

# The Rise of Populism:

Lessons for  
the European Union and  
the United States of America

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# Table of Contents

<i>Artis Pabriks</i>	
Foreword . . . . .	5
<i>Andis Kudors</i>	
Introduction . . . . .	11
<i>Ilze Balcerē</i>	
What Does Populism Really Mean? A Political Science Perspective . . . . .	17
<i>Anda Rožukalne</i>	
Is Populism Related Content the New Guilty Pleasure for Media and its Audiences? . . . . .	37
<i>Jānis Bērziņš</i>	
Neoliberalism, Austerity, and Economic Populism . . . . .	57
<i>Michael Kazin</i>	
Donald Trump and American Populism . . . . .	75
<i>Matthew Goodwin</i>	
Explaining the Vote for Brexit . . . . .	87
<i>Florian Hartleb</i>	
<i>It's migration, stupid!</i> Lessons from the Elections in Germany and the Netherlands in the Light of Populism . .	99

<i>Thierry Dominici &amp; Jean-Louis Alessandri</i> The Front National's Populism: From the Far Right to the Normalization of an Identity Party . . . . .	119
<i>Angelos Chrysogelos</i> The Three Faces of Greek Populism Under EU Membership . . . . .	133
<i>Daunis Auers</i> Populism in the Baltic States . . . . .	151
<i>Andis Kudors &amp; Artis Pabriks</i> Conclusion . . . . .	169
Notes on Authors . . . . .	175

# Foreword

During recent years in different parts of the world, including established Western societies, we have witnessed a series of political events such as elections, referendums, changes of governments and Presidents, which seem to be difficult to explain according to previously established conventional political measurements. Frequently, these political “surprises” have been associated with rising populist sentiments in politics as well as in society in general.

There was a stunning outcome with the UK referendum on Brexit, the unexpected successes of parties like the Five Star Movement in Italy, increasing trends of separatism in a number of established Western democracies, as well as increasing anti-EU sentiment. Finally, there was the US Presidential election and surprising victory of Donald J. Trump who now is the President of strongest World power – the United States of America. These seemingly surprising results of well-established democratic processes have been explained by a number of analysts and academics as the outcome of rising populist policies. One could easily argue that the Gaist of Populism is hanging over us.

In this collection of researches we tried to answer a number of questions that surround populism. Looking from my personal perspective as an acting politician, it is highly interesting to observe the populist phenomenon simultaneously from inside politics as well as from a distance as a political scientist. I would like to touch upon some of these observations in this introduction, as they will be further elaborated on in this book by a number of authors.

To start with, we need to look at the definitions or what one can understand with the term 'populism'. If I combine both my professional experiences, namely as an academician and politician, I would agree with those who argue that populism is both a form and a content. As a form populism presents a political practice where a politician or political movement, or even a social organization like an NGO tries to identify itself as close as possible with ordinary people; with citizenry or society at large. Some do it better, some do it worse, but we all try to do it to a degree. Consequently, one can easily argue that populism is not something which is present or absent. Rather it is a question of a degree – to what level is it present in the arguments of an acting politician, a whole political party or a movement. In many ways, populism is a necessary ingredient like spices or salt in the soup which provides the possibility of being elected and re-elected. In a certain sense, it also grants legitimacy and the people's consent to the corresponding political actor. I truly believe that without a certain degree of populism such things as trust, loyalty, success and other elements in politics are much more difficult to reach regardless of whether it is democratic, authoritarian or even totalitarian politics. For democracies the use of populism is very much about elections and being re-elected while for authoritarian regimes it is frequently about the general legitimacy of the rule. Populism as a form of politics very much depends on communication means and skills. The ancient Greeks noticed that rhetoric should be an indivisible part of a successful politician in order to reach and convince citizens or society as such about the benefits of certain policies.

Today, when societies have become more complex and sizable, this role has also been played by different types of media. Lately, a particularly strong role has been played by social media which gives anyone the tools to get the message across and reach a wide audience. If I have to describe populism as content, I would support the views expressed by Daunis Auers in his chapter of this book who argues that populism is a practice of making irresponsible promises or policy proposals that are not grounded in any economic or political realism. Sometimes it might be quite difficult to distinguish between irresponsible promises, stupidity

or even blunt lies. One can argue that populism as content is also present in every political trend or party, right or left – the difference is to what degree that forms the views and policies of the concrete political force. As an example of this, I recall an infamous but widespread remark by a certain Latvian politician who bluntly said: “How can we not give these promises?!” One cannot deny that, if a politician wants to be successful and popular, namely elected, he or she should give promises which sometimes are difficult or almost impossible to keep or implement. In one hand, it can be the case that sometimes politicians sincerely believe the unrealistic promises they give, which would show that they are victims of their own populism. On the other hand, there is no politician or political movement and party which is capable of keeping all their promises, realize all their plans or reach all their goals. That implies that by definition politicians give promises that are not fulfilled and, thus, they could be blamed for being populists. It should be common knowledge that no human is the mightiest and that there are situations which we can master, as well as there being situations in life where our possibility to influence events is close to zero. The common knowledge in politics is that if some 30 percent of political promises are fulfilled, a political actor can consider him or herself to be relatively successful. This reminds me of another revelation by one of my fellow politicians who noted that a successful politician in his/her first election must be capable of selling his vision of the world to people so that they elect him. Once the concrete politician is running for re-election, he/she must be capable of genuinely explaining why this vision did not turn into reality (yet) to still get re-elected.

Politicians and analysts frequently refer to populism when they talk of opposition parties or simply political opponents, thus trying to de-legitimize their claims or simply disqualify them as credible politicians. My observation is that populism is present as a teaser or a taste enhancer in all ideologies or political spectrums from left to right. Populism can be and is used while discussing or stating positions on a broad range of policies – starting from migration, asylum, terrorism, EU competences, and ending with various economic matters

including corruption, international trade, environment and even gender issues. For instance, arguments of opponents to international trade deals like CETA (Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement between the EU-Canada) or TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership; planned but currently abandoned negotiations on an EU-USA trade agreement) have been full of ungrounded accusations, false facts and popular appeal, to fears of the general public for just one reason – to halt progress in these negotiations and eventually stop the deals. Interestingly, in these as well as other cases populist policies could be observed not only among established political parties but also among NGO's who used the pages of populism playbook. Therefore, I would like to argue that populism is part of all spectres of societal life and politics in general.

It is rightly noted that populism as a form of political discourse is frequently used in alienated or divided societies to stress the imagined or existing distance between rulers and the ruled, between elites and the masses, or different ethnic or social groups. Populism per se is something that reminds us of people's deep communitarian wishes, what Rousseau would probably call "the general will of the people". Despite the fact that to a certain degree populism is an inherent part of everything political, it is important to search for an answer as to why populism is experiencing a resurgence in current politics, particularly now? I will not pretend that this one book can give the single ultimate answer to the rise of populism, but it will, however, highlight a number of trends in modern societies which are feeding populist sentiments.

I would like to distinguish the challenge of the modernisation of technologies as one of the sources of current populist resurgence. The technological revolution, particularly robotisation of the labour market, the rise of new communication technologies including social media, and the blurred line between the public and private spheres, as well as tensions between local and global identities creates a peculiar situation. These causes are adding to an already existing alienation between large parts of the population on one hand and political and economic elites on the other.

Partly due to robotisation and the globalisation of economies, an increasing number of people are feeling uncertainty about their incomes, jobs, and the future in general. Economic inequality is increasing in most Western countries. It provides the ground for populist offers from different political forces to overcome this problem by either utopic anti-globalisation movements or doubtful political and economic suggestions. In any case, it underlines the notion that our societies are searching for new and better economic models.

On the other hand, new electronic communication tools and social media platforms offer enormous possibilities for people to participate in social and political life. From the first glance it seems a great opportunity, however, it has its dark side and risks. It is rightly noted that some traditional media in previous decades have been turned into narrow elite platforms not representing the “real views” of the broader public, thus the average person on the street. At the same time social media risks becoming the platform of “vox populus” without any checks and balances of truth, lies, and consequences. Suddenly everyone becomes an expert on everything and can be used as a source of information.

In a broader picture the clash between the two types of media also represents the clash between political correctness and freedom of speech and opinion, direct democracy versus representative, possibly seen as an elitist democracy, and finally a certain clash between the globally thinking elites and locally thinking and acting “common man”.

The last clash, in my opinion, lies at the heart of current populist discourse. Most of us, despite all the fruits of modernisation, spend our lives in smaller communities, frequently speak only one language and cannot fully comprehend the broad narrative of the “Global world” and its challenges. Living locally is nothing wrong by definition because it gives people a certain security and feeling of predictability, a certain sense of communitarian solidarity we all long for from time to time. However, modern technologies, social media, changing labour conditions and other technological changes around us are increasingly forcing people who live local lives and prefer local identities to make global decisions. But these decisions cannot be correctly assessed only

through the local life perspective. It creates frustration, psychological and political tensions and opens the door to an illusion of the will of the people, being implemented via direct democracy in referendums on global matters, or at least blogs or reality shows.

No matter how harsh it sounds, I tend to think that currently our civilization is in the midst of a very changing World. It is a challenge and might be comparable to that what the ancient Greek civilisation once experienced after the collapse of the Empire of Alexander the Great. The locally thinking citizen and patriot of Greek polis suddenly faced the collapse of his small city-state world and entered another stretching until India, thanks to Alexander the Great. Traditional values, norms, beliefs, economic and political models and ideals were suddenly challenged. Readjustments had to be made. It took centuries of quests until another person was born on the ruins of the ancient world. The political animal of Aristotle, a community man of ancient polis turned into an individual standing alone on the frontier of the greater world, and alone in front of God. Just like then populism will accompany us now until today's societies and individuals find their way and adjust to the immense challenges we are currently facing. In the meantime I very much hope this book will shed light to our path going forward, and will help us not to fall again for the naked promises of populists once more.

*Artis Pabriks*

*Rīga & Brussels, November, 2017*

# Introduction

Although the wave of modern populism has reached the European Union and United States only during the last few years, the debate among scholars on the nature of populism has been unfolding for a relatively long time. Any concept that is becoming popular can start a new life – different from the original theory, and populism is no exception in this respect. Journalists, politicians and the general public embrace the concept of populism with new meanings, extending its use. A broader public often views populism as an emotional and simplified popular style of communication. Another rather widespread idea about populism is the perception of its use as promises which are unattainable but sound so sweet to voters' ear. Widening notions of popular concepts are an inevitable phenomenon; however, it is important to periodically listen to researchers so that we intend the same content when we use the same word.

