and 10 ‘Extremely important for democracy in general’.

values, and are much more likely to support direct democracy. Last, highly educated people are less likely to support direct democracy.

Overall, these results seem to suggest that the drivers of our findings are different for people with a low and a middle level of education. The 1968 events might have influenced low-educated people by making them more prone to anti-elitism, while people with a middle education might have been not supportive of the 1968 movements and might have become more conservative and more attached to traditional values.

Table 9: Long-Term Preferences

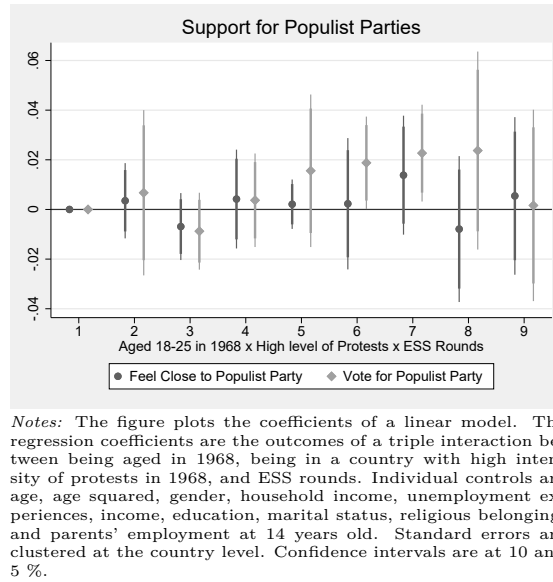
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Left-Right Scale	Attend Public Demonstration	Importance of Tradition	Support Direct Democracy
Panel A Low Education				
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.189 (0.143)	0.003 (0.007)	-0.037 (0.045)	0.666** (0.220)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Country FE				Yes
Observations	14,241	16,055	15,480	1,428
R-squared	0.083	0.060	0.205	0.156
Mean Dep. Var.	5.018	0.0894	4.177	8.126
Panel B Middle Education				
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.110** (0.041)	-0.018** (0.008)	0.132** (0.046)	0.004 (0.105)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Country FE				Yes
Observations	52,876	56,599	55,074	6,433
R-squared	0.070	0.049	0.178	0.064
Mean Dep. Var.	5.018	0.0894	4.177	8.126
Panel C High Education				
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.025 (0.112)	0.018 (0.012)	0.024 (0.050)	-0.315** (0.132)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Country FE				Yes
Observations	48,080	49,856	49,023	6,126
R-squared	0.102	0.077	0.170	0.117
Mean Dep. Var.	5.018	0.0894	4.177	8.126

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Activation of populist preferences Our main results can be due to the activation of a latent or a persistent preference of the individuals. To understand if this is the case, we follow the approach of Ochsner and Roesel (2017) and Cantoni et al. (2019) and we try to understand whether the experience of 1968 might have been activated

when the supply of populist parties increased¹⁵. Figure 5 shows the results of a triple interaction between being aged 18-25 in 1968, being in a country with a high intensity of protests, and the ESS rounds. The results show that support for populist parties was stronger in rounds 5 to 8, which corresponds to the years 2010 to 2016. The pattern displayed in Figure 5 brings suggestive evidence in support of the fact that exposure to an atmosphere in which traditional values are challenged and political movements are more likely to use populist rhetoric -as in 1968-, can be ‘activated’ when these issues enter again in the political arena. Indeed, the effect of our results is strongest starting from 2010, when the supply of populist parties and the saliency of anti-elite rhetoric increased (Valentim, 2021). We show this also in Table 10, where we split the sample into two periods: before and after 2010.

Figure 5: Exposure to 1968 events and Support for Populist Parties over time



¹⁵We are indebted to a referee for this suggestion.

Table 10: Vote for Populist Parties over time

	(1) Vote for Populist Party (before 2010)	(2) Vote for Populist Party (after 2010)
Aged 18-25 x High level of protests in 1968	0.004 (0.008)	0.022*** (0.005)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes
Observations	54,234	68,410
R-squared	0.067	0.082
Mean Dep. Var.	0.0641	0.0641

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

5 Discussion and Conclusion

During the last years of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s younger cohorts were increasingly dissatisfied with the then political class. Feelings of frustration toward political institutions reached their peak in 1968 when young people protested against the status quo worldwide. According to the literature, the 1968 events are an early manifestation of modern populism as it opposed ‘the pure people’ with a ‘corrupted elite’ (Mudde, 2004).