If use of the Latin language in international communication avoids misunderstandings in medicine, anatomy and biology, then a match of understanding in political science is formed by the publication of scientific articles and books as well as discussions in conferences. One should not worry if theorists have different views about the content of one or another notion, but problems can arise when we look at these concepts and phenomena from different normative viewpoints. For example, one normative issue is whether populism is an anti-democratic phenomenon?

In one way populism is sometimes called the *democratic disorder*. However, researchers' opinions on this issue tend to vary. It is believed that populists are more reformist than revolutionary: they oppose not the political parties as such, but the parties that advocate establishment rather than the interests of the people. Populism is not anti-democratic at least in this sense because it defends democracy as the only legitimate regime. Populists criticize how democracy functions in a particular country at a specific time. If we continue with the positive effects of populism, then you can say that sometimes populism can have a positive effect on the political engagement of citizenry. Populists can encourage passive citizens' groups to have a political participation.

At the same time there are negative effects from populism. Are populists capable of fulfilling what has been promised and contribute to a sustainable development of nations after coming to power? Unfortunately, in the current wave of populism it becomes evident that populism, as a policy style, is well received by the radical flanks of the political spectrum. It should be noted, however, that ignorant people automatically call both the radical left-wing and radically right-wing parties' populists, but this is not necessarily true. The main feature of populism is not the expression of radical ideas, but the opposing *us* – 'the good people' against *you* – 'the bad establishment'.

Donald Trump's presidential inauguration speech can be regarded as an illustration of the essence of populism: "Today's ceremony, however, has very special meaning. Because today, we are not merely transferring power from one administration to another or from one party to another. But we are transferring power from Washington, D.C., and giving it back to you, the people. [...] The establishment protected itself but not the citizens of our country. Their victories have not been your victories."<sup>1</sup> So, according to a populist approach, the political struggle is not between parties and ideologies, but people and the establishment.

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<sup>1</sup> "President Trump's Inaugural Address," accessed October 11, 2017, Annotated, <http://www.npr.org/2017/01/20/510629447/watch-live-president-trumps-inauguration-ceremony>.

The insignificance of the names of political parties and the ideologies they advocate is highlighted in the continuation of Trump's speech: "What truly matters is not which party controls our government but whether our government is controlled by the people. January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2017 will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again."<sup>2</sup>

Following the election of Donald Trump, some felt that it was also possible in Europe and formerly sceptical observers became much more careful about Marine Le Pen's chances of becoming president of France. However, despite increased anxiety before the elections in France and the Netherlands, we saw that neither Marine Le Pen nor Geert Wilders were to become leaders of their nations and withdraw from the European Union. One of the questions the authors of the articles in this book are trying to answer is whether 2016 was the highest point in the wave of populism and whether it is already in recession, or if what we experienced was just the first step for populism heading towards having a central place in European politics.

This collection of articles is based on two principles – thematic and geographic. The first three articles are devoted to separate topics, while the others analyse populist cases in individual countries. In the first article Ilze Balcere leads the readers on a journey through the theoretical aspects of populism, creating a roadmap for the whole book. I. Balcere continues the theoretical debate about the historical roots of populism, the definitions of contemporary populism and theoretical boundaries of populism. Some authors write about individual countries (for example, Florian Hartleb and Daunis Auers) touch on populist theory too.

The second of the thematic articles that do not focus on a single country is the analysis by Anda Rožukalne on the topic of *mediated populism* and *populist media*. In her article Rožukalne examines the role of media in the dissemination of populist messages. She analyses, inter

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<sup>2</sup> "President Trump's Inaugural Address," accessed October 11, 2017, Annotated, <http://www.npr.org/2017/01/20/510629447/watch-live-president-trumps-inauguration-ceremony>.

alia, whether the media is just an instrument in the hands of populists, or if they pursue their own commercial interests, using opportunities offered by a specific political environment and moment. The third article is devoted to economic populism in which Jānis Bērziņš examines the essence, aims and consequences of this phenomenon. Latin American and other left-oriented populist policies serve as examples here. The inclusion of analysis of media and economic populism in this book reflects the objective to lift restrictions on the understanding of populism and to give the reader a wider picture of this phenomenon.

The geographic section of the book begins with Michael Kazin's article about latest populist trends in the United States, choosing the election of Donald Trump as President as the prime case. Michael Kazin points out that populism can be dangerous, but it may also be necessary, as a shock therapy or prevention against self-satisfied mainstream politicians falling asleep. Matthew Goodwin focuses in his article on Brexit's theme, analysing previous sentiments and trends of British Euro-scepticism and the mistakes and inaccuracies of its mainstream politicians, which was the reason for Britain leaving the EU.

Florian Hartleb has focused on populist manifestations in two EU countries where parliamentary elections were held in 2017 – the Netherlands and Germany. Hartleb examines some of the main features of populism and uses the comparative analysis of populist cases in both these countries, which greatly helps in understanding the essence of populism as such and the specifics of each countries concerned.

The article by Thierry Domici is devoted to populism in France, a country whose domestic policies have been particularly scrutinized for at least the past two years in connection with assumptions about the continuation of the Brexit cascade in other EU countries. The election results in France and the Netherlands allowed many Europeans to breathe and relax; still, there are many lessons to be learned not only for politicians in France and the Netherlands but also in other European countries.

Angelos Chrysogelos views populism as a long-standing and endemic phenomenon of Greek politics, pointing to a number of

historical and contemporary political and economic processes in Greece and throughout Europe that have contributed to the expressions of left-wing populism in Greece. The article by Chryssogelos enriches this volume of articles, drawing attention to the combination of politically left-wing ideas with populism and its consequences in Greek politics and economics. It is essential that Chryssogelos reaches further than the frontiers of Greece and presents his vision of how we can think conceptually of populism as a phenomenon of world politics, related to structural shifts beyond the nation-state. The essay by Daunis Auers leads the readers from the south to the north and analyses the roots and manifestations of populism in the Baltic States. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have achieved very good results in terms of restoring and consolidating democracy since the regaining of independence in 1991; however, the low levels of citizens' trust towards political parties is fertile soil for populists. Auers' article reveal common and different tendencies in the manifestations of populism in the Baltic States.

This book is currently the third project of the Centre for East European Policy Studies, implemented jointly by the MEP from Latvia, Artis Pabriks. The aim of this book is to continue the theoretical discussion of the nature of populism and to analyse the experience of the United States and several European countries, as well as formulate conclusions-based recommendations for politicians and decision-makers in Europe and the United States. The book is intended for a wide range of readers, for experts and students of comparative and foreign policy, communication science and economics, as well as for politicians and journalists. I would like to thank all the authors of the articles for their work, as well as Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the European People's Party for their financial support in the edition of this volume.

*Andis Kudors*  
*Rīga, October, 2017*



# What Does Populism Really Mean? A Political Science Perspective

*Ilze Balcere*

Populism has become one of the most widely used concepts in today's politics, media, public discourse and academia. A number of books and countless articles have been produced, aiming to explain its theoretical meaning and practical impact. Yet, in spite of these efforts, it seems that different people still use it with very different intentions. Several decades ago Wiles wrote: "to each his own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds".<sup>1</sup> In many ways this observation is still relevant. However, without conceptual boundaries it is impossible to draw (more or less) clear distinctions between the different parties and politicians to whom the label of populism has been assigned. If populism can be applied to *all* politicians or *all* parties then it becomes useless and meaningless. The aim of this chapter is to shed light on this concept and explain its core meaning. My intention is to show that an everyday (or popular) understanding of populism slightly differs from the way this concept is defined in the field of political science. However, it would be all too optimistic to say that political scientists have one common

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Wiles, "A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on Populism," in *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, eds. Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 166.

understanding. In fact, there are a number of concepts in social sciences with many conflicting definitions and populism is no exception.

In the mid-1990s populism was mainly associated with radical right-wing parties in Western Europe, like National Front in France, the Austrian Freedom party, or the Flemish Block in Belgium. However, “it became quickly evident that the populist phenomenon was not confined only to the radical right”.<sup>2</sup> Akkerman has indicated that ‘there is an increasing interest in populism as a broader phenomenon that cannot be exclusively identified with the far right’.<sup>3</sup> Important developments in defining populism was made by Mudde in an article published in 2004. He proposed the term ‘populist *Zeitgeist*’, by pointing out that “while populism has been less prominent in mainstream politics of Western Europe, the last decade or so has seen a significant change in this. Various mainstream opposition parties have challenged the government by using familiar populist arguments”.<sup>4</sup> Also, other scholars and academics agree that nowadays populism has gone beyond the rhetoric of radical parties into the discourse of traditional mainstream parties as well. This is one of the obstacles that make populism a diffused concept, a phenomenon potentially found among rightist, leftist as well as centrist parties. Often this label is also attached to new parties with questionable ideological stand. Due to its fluid nature some scholars and academics even question the usefulness of populism as a concept. For example, Canovan adds that “there is no acknowledged common history, ideology, program or social base, and the term is usually applied to movements from outside, often as a term of abuse”.<sup>5</sup> An additional problem is the fact that political actors have tried to avoid calling them

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<sup>2</sup> Andrej Zaslove, “Here to Stay? Populism as a New Party Type,” *European Review* 12, no. 3 (2008): 319.

<sup>3</sup> Tjitske Akkerman, “Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?,” *Acta Politica* 38 (2003): 148.

<sup>4</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism *Zeitgeist*,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 550.

<sup>5</sup> Margaret Canovan, “Populism for political theorists?,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 243.

populist in contrast to liberalists or socialists. Hence, there is a lack of self-identification. “It is not the case that we can all recognize populism when we see it, and that we merely need to learn to analyze what we see. The situation has rather been that some observers see populism where other see nothing of the sort,”<sup>6</sup> Canovan writes.

Historically populism has been associated with two distinct political movements which originated at the end of the nineteenth century – Narodniki (*narodnichestvo*) in Russia and the People’s Party in North America. Later, in the 1950s, it was used to describe Latin American populism (for example, Perón in Argentina, Vargas in Brazil or Chavez in Venezuela). In the Latin American context populism was then perceived in a rather positive light – as a mobilizing force. In 1980s and 1990s it was employed to describe newly emerging radical right wing parties in a number of Western European democracies. It was since this time that populism was used as a negative concept and merely seen as pathology of the respective political system. The fuzziness of populism is enhanced by the fact that it can be found also on the left of ideological spectrum. Mudde claims that “left-wing populism is generally strongest among outsider parties, such as the (East) German Party of Democratic Socialism, the Scottish Socialist Party, or the Dutch Socialist Party. These left-wing populist parties combine a democratic socialist ideology with strong populist discourse”.<sup>7</sup> The most recent examples of left-wing populist parties include Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain. In fact, as Howard rightly indicates, “one of the confounding features of populism is that it does not fit neatly into conventional conceptions of the left-center-right political spectrum”.<sup>8</sup> He continues to note that “in Latin America, populist movements have generally been associated with

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Canovan, “Two Strategies for the Study of Populism,” *Political Studies* 30, no. 4 (1982): 544–545.

<sup>7</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 549.

<sup>8</sup> Marc Morjé Howard, “Can Populism Be Suppressed in a Democracy? Austria, Germany and the European Union,” *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 19.

the political left. Usually with the strong support of the urban working class. In Europe, populist movements have been considered more of a right-wing phenomenon, fueled especially by peasant or worker support of nationalist myths and ideologies”.<sup>9</sup> “In fact, the claim that the people (however defined) are the only legitimate sovereign and have been deprived of power can sit quite easily with leftist ideologies. [...] If they are not necessarily of the right, then populists obviously cannot always be classified as ‘extreme’ or ‘radical’ right either.”<sup>10</sup>

Before I proceed with various definitions of populism, I would like to briefly explain the historical roots of this term, namely, the two late nineteenth century agrarian movements in Russia and America. Many academics dealing with the history of populism have employed it to describe Russian ‘narodnichestvo’. The Narodniki movement of late nineteenth century Russia saw peasants and peasant communes as the real basis for national identity and traditional values. Peasants were contrasted with urban life and Russian cities as the evils of capitalism. A peasant, compared with an urban inhabitant, was perceived as morally pure, uncorrupt, absent from greed and other capitalist byproducts. It is important to add – intellectuals who stood behind this movement were opponents of the Tsarist regime that, according to Narodniki, was to blame for the miserable condition of peasants. According to Narodniki, cities were infected by capitalism brought from Western Europe, while countryside of the Russia still bared the ideal type of commune and sense of togetherness. The peasant life in a commune was seen as the ideal model for Russian people, the only way to escape foreign capitalism and its evils. Narodniki wanted

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<sup>9</sup> Marc Morjé Howard, “Can Populism Be Suppressed in a Democracy? Austria, Germany and the European Union,” *East European Politics and Societies* 14, no. 2 (2000): 19.

<sup>10</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, “Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre,” in *Twenty-first Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

to encourage Russians to leave cities and establish communal life; what they saw as more democratic and socialist in nature.

On the other hand, for the American populists – The People’s Party – the main object of criticism were large corporations, trusts and banks, which dominated over Washington and had disproportioned influence over the federal government. “The rise of the People’s Party was a reaction against the ‘failure’ of both the Republican and the Democratic Party to represent the farmers and the workers”.<sup>11</sup> Some researchers closely relate the origin of the term ‘populism’ with The People’s Party. In The People’s Party conference held in early 1890s, one of the leaders of The People’s Party, the judge Rightmire, complained about the difficulty he experienced in using the name ‘People’s Party’ in an ordinary conversation. While he could easily refer to a man as a Republican or a Democrat, he could not call him a People’s. He needed a whole sentence to introduce him as a member of the People’s Party. Rightmire wanted a shorter name for everyday use and asked Overmyer, one of the democratic leaders, for a nickname of the People’s Party. Overmyer brought forward the word ‘Populist’.<sup>12</sup> Since then the term was connected with The People’s Party and often used by the media when referring to this organization and its representatives.

Both historical movements considered themselves as the true fighters against established elites in defense of ordinary people – the peasants and workers. However, they were also fundamentally different. For example, Narodniki saw socialism and collectivism as the fundamental basis for collective life, while American populists never questioned individual ownership and private enterprise as an important principle for democracy. The Narodniki movement was elitist in nature. It involved Russian intelligentsia educated in Western

<sup>11</sup> Tim Houwen, “The non-European roots of the concept of populism,” *Working Paper No. 120* (Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex and Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2011), 8–9; John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt. A History of Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1931), 239.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

universities. However, the membership base of American populists mainly consisted of farmers and workers. Houwen has pointed out that it is rather a 'historical accident' that the label of populism has been applied to these two very different political establishments.<sup>13</sup>

### Three Approaches to Populism

It is problematic to embrace populism in a single comprehensive definition, mostly because of the numerous labels it has been attached to. In spite of many efforts to clarify its core meaning in the past, the last decade has witnessed an earthquake in the amount of scholarly research directly or indirectly dealing with the concept of populism. Researchers have also tried to highlight the different methodological problems and challenges one would face when dealing with this concept in empirical research. For example, Canovan argues that the real challenge is not to recognize similarities among different political establishments "as in trying to decide what is 'populist' about them and what, if anything, they have in common with other past and present political phenomena known by the same label".<sup>14</sup> In her earlier studies Canovan has emphasized that "the agreed core of meaning has been notoriously lacking in the case of 'populism'".<sup>15</sup> Zaslove, on the other hand, is more optimistic arguing that "the discovery of populism in the 20<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries in Europe, separated by a continent and a century from the 19<sup>th</sup> century North American populism and by continent from Latin American populism, encouraged a growing number of social

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<sup>13</sup> Tim Houwen, "The non-European roots of the concept of populism," *Working Paper No. 120* (Sussex European Institute, University of Sussex and Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, 2011), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Populism for political theorists?," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 243.

<sup>15</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Two Strategies for the Study of Populism," *Political Studies* 30, no. 4 (1982): 544.

scientists to argue that populism had a core set of characteristics that transcend time and space”.<sup>16</sup>

There are three main conceptual approaches to populism. It can be viewed as a specific style of doing politics, an internal organizational form of party, or a thin ideology. The following sections will introduce each of these understandings more broadly and hopefully illuminate how populism is defined in the scientific field, as well as show that populism has definitive borders.

### ***Populism as a style***

Often populism is perceived as a particular style or rhetoric of making, doing and presenting politics. In this regard it is closely related with such terms as simplification, directness, overpromising or an absence of political correctness. This understanding of populism has gained attention from the academic world as well. For example, Albertazzi and McDonnell write that “[...] the epithet ‘populist’ is often used in public debate to denigrate statements and measures by parties and politicians which commentators or other politicians oppose”.<sup>17</sup> Also Canovan has paid attention to the fact that “even within contemporary Western politics, the term ‘populism’ is used [...] also for a classic tactic available to political insiders: a kind of ‘catch-all’ politics that sets out to appeal to the people as a whole”.<sup>18</sup> Betz has described populism as a rhetorical style “designed to tap

<sup>16</sup> Andrej Zaslove, “Here to Stay? Populism as a New Party Type,” *European Review* 12, no. 3 (2008): 320.

<sup>17</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, “Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre,” in *Twenty-first Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Margaret Canovan, “Populism for political theorists?,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 243.

the feelings of *ressentiment* and exploit them politically”.<sup>19</sup> Blokker broadly defines it as a “particular style of argumentation (including anti-elitism, anti-technocracy and formal institutions, a strong emphasis on unmediated popular sovereignty, and a portrayal of the people as an organic unity)...”.<sup>20</sup> In line with this approach, populism implies usage of simple language as opposed to complex and technocratic elite communication. Populists can also try to distance themselves from existing parties and politicians by emphasizing their interconnection with established political structures.

According to this broad understanding, populism is seen as a general manner in the way politicians or parties present their policies or the way they behave in public. Havlík and Pinková have rightly indicated that “populism in the public as well as journalistic discourse has in many case become synonymous [...] with demagoguery or rhetorical statements full of empty promises”.<sup>21</sup> This is the current popular understanding of populism used by media, politicians and the public in general.

Whenever someone propose policies that the larger public will favor (like, increased minimum wage, free higher education, tax cuts before elections etc.), he is often called ‘a populist’. Mudde calls this tactic as “opportunistic policies with the aim of (quickly) pleasing the people/voters – and so ‘buying’ their support – rather than looking (rationally) for the ‘best option.’”<sup>22</sup> If populism means “simple solutions

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<sup>19</sup> Hans Georg Betz, “Conditions Favoring the Success and Failure of Radical right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, eds. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 198.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Blokker, “Populist Nationalism, Anti-Europeanism, Post-nationalism, and the East-West Distinction,” *German Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (2005): 387.

<sup>21</sup> Vlastimil Havlík and Aneta Pinková, “Introduction,” in *Populist Political Parties in East-Central Europe*, eds. Vlastimil Havlík and Aneta Pinková (Brno: Muni Press, 2012), 9.

<sup>22</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 542.

to complex problems”, then it implies to at least one serious problem. Namely, it becomes empirically problematic (if not impossible) to capture and measure populism and its different manifestations. What exactly characterize ‘simple solutions’, ‘direct language’ or ‘emotional language’? If populism becomes dependent on one’s ideological stand (for example, if I am a strong socialist, then everything that the liberals say I can call populist) or political sympathies (for example, all policy proposals made by political opponents are populist), then the value of populism as an analytical concept and empirical category becomes meaningless and useless. If something is *everything*, then it is *nothing*. Also Mudde mentions one dominant interpretation of populism as “highly emotional and simplistic discourse that is directed at the ‘gut feelings’ of the people”.<sup>23</sup> However, he immediately criticizes this perception. “Though this definition seems to have instinctive value, it is highly problematic to put into operation in empirical studies. When is something ‘emotional’ rather than ‘rational’, or ‘simplistic’ rather than ‘serious’?”.<sup>24</sup> In fact, these phenomena can be marked with other terms. Simplistic or irrational language is demagoguery, and policies seeking to please voters in order to buy support is nothing but opportunism.<sup>25</sup> Also other scholars criticize the usefulness of this conceptual approach. Hough and Koß point out that “one thing populism is *not*, however, is the articulation of popular but unpractical policies with the aim of mobilizing electoral support”.<sup>26</sup> Other scholars note that this usage of populism can result in a situation where it is applied to “almost any politician capable of winning an election”.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 542.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Dan Hough and Michael Koß, “Populism Personified or Reinvigorated Reformers? The German Left Party in 2009 and Beyond,” *German Politics and Society* 27, no. 2 (2009): 79.