In this paper, we build on the impressionable years hypothesis (Krosnick and Alwin, 1989) and we investigate the long-term effects of the 1968 events in Europe to explore the link between dissatisfaction with political institutions and support for populist parties. We show that those who were most exposed to the 1968 protests during their formative age are less satisfied with the national government and are more inclined to vote for or feel close to populist parties. We do not find similar effects for other cohorts. We run also a series of placebo tests and robustness checks to support the validity of our results. Last, we show that our results are driven by individuals with a middle and a low level of education. When digging deeper into the mechanisms, we find that although both individuals with a low and a middle level of education are more likely to support populist parties, the drivers of the results differ. Specifically, we find that, among low-educated people, the long-term preference between 1968 and today’s populism could be anti-elite sentiment. This is consistent with literature showing that the populist anti-elite rhetoric might attract those who are dissatisfied with the political status quo (Acemoglu et al., 2013). On the other hand, we find that people with a middle level of education have developed more conservative preferences. This result might suggest that individuals with a middle level of education were against the 1968 movements and that the values change proposed by the 1968 movements triggered a cultural backlash in that part of the population. As a consequence, the defense of traditional values appears to be the driver of voting for populist parties for middle-educated individuals exposed to 1968 events.

The literature on populism suggests that one of the drivers of individual support for populist parties is the feeling of frustration generated by economic hardship or cultural changes (Cerqua et al., 2023; Colantone and Stanig, 2019; Guiso et al., 2020; Inglehart and Norris, 2016). Economic shocks or cultural backlashes fuel feelings of dissatisfaction toward governments and detach people from the prevailing political parties, thus paving the way for the rise of populism. However, the direct relation between dissatisfaction toward governments and support for populism has been less explored.

Our results contribute to the understanding of people’s support for populist parties by providing evidence of a causal nexus between sentiments of dissatisfaction and populist voting. The literature presents some possibilities on why those who are dissatisfied with political institutions might vote for populist parties. According to research in political science, people vote for populist parties to express their discontent against the prevailing political class (Betz, 1994; Mayer and Perrineau, 1992). Alternatively, economic literature suggests that disappointed voters might become more risk lovers and support the short-term policies proposed by populist parties, rather than the safe

long-term policies proposed by the incumbent (Panunzi et al., 2020). We bring evidence showing that people who experienced strong dissatisfaction toward political elites or who experienced cultural backlashes in the past, are today more likely to vote for populist parties. Perhaps, our greatest contribution is to show that the underlying mechanisms leading to populist voting might differ depending on the level of education. Indeed, we show that the same political atmosphere differently affected the long-term preferences of those with a middle, low, and high level of education. An interesting avenue for future research is to further investigate the interaction between education and pivotal political experiences in developing long-term political preferences.

Finally, our results show that exposure to an atmosphere of general dissatisfaction toward politics during formative years affects voting preferences in the long run. Citizens' active participation and trust in political institutions is crucial for the well functioning of a democracy (Aghion et al., 2010; Algan et al., 2016; Becker et al., 2016; Cerqueti et al., 2019). Further research is needed to understand the possible effects of permanent dissatisfaction with political institutions.

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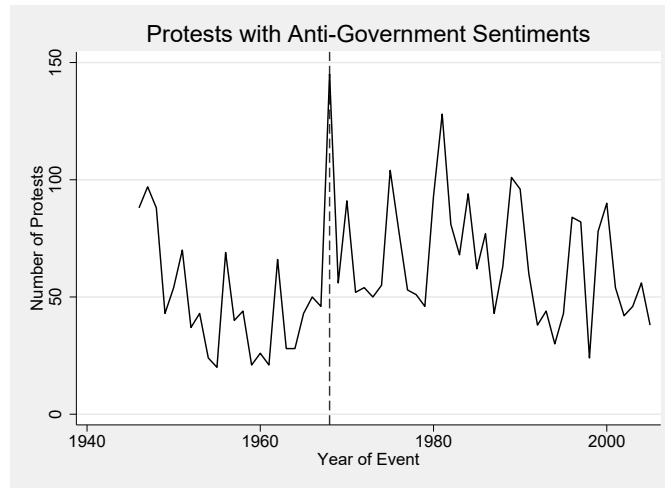
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Appendix

Figure A1: Number of Protests 1945-2005 without the UK



Notes: Data are taken from the Social, Political and Economic Event Database (SPEED).