<sup>27</sup> Torcuato Di Tella, “Populism Into the Twenty-First Century,” *Government and Opposition* 32, no. 2 (1997): 188.

## ***Populism as an organizational form or movement***

One definition tends to relate populism to some particular organizational features that are common among all populist parties and movements. Barr, for example, explains that populist movements “exhibit a top-down relationship between the leader and followers...”<sup>28</sup> A strong reliance on a leader “means that in the very form of authority, they are expressing a rejection of more bureaucratized, regularized and constrained forms of leadership”.<sup>29</sup> “Since under populism the ruler is an individual, that is, a personalistic leader, the connection between leader and followers is based mostly on direct, quasi-personal contact, not on organizational intermediation”.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the internal organization of populist parties usually differ from traditional bureaucratized multi-level party structures. In his earlier publication, Weyland wrote that populism has three characteristics: “a personal leader appeals to the heterogeneous mass of followers who feel left out and are available for mobilization; the leader reaches the followers in a direct, quasi-personal manner that bypasses established intermediary organizations [...]; if the leader builds a new or revives an old populist party, it remains a personal vehicle with a low level of institutionalization”.<sup>31</sup>

However, the role of a charismatic leader that some scholars emphasize as the most crucial feature of populist parties has been criticized. In fact, leader centric definitions are often used by analyzing manifestations of populism in Latin America rather than Europe. In this regard Barr has argued that “certainly the most successful populists have had tremendous personal charisma, but there have been

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<sup>28</sup> Robert R. Barr, “Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics,” *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 39.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 276.

<sup>30</sup> Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 40, no. 1 (2001): 13.

<sup>31</sup> Kurt Weyland, “Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 4 (1999): 381.

notable non-charismatic populist leaders as well (e.g. Peru's Alberto Fujimori)".<sup>32</sup> Also Mudde writes that "while charismatic leadership and direct communication between the leader and 'the people' are common among populists, these features *facilitate* rather than define populism".<sup>33</sup>

### ***Populism as a Thin Ideology***

Within the academic field populism is mostly understood and defined as 'thin-centered ideology' (this concept was originally developed by Michael Freeden in 1996). In line with this approach populism is restricted to a definitive set of ideas, and in practice can be combined "with different full ideologies".<sup>34</sup> At the core of populism is the perception where 'the good people' are positioned against 'the bad elite'.<sup>35</sup> This is the so called 'minimal' definition of populism, because it only includes those necessary and sufficient characteristics to categorize a particular political actor as populist or non-populist. On the other hand, it leaves out all other features that may vary among cases, for example, the presence of charismatic leader, direct communication with voters, a diffused organizational structure etc. Thus, this approach is far less ambiguous than the other two discussed previously and, most importantly, is suitable for comparative empirical analysis.

According to this definition, populism lacks internal cohesiveness and "in itself does not provide an all-encompassing agenda on how society

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<sup>32</sup> Robert R. Barr, "Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics," *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 41.

<sup>33</sup> Cas Mudde, "The Populism Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 545.

<sup>34</sup> Ben Stanley, "The thin ideology of populism," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 1 (2008): 108.

<sup>35</sup> Matthijs Rooduijn, Sarah L. de Lange, and Wouter van der Brug, "A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe," *Party Politics* 20, no. 4 (2014): 2–3.

should function”<sup>36</sup> as opposed to full ideologies (for example, socialism, liberalism or conservatism). “If we define ideology as a total, closed and cohesive view of human beings in society, it would be indeed difficult to claim that populism is a fully fledged ideology”.<sup>37</sup> Considering populism as a thin ideology means to recognize that it “conveys a distinct set of ideas about the political which interact with the established ideational traditions of full ideologies”.<sup>38</sup> It is argued that dividing populism “into clearer, more defined subcategories both reduces the tendency towards normative assessments and improves our understanding of the ways in which populism’s core elements hang together”.<sup>39</sup>

As noted previously in this chapter, in the past there have been numerous attempts to provide a precise and useful definition of populism that could encompass all the past and present populist cases. The first attempt to explain what populism really means was made by Ionescu and Gellner in a book titled “Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics” published in 1969. Yet, it failed to formulate a precise definition. Perhaps the most widely used definition today (in the academic field) was elaborated by Cas Mudde in 2004. According to him, populism is a thin “*ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people*”<sup>40</sup> (emphasis in original). Consequently populism is seen as a thin ideology

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<sup>36</sup> Stijn Van Kessel, “A Matter of Supply and Demand: The Electoral Performance of Populist Parties in Three European Countries,” *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 177.

<sup>37</sup> Tjitske Akkerman, “Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?,” *Acta Politica* 38 (2003): 150.

<sup>38</sup> Ben Stanley, “The thin ideology of populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 1 (2008): 95.

<sup>39</sup> Kevin Deegan-Krause and Tim Haughton, “Toward a More Useful Conceptualization of Populism: Types and Degrees of Populist Appeals in the Case of Slovakia,” *Politics & Policy* 37, no. 4 (2009): 82.

<sup>40</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543.

that combines popular sovereignty with hostility towards established elites. Importantly, this definition is suitable for studying populism in different geographical regions (Europe and Latin America) and historical time periods (populism in 1990s and 2000s). The rest of this section will focus on a more in-depth description of both characteristics of populism mentioned earlier, namely, centrality of the people and anti-elitism.

Populism is anti-elitist because it accuses the elites of ignoring the interests and needs of ordinary people. The antagonism between ‘us’ the people, and ‘them’, the corrupt, selfish, arrogant elite is “central to all forms of populism”<sup>41</sup> ranging from left to right wing populist manifestations. Barr notes that “...the target audience of those appeals will vary depending on the specific circumstances”.<sup>42</sup> Most often criticized the elite group is the political class,<sup>43</sup> including past and present parties and politicians. However, anti-elitism can also target “the cultural elite, intellectuals, journalists and judges, or at the economic elite, including businessmen and the capitalist system”<sup>44</sup> on a broader level. Some populists oppose intelligentsia and *the power of experts*. They see scientific knowledge as a manipulative tool used by elites, namely, that elites only use evidence that supports their decisions. On the contrary, populists might argue that politicians should only rely on the wisdom of the people.

Anger towards the elite can be accompanied with a critique of particular social groups like immigrants and domestic ethnic minorities (some scholars use a term: ‘the dangerous others’).<sup>45</sup> Betz, for example,

<sup>41</sup> Darin D. Barney and David Laycoc, “Right-Populists and Plebiscitary Politics in Canada,” *Party Politics* 5, no. 3 (1999): 323.

<sup>42</sup> Robert R. Barr, “Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics,” *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 39.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>44</sup> Matthijs Rooduijn, Sarah L. de Lange, and Wouter van der Brug, “A populist Zeitgeist? Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe,” *Party Politics* 20, no. 4 (2014): 3.

<sup>45</sup> Pierre Anhdre Taguieff, “Political science confronts populism: From a conceptual mirage to a real problem,” *Telos*, 103 (1995).

refers to 'exclusionary populism' to describe the ideologies of established and newly emerging radical right wing parties in Western European democracies.<sup>46</sup> However, it should be added that hostility towards immigrants and different minority groups is a definitive feature of radical right wing populist parties, but can be absent from the ideological profile of left wing populists who strive for the idea of more inclusive societies. Hence, from an academic point, there is still no agreement on whether anti-immigration can and should be assigned as one of the constitutive elements of current populism.

Anti-elitism is not necessarily directed against domestic elites. Canovan claims that according to populists, the government is in the hands of corrupt politicians and selfish millionaires, and functions in the interests of different international institutions.<sup>47</sup> Thus, in its various forms populism may concentrate its critique against international actors, for example, the International Monetary fund, the European Union, Brussels, the World Bank or NATO. According to Akkerman the content of anti-elitism might depend on the ideological position of the party. She writes that "populists from the right tend to regard moral corruption as the main problem of representation. The governing elites are arrogant, selfish etcetera. Another problem of representation is that 'special interests' are seen to have captured the political process. [...] For the left populists special interests are usually the economic giants such as large corporations. Populists of the right identify special interests most often with the claims of 'minority' groups, such as immigrants, the unemployed, environmentalists or feminists".<sup>48</sup> Populism "is almost always used in opposition to what is defined, by contrast, as 'elite', 'exclusive', or 'establishment', its deployment being more about marking the difference than denoting content, and its meaning being largely

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<sup>46</sup> Hans Georg Betz, "Exclusionary Populism in Austria, Italy, and Switzerland," *International Journal* 56, no. 3 (2001).

<sup>47</sup> Margaret Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999).

<sup>48</sup> Tjitske Akkerman, "Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?," *Acta Politica* 38 (2003): 151.

relative to the standpoint from which it is deployed”<sup>49</sup> notes Comroff. Mudde writes that “populism presents a Manichean outlook, in which there are only friends and foes. Opponents are not just people with different priorities and values, they are *evil!*”<sup>50</sup>

The second important feature of populism is people-centrism. Populism “appeals to a community of ‘ordinary people.’”<sup>51</sup> It sees people as homogenous<sup>52</sup> and monolithic.<sup>53</sup> By being atomized by the elite, populists see the necessity to establish the ‘people’s government’, the rule of which would eventually incorporate the practical knowledge of the people and eliminate the complicated bureaucratic procedures<sup>54</sup> that stay in the way of people’s will. In political reality there can be different strategies how to construct the ‘people’. Appeals can range from references to citizens, the population, inhabitants or the nation. Some may identify underprivileged groups (for example, workers or those receiving the minimum wage) as ‘the people’.

The manifestation of people-centrism is very problematic to identify in empirical studies in contrast to anti-elitism. In fact, it is still questionable who ‘the people’ actually are, because the meaning of this term varies depending on the case. To avoid this confusion, Taggart introduced the term *heartland*. According to him, it “represents

<sup>49</sup> Jean Comroff, “Populism and Late Liberalism: A Special Affinity?,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 637 (2011): 100.

<sup>50</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 544.

<sup>51</sup> Stijn Van Kessel, “A Matter of Supply and Demand: The Electoral Performance of Populist Parties in Three European Countries,” *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 177.

<sup>52</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, “Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre,” in *Twenty-first Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Tjitske Akkerman, “Populism and Democracy: Challenge or Pathology?,” *Acta Politica* 38 (2003): 151.

<sup>54</sup> Koen Vossen, “Populism in the Netherlands after Fortuyn: Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders Compared,” *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 11, no. 1 (2010).

an idealized conception of the community they serve. It is from this territory of imagination, that populists construct the ‘people’ as the object of their politics. [...] It is a construction of an ideal world”.<sup>55</sup>

## Conclusion

An extensive part of the debate about populism is devoted to its definitive meaning. Even though within political science we can draw (more or less successfully) some conceptual borders and clarify the core characteristics of this term, one aspect of populism is maybe even more important. Namely, does populism (whatever definition one uses) endanger democracy? Is it complementary to democratic state governance or contradictory? Scholars have expressed different opinions about this question. For example, Derks writes that “populists want to regulate societal life according to the ‘will of the people’ and reject intermediary institutions that hinder the direct influence of that will. Thus, populism takes on an ambiguous attitude against democracy. [...] Especially intermediary institutions with a representative function, such as parliament, are subject to populist criticism”.<sup>56</sup> Conflicting views about populism and democracy are often based on our normative understanding. Namely, we usually associate democracy with something positive, desirable, while populism is mostly perceived as negative and undesirable.

According to Mény and Surel, modern democracy rests on two fundamental principles – the power of the people (popular will) and constitutionalism.<sup>57</sup> Constitutionalism stipulates that democracy

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<sup>55</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 274.

<sup>56</sup> Anton Derks, “Populism and the Ambivalence of Egalitarianism. How Do the Underprivileged Reconcile a Right Wing Party Preference with Their Socio-Economic Attitudes?,” *World Political Science Review* 2, no. 3 (2006): 179.

<sup>57</sup> Yves Mény and Yves Surel, *Democracies and The Populist Challenge* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002).

needs to operate under regulations and rules in order to survive and be maintained. It means there should be a protection of individual rights independent of the majority will (power of the people). “Liberal democracy requires the maintenance of a successful balance between majority rule and individual and minority rights. This balance can be disrupted in two different ways. One would involve a hypertrophy of its democratic side to the point where it excessively weakens the protection offered for individual and minority rights – this leads to the democratic disorder known as *populism*”.<sup>58</sup>

Some argue that today constitutionalism dominates over democracy – ‘the will of the people’. Populists use this presumption and built their electoral rhetoric. Often populist parties or politicians express frustration with the way representative democracy functions. They demand an extension of the people’s power to influence political decisions, and a broadening of channels through which they could participate in the decision-making process. Traditionally this might include support for the extension of referendums, directly elected officials or reduction of parliamentary powers.<sup>59</sup> When this direct link between representatives and the people is absent or dysfunctional, democracy might be in crisis. Thus, populists do not “present themselves as threats to Western European democracy, but as its saviors”.<sup>60</sup>

“...Populists are reformist rather than revolutionary, they do not oppose political parties per se. Rather, they oppose the established parties, call for (or claim to be) a new kind of party; i.e. they express populist anti-party sentiments rather than extremist anti-party sentiments”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Marc F. Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 87–88.

<sup>59</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, “Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre,” in *Twenty-first Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, eds. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 546.

writes Mudde. Populism is not anti-democratic, because it still defends democracy as the only legitimate regime. Instead, populism criticizes the way democracy functions. They appeal for *more* not *less* democracy. Their intention is not to transform society but to change the status of the people in the political system.<sup>62</sup> In fact, Pappas has proposed the term ‘populist democracy’ referring to the examples of Greece and Hungary. According to him, “a populist democracy [...] is a democratic subtype in which, besides the party in office, at least the major opposition party (or even other minor parties) are also populist”.<sup>63</sup> In a similar manner, Blokker argues that populism cannot be considered as a pathology of modern democracy, since both pay particular importance of the people, the demos, but rather as a specific interpretation of democracy.<sup>64</sup> Populism can have a positive effect in terms of political engagement. Populist parties can “...increase the political involvement of groups that otherwise are likely to be passive, and they can provide a useful ‘wake-up-call’ to elites and public officials who have grown too cozy with their privileges and too remote from the concerns of public opinion”.<sup>65</sup>

What are the causes of populism? “The conventional explanation of the rise of populist parties in Western Europe is premised on the pivotal role of popular disillusionment with mainstream political parties”.<sup>66</sup> Dissatisfaction with traditional party elites and the spread of corruption are usually the most often mentioned factors explaining the emergence of populism. Some academics relate the success or failure of populism with party strength. “Where parties are highly institutionalized, they control

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<sup>62</sup> Cas Mudde, “The Populism Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543–546.

<sup>63</sup> Takis S. Pappas, “Populist Democracies: Post-Authoritarian Greece and Post-Communist Hungary,” *Government and Opposition* 49, no. 1 (2014): 1.

<sup>64</sup> Paula Blokker, “Populist Nationalism, Anti-Europeanism, Post-nationalism, and the East-West Distinction,” *German Law Journal* 6, no. 2 (2005): 379.

<sup>65</sup> Marc F. Plattner, “Populism, Pluralism, and Liberal Democracy,” *Journal of Democracy* 21, no. 1 (2010): 89.

<sup>66</sup> Catherine Fieschi and Paul M. Heywood, “Trust, cynicism and populist anti-politics,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 289.

recruitment and prevent outsiders from rising. Strong parties make their cadres climb a long ladder of positions before they reach national office. This lengthy career coopts politicians into established organizational networks. Strong parties block the ascent of populist mavericks”.<sup>67</sup>

Populism is often related with the presence of crisis. For example, Taggart argues that “...populism is a reaction to a sense of extreme crisis. Populism is not the politics of the stable, ordered policy but comes as an accompaniment to change, crisis and challenge. This crisis may well stem from a sense of moral decay but it always spills over into a critique of politics and into the sense that politics as usual cannot deal with the unusual conditions of crises”.<sup>68</sup>

Is populism episodic or enduring? Taggart points out the former. He writes that ‘populist politicians, movements or parties emerge and grow quickly and gain attention but find it difficult to sustain that momentum and therefore will usually fade fast’.<sup>69</sup> When a political party with a strong populist appeal wins an election or joins the government it becomes impossible to continue to maintain its anti-elitist appeal because it becomes part of the establishment. Thus, I argue that in the long run populism is bound to an inner fatality. It is a thin ideology that cannot sustain itself for a long period of time without a proper electoral platform and practical policy solutions. Once in power, populists have to struggle with routine politics and make compromises, including collaboration with the elites they previously opposed.

<sup>67</sup> Kurt Weyland, “Neoliberal Populism in Latin America and Eastern Europe,” *Comparative Politics* 31, no. 4 (1999): 384.

<sup>68</sup> Paul Taggart, “Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 270.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.



# Is Populism Related Content the New Guilty Pleasure for Media and its Audiences?

*Anda Rožukalne*

Nowadays, populism is one of the buzzwords of political processes and media discussions, and not without a reason. Throughout recent years, populist parties and politicians in several countries have acquired significant support from voters. Analysing the causes of these successful instances, many researchers place media under the microscope, examining the interconnections between media performance and the “populism revolts” in 2016.<sup>1</sup> What’s more the media are held responsible for this tendency which has been compared to “a black cloud over democracy”.<sup>2</sup> Supportive media actions have encouraged the development of populism movements or even initiated them.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Noam Gidron and Peter A. Hall, “Populism as a Problem of Social Integration,” published 2017 at Harvard University, <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hall/files/gidronhallapsa2017.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgreen, “Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain,” *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2016): 47.

<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Krämer, “Media populism: A conceptual clarification and some theses on its effects,” *Communication Theory* 24, no. 1 (2014): 42.

By itself, populism does not cause agitation,<sup>4</sup> rather, it is the direction towards which it leads certain groups of society. The great significance of communication in spreading populism is confirmed by various political forces skilfully availing themselves of communication, leading to the conclusion that populism is not necessarily always the same, easily recognisable body of ideas. The term ‘populism’ can also be applied to a political style,<sup>5</sup> not a specific manifestation with a political content. The style is characterised by contemptuous rhetoric addressing political rivals, attacks towards opponents, emotional communication and a desire for provocations in order to remain as the centre of attention.

The development of populism throughout various periods of history corresponds with social crises. It is worth mentioning that a long-term crisis has also touched the basis of media actions making it more difficult for them to maintain the trust of their audience, long-lasting business models, and to attract the attention of audiences captivated by the opportunities of social media. Curiously enough, emotional content, event dramatisation, personalisation of politics and turning it into a “horse race”<sup>6</sup> is the reproach addressed to media when the erosion of their professional quality is characterised.

Among the many questions arising from the search of connections between the growth of populism and the current practice of media, the most challenging one is the assessment of populism communication mechanism and effects. Therefore, this paper compiles various research conclusions explaining the interaction of media and populist movements’ communication.

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<sup>4</sup> Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgreen, “Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain,” *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2016): 47.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> Thomass E. Patterson, “News Coverage of the 2016 Presidential Primaries: Horse Race Reporting Has Consequences,” published July 11, 2016 at Shorenstein Center, <https://shorensteincenter.org/news-coverage-2016-presidential-primaries/>.

## Mediated Populism and Populist Media

Do media and journalists use populist politicians only as information sources, passively revealing their opinions or actions, thus helping populists gain popularity? Perhaps media actively support populist ideas and uses populism as a framework to reflect reality?

These answers are not so simple to find, given that both approaches can be observed in media content. Compiling the opinions of various authors, it can be concluded that two alternative explanations exist.<sup>7</sup> One supports the idea that the logic of media activity provides a beneficial platform for the carriers of populist ideas. Media, who are expected to provide exciting information every day, can gain advantages by publishing bold phrases, individualising political problems with the help of attractive politicians. The political communication of populists, distinguished by disdain towards establishment politicians or officials, intense support of people, helps attract media audiences. For this reason, populist politicians and their ideas acquire disproportionately large media attention. Mediated populism is media activity, which is favourable for spreading populism ideas, helps popularise populist politicians and encourage the success of populist movements during elections.