Table A1: Protests with Anti-Government Sentiments in 1968

Country	Number	Above Mean
Netherlands	0	No
Belgium and Ireland	1	No
Switzerland and Sweden	2	No
Denmark	3	No
Greece	6	No
Spain	9	No
Great Britain	12	Yes
Italy	13	Yes
West Germany	17	Yes
France	39	Yes

Table A2: Summary Statistics

Variable	Mean	(Std. Dev.)
Age	49.651	(17.937)
Income Decile	5.909	(2.663)
Unemployment experiences last 3 months	0.275	(0.446)
Male	0.493	(0.5)
Years of Education	13.018	(4.11)
Married	0.504	(0.5)
Religious Belonging	0.556	(0.497)
Father Unemployed when 14	0.033	(0.18)
Mother Unemployed when 14	0.469	(0.499)
Number of Universities in 1968	51.49	(53.966)
Mass Mobility Measure in 1968	0.491	(1.642)
Government Satisfaction	4.463	(2.349)
Vote for Populist Party	0.071	(0.257)
Feel Close to Populist Party	0.052	(0.222)
Observations	155,443	

Table A3: Main Results (continuous variable for protests)

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Government Satisfaction	Feel Close to Populist Party	Vote for Populist Party
Aged 18-25 x Protests (continuous)	-0.0037 (0.0027)	0.0002* (0.0001)	0.0005** (0.0002)
Aged 18-25 x Protests (squared root)	-0.0262 (0.0179)	0.0015** (0.0006)	0.0034*** (0.0011)
Aged 18-25 x Protests (log)	-0.0358 (0.0256)	0.0022** (0.0008)	0.0046*** (0.0014)
Individual Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year of Birth FE x Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country x Year Survey FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	122,650	122,650	122,650

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Table A4: Main Results Excluding one country at a time

Excluded Country	Government Satisfaction											
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
Belgium		Switzerland	Germany	Denmark	Spain	France	Great Britain	Greece	Ireland	Italy	Netherlands	Sweden
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	-0.193** (0.0621)	-0.205*** (0.0584)	-0.152** (0.0540)	-0.193*** (0.0607)	-0.170** (0.0614)	-0.225*** (0.0524)	-0.193** (0.0733)	-0.172** (0.0587)	-0.154** (0.0512)	-0.172** (0.0566)	-0.197*** (0.0603)	-0.195** (0.0634)
<i>N</i>	110732	113820	110635	114326	112480	110642	109253	116984	111617	118215	110033	110412
<i>R</i> ²	0.214	0.183	0.211	0.204	0.197	0.203	0.220	0.195	0.207	0.207	0.203	0.206
Feel Close to Populist Party												
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.00578 (0.00324)	0.00768** (0.00247)	0.00628* (0.00302)	0.00620* (0.00322)	0.00594* (0.00310)	0.00592 (0.00344)	0.00448 (0.00292)	0.00515 (0.00292)	0.00547 (0.00328)	0.00730** (0.00288)	0.00430 (0.00278)	0.00668* (0.00334)
<i>N</i>	110732	113820	110635	114326	112480	110642	109253	116984	111617	118215	110033	110412
<i>R</i> ²	0.079	0.070	0.080	0.081	0.073	0.078	0.075	0.078	0.081	0.055	0.080	0.076
Vote for Populist Party												
Aged 18-25 in 1968 x High level of protests	0.0134** (0.00567)	0.0172*** (0.00374)	0.0127** (0.00500)	0.0154** (0.00517)	0.0120** (0.00529)	0.0120** (0.00451)	0.0155** (0.00494)	0.0128** (0.00509)	0.0127** (0.00519)	0.0142** (0.00499)	0.0115* (0.00532)	0.0135** (0.00578)
<i>N</i>	110732	113820	110635	114326	112480	110642	109253	116984	111617	118215	110033	110412
<i>R</i> ²	0.081	0.080	0.079	0.082	0.073	0.080	0.074	0.078	0.082	0.050	0.081	0.075

Notes: The table reports the coefficients of a linear model. Individual controls are age, age squared, gender, household income, unemployment experiences, income, education, marital status, religious belonging and parents' employment at 14 years old. Standard errors are clustered at country level.
Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1