The other explanation holds the view that media are themselves populist.<sup>8</sup> This perspective believes that not only politicians, but also journalists and media editors, frame events in a populist manner. Namely, journalists in their treatment of events, topics and problems often use the populist division of “good guys” and “the others”. The good people supposedly cannot exercise their rights because “the others”, who are to blame for societal problems and their inadequate solutions, impede them.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese, “Shot the messenger? The media role in framing populist attributions of blame,” *Journalism* 1–20 (2017): 2, DOI: 10.1177/ 1464884917698170.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

Analysing the interaction between media and populism, Benjamin Krämer introduces the term populist media.<sup>9</sup> It is applied to media that are populist regardless of the relevant populist movements because of populist idea usage in reality analysis. According to Krämer, media populism can either develop independently, along with populist political movements, or be involved in alliances together with them.

Another characteristic of populist media is the use of emotional style in the presentation of content. To display political issues, emotional blame attribution is actively used as a framework.<sup>10</sup>

It is not easy to distinguish mediated populism and populist media, for both cases are characterised by emotional style, oriented towards conflict, and the content opposes the interests of different groups. However, in the case of mediated populism, the content created by journalists is more varied with a higher level of pluralism. The creation of populist media content shows the editorial policy; mediated populism, on the contrary, is mostly linked to the journalists' professional routines in the choice of sources and information.

## **Role of Tabloids in Mediatisation of Populism**

Tabloids are blamed for populist framing of events more often than quality media. It is because of tabloid approaches in the selection of information: instead of analysing issues, they tend to emphasise personalities and simplistically announce them as culprits or victims. Tabloid style is frequently based on loud announcements, opinions – not the assessment of facts; therefore, it is favourable for spreading populist messages, partially coinciding with a populist communication style.

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<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Krämer, "Media populism: A conceptual clarification and some theses on its effects," *Communication Theory* 24 no. 1, (2014): 42.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese. "'They Did It': The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication," *Communication Studies* 1–31 (2016): 4, DOI: 10.1177/0093650216644026.

A significant role in the recognition of populist party leaders and messages goes to the tabloidization tendency of other media;<sup>11</sup> seeking ways to attract an audience, media offers more and more simplified and emotionally colourful content. This tendency in content selection and presentation style coincides with the processes of media environment hybridisation. Whereas in the UK or Germany the traditions of media activity clearly distinguishes yellow press from quality media, in many Eastern European countries, especially online platforms, media combines professional journalistic content with a celebrity's private life, horoscopes, mysticism, etc.

Analysing the influence of British tabloids on politics, Simon Cross claims that it is stronger than other research has shown. He disagrees with the view that the basis of tabloid influence is their "anti-elitist popular appeal".<sup>12</sup> According to Cross, the actual political influence of tabloids is connected with their "populist agendas". It is proved by the willingness of politicians to reveal their statements to tabloids, as done by the former UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. Sometimes, tabloid editors avail themselves to a "name and shame" approach in order to request something from politicians, for example, force them to adopt a law, which would allow the identification of sexual abusers. The author blames British politicians who allow tabloids to remain a great political power by making use of their "act dog" features.<sup>13</sup> Cross mentions a major turning point by the British tabloid press in the 1990s, when *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* included asylum seekers, former prisoners, illegal immigrants and psychiatric patients in a list of daunting "others".

There are several additional reasons for the interaction of tabloids and populist politics. Traditionally, tabloid media has a weaker link

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<sup>11</sup> Nichola Renée Harris, "Tabloidization in the Modern American Press: A Textual Analysis and Assessment of Newspaper and Tabloid Coverage of the "Runaway Bride" Case," *Thesis*, Georgia State University, 2006, [http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication\\_theses/7](http://scholarworks.gsu.edu/communication_theses/7).

<sup>12</sup> Simon Cross, "Mad and bad media: Populism and pathology in the British tabloids," *European Journal of Communication* 29, no. 2 (2014): 217.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

to the political establishment than elite media.<sup>14</sup> Tabloid business models require a more focused market orientation compared to that of quality press, which tries to avoid content commercialisation. Society's dissatisfaction with the current elite is expressed more directly in tabloids than in broadsheet newspapers. Thus, tabloids demonstrate a minor dependence on the established order; they are more dependent on "popular demands".<sup>15</sup>

Interconnection between media and populism is most commonly paid attention to during elections. However, an increase of populist messages can be observed between elections as well. The explanation goes: as a response to the success of populists during an election, mainstream politicians start using elements of populism in their political communication.<sup>16</sup> The parties that have not succeeded in previous elections thus attempt to regain their influence by copying elements of populist style to their communication.

Media too benefit from using populist messages. One of the most important elements of populism communication is condemnation and blame attribution. In cases of politician rivalry, messages containing blame attribution give journalists a convincing power, speaking to the dissatisfied audience. Populist communication style thus coincides with media activity logic during pre-election periods.<sup>17</sup>

Research by Hameleers et al. shows that when comparing various information sources politicians are the main source of condemning messages. Although the mediatized blame game<sup>18</sup> is not entirely in the hands of politicians. The researchers identified two main styles that journalists use: *interpretative journalism* and *objective journalism*. Interpretative journalism turned out to be the only one in which

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese, "Shot the messenger? The media role in framing populist attributions of blame," *Journalism*, 1–20 (2017): 5, DOI: 10.1177/ 1464884917698170.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

a journalist's agency had a significant role in the spreading of populism.<sup>19</sup> In this data cluster, journalists actively interpreted events, displaying the causes of issues and moral connections. Journalists used an extremely negative tone of reporting in their articles and emphasised conflicts, pointing out clearly the disbelief towards unreliable politicians and societal out-groups.<sup>20</sup> By analysing journalists' practice in connection with media types and journalism styles, the researchers found that populist blame attribution is more prevalent in interpretative style journalism and tabloids.<sup>21</sup>

Research of populist content sources shows that media themselves, regardless of populist activity, are involved in populist message creation. This means the research provides empirical evidence<sup>22</sup> for the condemnation applied to media at the beginning of this chapter.

It confirms the observation that responsiveness to populist messages and the populist communication style has become routine by some media. The audience gets used to this manner of communication, and the media construct not only an attitude towards certain groups of society, but also provides words, phrases and styles to interpret reality.

## Media Driven Extremism and Racism

Populistic messages contain not only emotional condemnation at elite politicians or simplified answers to complex issues. Contrasting different society group interests and the blame game for the actions or existence of guilty out-groups, characteristic to populist communication, has forced the audience in several countries to encounter extreme, intolerant, and even racist media content. The great wave of migration

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese, "Shot the messenger? The media role in framing populist attributions of blame," *Journalism*, 1–20 (2017): 9, DOI: 10.1177/ 1464884917698170.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

in the European Union and the issues arising from it, terrorism in various EU countries, multicultural politics and other political, cultural, economic, and social issues have predominantly been at the centre of media attention.

The topic of migration and the attitude towards migrants has been prevalent in reports on Brexit, as well as in pre- and post-election communication of the President of the United States, Donald Trump. It has not disappeared because specific decisions have followed populist interpretations. In discussions about Brexit, the issues concerning further stays by Eastern European immigrants are being solved.<sup>23</sup> On an international and national level, fierce discussions and protests have been caused by Donald Trump's tolerant attitude towards the white supremacist march in Charlottesville,<sup>24</sup> as well as the abolition of DACA, the Mexican immigrant programme.<sup>25</sup>

In other countries similar processes are being observed. For example, in Finland's 2016 election nationalist-populist parties were successful, anti-immigration messages having an important role in their pre-election political communication. Media content proves that nationalist-populist attitudes towards asylum seekers, immigrants, and ethnical minorities received a great deal of attention; politicians were accused of their messages being racist. This type of media criticism towards anti-immigration parties is inevitable, as the basis of critical rhetoric is the indiscriminating, liberal, democratic culture of post-war Europe.<sup>26</sup> Finnish researchers did comparative research on the reactions

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<sup>23</sup> Simon Tilford, "Britain, immigration and Brexit," *CER BULLETIN ISSUE 105*, 2015/2016, [http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/bulletin\\_105\\_st\\_article1.pdf](http://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/bulletin_105_st_article1.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Jia Tolentino, "Charlottesville and the Effort to Downplay Racism in America," *The New Yorker*, August 13, 2017, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/jia-tolentino/charlottesville-and-the-effort-to-downplay-racism-in-america>.

<sup>25</sup> Sabrina Siddiqui, "Trump ends "Dreamers" program, leaving fate of 800,000 uncertain," *The Guardian*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/sep/05/donald-trump-dreamers-program-young-immigrants>.

<sup>26</sup> Niko Hatakka, Mari K. Niemi, and Matti Välimäki, "Confrontational yet submissive: Calculated ambivalence and populist parties' strategies of responding to racism accusations in the media," *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 3 (2017): 263.

towards racism accusations in mainstream news of the Finns Party, UK Independent party and Sweden Democrats party.

The prevalent public criticism of intolerant opinions forced the nationalist-populist party representatives to deny their views.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the concealing or denying of opinions makes it difficult for anti-immigrant parties to maintain their condemnation towards immigration processes. Sharp criticism to their opinions in the media is one of the reasons why anti-immigration parties try to adapt or alter their announcements in such a way as to calm down or cause no concern to the larger public and their modest supporters, while at the same time retaining the trust of the voters who support anti-immigration ideas.<sup>28</sup>

The denial of racism and racist messages is a new research field in political communication. In contrast to previous research examining extreme right-wing politician public rhetoric, researchers now analyse the framework of political announcements and the rhetorical “package”, with the help of which communicators of racist and xenophobic messages attempt to decrease the potential harm of their statements to political forces in an election. To define discourse strategies displaying racist opinions as “not racist”, a term of “new” or “modern” racism is used.<sup>29</sup> These forms of denial and disguise are largely different from the former “old-fashioned racism”,<sup>30</sup> because the borderline dividing the xenophobic daily routine of populist parties from other ideas has blurred.

Public political communicators attempt to perform two (as if contradictory) actions at the same time: make a racist statement and

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<sup>27</sup> Niko Hatakka, Mari K. Niemi, and Matti Välimäki, “Confrontational yet submissive: Calculated ambivalence and populist parties’ strategies of responding to racism accusations in the media,” *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 3 (2017): 262.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 263.

<sup>29</sup> Martha Augoustinos and Danniele Every, “Accusations and denials of racism: Managing moral accountability in public discourse,” *Discourse & Society* 21, no. 3 (2010): 251–256.

<sup>30</sup> Niko Hatakka, Mari K. Niemi, and Matti Välimäki, “Confrontational yet submissive: Calculated ambivalence and populist parties’ strategies of responding to racism accusations in the media,” *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 3 (2017): 263–264.

parallelly nivellate its negative consequences on the messenger's political fate. Knowing that these messages can be criticised in public debates politicians try to control the consequential impact.

The authors of the research have found that politicians use various strategies. One of the strategy groups is *confrontation strategies*. It consists of a complete denial of racist communication accusations; in a bid to justify xenophobic statements insults are forwarded to someone else, impugned, or avoided. These strategies allow politicians to refrain from responsibilities concerning their parties' connection with racism.<sup>31</sup> It may be concluded that these strategies are used to speak to voters who support an immigrant restriction policy.

If politicians attempted to publicly distance themselves from their colleagues' intolerant statements or actions, explain them away or apologise, researchers identified it as *submissive strategies*. In these cases, the involved parties admitted to have violated certain social norms, and the party members deserve to be punished for their statements. In the case of submissive strategies, politicians took responsibility for the representatives' racist statements on the one hand, but tried to justify the action on the other hand, in order to reduce the severity of the accusations.<sup>32</sup> Populist parties used two main strategies to react to mainstream media offenses concerning racism. Submissive damage control strategies were used to attract a broader audience. Confrontational damage control strategies were addressed to the groups of voters who "are more resonant with extreme rhetoric on immigration".<sup>33</sup>

The development of politics and behaviour of voters allows us to notice additional consequences of populism: new extremal political forces who have overcome the borders of marginal groups because of their ever increasing political activity.

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<sup>31</sup> Niko Hatakka, Mari K. Niemi, and Matti Välimäki, "Confrontational yet submissive: Calculated ambivalence and populist parties' strategies of responding to racism accusations in the media," *Discourse & Society* 28, no. 3 (2017): 270.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 272.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

Analysing the communication environment and its research, the development of various intolerant communication ways can be observed. Traditional media, although publishing populist messages, still retain their professional principles and encourage discussion about the impact of racism on society. Therefore, certain radical politicians adapt their communication to a specific media style because of the risk of encountering a negative reaction from voters and media condemnation.

Social media provides various communication opportunities such as discussions and the involvement of specific groups of society. Mainstream media, social media and political communication come together in this field and the ever increasing civic activism creates a growth of mediatized populism.

## **Social Media and Mediation of Populism**

The increase of populist political movements in various countries coincides with the inhabitants' changes in media use.<sup>34</sup> As a source of everyday information, social media is becoming increasingly popular.<sup>35</sup> Political communicators, too, avail themselves of social media to spread their messages and initiate discussions. It is an opportunity to directly address citizens and quickly test ideas.

Defined communication forms like Facebook, Twitter and other similar sharing platforms are rather convenient for spreading populism ideas. The communication available on social media is quick and direct, and it allows people to cross social group borders. It is close to "direct democracy and plebiscity",<sup>36</sup> which characterises the political structure supported by populism.

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<sup>34</sup> TNS Opinion & Social, "Media use in European Union," *Standard Eurobarometer* 86 (Autumn 2016): 1–82.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Mitchell, *State of the news 2015*, Pew Research Center, published April 29, 2015, <http://www.journalism.org/2015/04/29/stateof-the-news-media-2015/>.

<sup>36</sup> Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgreen, "Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain," *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2016): 51.

Social media offers more and more opportunities to spread views, which are underserved in media, but at the same time does not expand the spectrum of democratic statements. These tendencies display a spread of anti-democratic values and can threaten democracy because the media environment helps them self-mobilise and self-educate through violent actions.<sup>37</sup>

The opportunity for anyone to initiate or participate in public discussions on social media has made sharing platforms be associated with a high democracy potential. However, research on social media's impact has identified the opposite. The most widespread effect is the information bubble, defining habits of information use, whereas the echo-chamber theory and theoretical framework of Crystallisation<sup>38</sup> explains the effects of content in a restricted information area.

The echo-chamber effect is strengthened by each user's unrestricted power to select wanted and unwanted information or opinions. In an environment of limited discussion participants, the views repeat themselves and become exaggerated or distorted. Supporters of the same idea, discussing it in a closed space, can become polarised, extremal, or radical. Living in an information echo-chamber, one can reach an assumption that their view is more universal or accurate than it is in reality. Typically, in this kind of communication, which is undisturbed by different views, the view of opinion leader is never doubted, but those who think otherwise are ignored or excluded from the discussion. In this situation, participants of the discussion may notice their own opinions are echoed because they are repeated by others.

The echo-chamber effect has been known for a long time, however, it has become more prominent in the era of social media, because the process of getting to know reality allows users to select content,

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<sup>37</sup> Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgreen, "Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain," *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2016): 54.

<sup>38</sup> Yvette Donghee Wohn and Brian J. Bowe, "Micro Agenda Setters: The Effect of Social Media on Young Adults' Exposure to and Attitude toward News," *Social Media + Society* (January-March 2016): 3.

avoiding unpleasant, unknown, and surprising information. This effect can delay society change and restrict democratic discussion, for people with the same views do not distinguish opinions not linked to the group they belong in.

Both above mentioned effects are beneficial for populism growth because social media offers a comfortable communication and opinion environment undisturbed by opposing views to those responsive to populist ideas.

## **Emotionally Charged Social Media Communication**

As populism is characterised by emotional messages spread by traditional media, a social media communication environment is even more favourable for emotion manifestation. This is, first and foremost, because of social media structures, which encourages emotion and impulsion. According to Tristan Harris,<sup>39</sup> social media applications' architecture is built with a target to play to people's psychological weaknesses and encourage emotional reactions instead of providing a meaningful discussion environment.

For instance, Facebook's (FB) emoticon system makes it simple for users to display their emotions. Other user generated content is also characterised by negative and positive emotions, with the help of which events, people, and processes are evaluated.<sup>40</sup> Users without the information context quickly react to any impulse, show joy and support, condemn, blame, anger and shock. Social media communication tools help make hasty decisions about the guilty and the innocent, the bad and the good, the culprit and the victim. Similar approaches

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<sup>39</sup> Bianka Bosker, "The Binge Breaker," *The Atlantic*, published November 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/11/the-binge-breaker/501122/>.

<sup>40</sup> Xiao Wang and Andrea Hickerson, "The Role of Presumed Influence and Emotions on Audience Evaluation of the Credibility of Media Content and Behavioural Tendencies," *Journal of Creative Communications* 11, no. 1 (2016): 3.

to reality perception and problem evaluation are used by populist movement leaders.

A pilot research by the author of this chapter examined attitudes in FB discussions revealed through text and through emoticons. Analysing discussions on social issues, a politician's personal life, and elections, similar results for an emotional presence were acquired. Quantitative data showed that emoticons are used more frequently in an automatic way and reveal more powerful emotions than in text discussion. Those users who not only used emoticons, added arguments and examples to the conversation. The emotions found in text were less polarised, and feeling nuances were perceived. Qualitative data assessment revealed that the variety of opinions is limited because of a typical single dominating view in FB conversations. Others either supported it or, finding no people to share views with, quit the conversation.

Other researchers have also observed the limits of social media discussion:<sup>41</sup> not enough variety of views, weak argumentation and insufficient context.

Before the election and after becoming the President of the USA, Donald Trump had been successfully using the microblogging network *Twitter.com*. It was one of his tools for political mobilisation for supporters recognisable by "their unique combination of anti-expertise, anti-elitism, and pronationalist sentiments".<sup>42</sup>

The communication form of Twitter is perfectly suitable for spreading simplified, emotional populist messages. It supports attacks, hostility, blame and verbal condemnation. Twitter "demands simplicity" – it is impossible to discuss complex issues, it promotes impulsivity; thoughts can be expressed by people without any knowledge or communicative content; it requires no effort, because expressing one's

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<sup>41</sup> Yvette Donghee Wohn and Brian J. Bowe, "Micro Agenda Setters: The Effect of Social Media on Young Adults' Exposure to and Attitude toward News," *Social Media + Society* (January-March 2016): 7.

<sup>42</sup> Eric J. Oliver and Wendy M. Rahn, "Rise of *Trumpenwolk*: Populism in the 2016 Election," *Annals* (September 2016): 189.

mind on this platform is “ridiculously easy”.<sup>43</sup> Twitter fosters incivility, permitting impolite, offensive and invasive communication.<sup>44</sup> Brian L. Ott emphasises that Twitter is a fertile ground for the Dark Triad: narcissism, Machiavellianism, and psychopathy. Although it is possible to communicate different emotional shades, Twitter is characterised by aggressiveness, hatred, offense.

## Persuasiveness of Populist Messages

Identifying populist messages or styles within media content has been researched a great deal more than the impact of these messages on the audience. Analysing the effects of populism, Michael Hamelers et al. assesses the opportunities to reconstruct reality using media framing.<sup>45</sup> Framing helps to express moral evaluation, and the populist blame is distinguished from other blame by the moral division between “us” and “them”. In this conceptualisation, populism is defined as a moral and relational phenomenon in which centralisation of ordinary people as an in-group is necessary, however insufficient to identify populism<sup>46</sup> because it must be opposed to an out-group.

The research of Michael Hamellers et al. in 2016<sup>47</sup> is the first one in the field of the media’s role in populism empirically proving the effects of populist messages. Research data shows that the sources of populist blame are not merely politicians, it can also be spread by journalists.

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<sup>43</sup> Brian L. Ott, “The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement,” *CRITICAL STUDIES IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION*, published at Research Gate 2016, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311892973\\_The\\_age\\_of\\_Twitter\\_Donald\\_J\\_Trump\\_and\\_the\\_politics\\_of\\_debasement](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311892973_The_age_of_Twitter_Donald_J_Trump_and_the_politics_of_debasement).

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>45</sup> Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese. ““They Did It”: The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication,” *Communication Studies* 1–31, (2016): 4, DOI: 10.1177/0093650216644026.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

Power of persuasiveness is achieved through means of framing, therefore actively reconstructing interpretations about complex social issues such as the job market crisis, social inequality, and the refugee crisis.

Journalist interpretations allow us to easily convert significant social issues into binary oppositions consisting of “blameless us” and “culprit them”. This kind of attitude towards complex issues, pre-framed in the media, is frequently transferred to discussions on social media and user content, simplifying issue causes and blaming politicians or political parties.

As there is a lack of information in political discussions about the responsibility for problems and difficulties, citizens are guided by simple stereotypes suggested by populist messages, forming an opinion about political elites. Researchers claim that populist messages do not touch all citizens alike, because those who are against populist interpretations can resist these messages to a greater extent.<sup>48</sup>

To communicate with audiences, populist communication combines anger and fear, states Hameleers et al.<sup>49</sup>. Anger is associated with the situation that the unreliable elites disallow ordinary people to achieve their goals. Fear is used to emphasise insecurity and talk about threats,<sup>50</sup> because the corrupt elite cannot represent citizens’ interests. According to Hameleers et al., anger and fear in populist messages are used differently. Fear creates insecurity and a feeling of the uncontrollability of events.<sup>51</sup> It stimulates the processing of new information and gradually forces people to accept populist messages, which have identified the guilty: those who are responsible for the problems. Anger creates a feeling of control and clarity.<sup>52</sup> It does not

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<sup>48</sup> Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, and Claes H. de Vreese. ““They Did It”: The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication,” *Communication Studies* 1–31, (2016): 7, DOI: 10.1177/0093650216644026.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

stimulate the desire to seek new information; it creates a situation where people are dependent on the existing views.

Media content research from the Netherlands shows that populist blame frames influenced blame perception. If populists blamed the European Union, citizens were also inclined to blame the EU. However, analysing the blame addressed to the national government, the emotional style had a greater impact on the blame perception than requests for the government to take responsibility. It means that populist messages were perceived differently for the EU and the government of the Netherlands. To make populist messages to the government successful emotions were required, whereas the ones addressed to the EU were accepted quickly and easily. It might be that the attitude towards the EU is less clear than the assessment of the government. To change the attitude towards the government, a greater amount of attacks is necessary.

## **Discussion on the Future of Mediated Populism**

Media populism is connected to market driven journalism,<sup>53</sup> which focuses on market targets instead of responsibility arising from society interests. Journalists attempt to adapt to network communication: quite frequently, professional high quality works are populistically introduced via social media, expanding the audience. The lack of resources in media organisations cause content prepared outside the media, as well as powerful populist messages, to influence media content. It is strengthened by “she said, he said”<sup>54</sup> journalism, which is based on opinions instead of facts. Populist movement representatives are champions of powerful messages useful for media.

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<sup>53</sup> Daniel C. Hallin, “Sound bite news: Television coverage of elections, 1968–1988,” *Journal of Communication* 42, no. 2 (1992): 5–24.

<sup>54</sup> Jay Rosen, “He Said, She Said” Journalism: Are We Done With That Yet?,” *Huffington Post*, May 25, 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-rosen/he-said-she-said-journali\\_b\\_187682.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-rosen/he-said-she-said-journali_b_187682.html).

The necessity to constantly compete with alternative communication channels and the lack of resources arising from this ‘rat race’ in media organisations makes it more likely for media to continue using the populism communication form in the near future. Public media and the few media organisations prioritising quality try to avoid this kind of practice. However, the approaches mentioned are rather an exception, and not an example worth looking up to.

The Brexit voting result in the UK in 2016 was greatly impacted by tabloid support. The results of the vote, which surprised both the UK and other EU inhabitants, could be called “old-school populism communication”, with traditional media playing the main role. Continuing the above mentioned analogy on populism communication channels, Twitter activity by USA President Donald Trump may be called “new-school populism communication”. It influenced the actions of voters as well as the media, as journalists were and are forced to use the short messages as official information sources. Receiving simple, emotional messages decreases the possibility for the media to offer varied and multi-layered content, which would help to assess issues within a high-quality public discussion process. The situation is also made more difficult by algorithms and Google Search Engine Optimisation driven Internet media content. Automaticized tools influence media contents inner pluralism, diminishing the variety of opinions and topics in an ever-expanding information flow. If the content available to society is driven by algorithms, if the structure and popularity of information is distorted not only by paid trolls and fake news producers but also roboticised social media accounts and Twitterbot software, the question about radical and extreme communication concerning populism effects becomes even more significant. Current research shows worrying data on the audience’s potential to distinguish qualitative media content and resist the influence of fake information.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Stanford University, “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning. Executive Summary,” published November 21, 2016, <https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Executive%20Summary%2011.21.16.pdf>.

There is an insufficient amount of research about the way that media strengthens anxiety and insecurity in society by choosing sensationalisation and a superficial view. The structure of social media and the communication models available to users support a multiplication of fear, conspiracy theories and powerful messages. It is convenient for spreading and establishing populist messages. Anxiety arising from an uncertain future or other society groups is an important theme of populist movement messages. However, the emphasis of social insecurity is convenient for spreading extreme views or the support of extreme action.

This question requires research on the consumption of social media content that is linked to extreme ideas. Although some research exists,<sup>56</sup> there is a lack of data which proves the link between right-wing extremism and social media communication; therefore it is complicated when assessing how new participants of extreme and terroristic organisations are acquired with the help of social media. For instance, Jihadist communication is difficult to examine because the audience is hard to identify. The acquisition of data is made difficult by the fact that Jihadist pages only exist for a limited amount of time<sup>57</sup> and often change their location.

Another direction of research is the interconnections between radical online messages and actual participation in violent actions. Research using the indirect media effects theory claims the existence of populist forums<sup>58</sup> can function as the soother of negative emotions, and not encouraging direct participation in violent action. At the same time, researchers must assess the opportunities of network forums to mobilise supporters with the help of information and network tools.

In populist inspired radicalism effect research it is important to state media regulation questions, including the issue on how

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<sup>56</sup> Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgreen, "Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain," *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2016): 54.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

to transfer existing regulations to virtual networking formats. It is well known that extreme movement pages do not obey the standards characteristic to traditional media.<sup>59</sup> These facts make it important to quickly solve an issue by imposing stricter norms for online video platform providers, such as YouTube. However, this solution creates concerns about the future of media freedom and freedom of speech,<sup>60</sup> if certain opinions are limited or banned, forcing an audience to hide within closed information “echo-chambers”.

One more research direction is related to the unanswered question on how Habermassian rational and reasoned public sphere discourse is changing, because the idea of the agonistic public sphere,<sup>61</sup> in which emotions are seen as an alternative type of democratic practice, has become more visible.

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<sup>59</sup> Claudia Alvares and Peter Dahlgreen, “Populism, extremism and media: Mapping an uncertain terrain,” *European Journal of Communication* 31, no. 1 (2016): 54–55.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Jingrong Tong, “The formation of agonistic public sphere: Emotions, the Internet and news media in China,” *China Information* 29, no. 3 (2015): 335.

# Neoliberalism, Austerity, and Economic Populism

*Jānis Bērziņš*

Brexit. Trump. Conservative right-wing governments within the European Union. BRICS. It seems the Western economic and political model is in crisis. This should not be a surprise. On the one hand, what happens in the economy is always the result of political decisions, although though Central Banks are usually independent. Monetary policy is only part of economic policy after all. On the other, the support for specific models of political and economic governance depends very much on the performance of the economy as perceived by the population, thus by voters in the classical process of economic voting. Implementing economic populist policies is considered to be an unsustainable way to gaining political support and winning elections after conservative economic policies failed to deliver economic growth and development.

One of the strongest arguments against economic populism is that after some growth the economy sooner or later collapses, usually going back to the same level it was before. It is followed again by conservative neoliberal orthodox economic policies and austerity, which will again fail to deliver vibrant growth and development. Allegedly, it is the only alternative. Although this seems to be logical, the fact is that Neoliberalism resulted in the economic system being much more unstable, therefore much more prone to crises, while austerity indeed

results in economic stagnation or even contraction. With the 2007 crisis, the economy of many countries suffered the same effects as that of classic Latin American economic populism. The difference this time is that, although they were pursuing the “correct” economic policies, budget deficits, external debts, and unemployment increased, while real wages plummeted. Since the solution was austerity, these trends were aggravated by the effects of economic stagnation. A fair question therefore is in what extent neoliberalism and austerity are as valid as macroeconomic populism since their result is the same. The only significant difference is inflation, but does it really matter in a situation of crisis and stagnation?

Nevertheless, it is not the objective in this paper to discuss whether neoliberalism and austerity are correct economic policies and countries should get used to slow growth and economic stagnation as the norm. Rather, the question is about the political implications of bad economic performance, regarding support by the public for the Western political system and democratic values. Since the only time people may penalize politicians for their mistakes is during elections, it should not be a surprise there is significant political support for change and other alternatives, even if they are outside the center and against Western democratic values. Repeating one of Bill Clinton’s 1992 campaign slogans: “It’s the economy, stupid.”

## **Economics and Populism**

Since the Neoclassical revolution initiated by W. Stanley Jevons in 1871, economics is supposed to have been ideology-free. For many the use of mathematical methods would avoid ideology interfering in economic research. However, many years later, the question about economic theory having been invalidated by ideological bias is still relevant. For example, Joseph Schumpeter was still absorbed with this question in 1950. For him, Social Sciences could not be ideology-free, since “Analytic work begins with material provided by our vision of things,

and this vision is ideological almost by definition.”<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, Schumpeter did not develop the theme. After briefly discussing the issue in his *History of Economic Analysis*, the text breaks and a new chapter starts. Joan Robinson, from the University of Cambridge, discussed its relevance in the first chapter of her 1962 book “*Economic Philosophy*.” For her economics “has always been a vehicle for the ruling ideology of each period as well as partly a method of scientific investigation.”<sup>2</sup> She wrote an entire chapter analyzing the metaphysics, moral, and science of economics, but did not develop the mechanisms of interaction between the economics and ideology mediated by politics.

Therefore, the issue never was fully analyzed. During the 1960s, Daniel Bell presented the idea that traditional grand humanistic ideologies were exhausted and more conservative ideologies would arise. Later, during the 1970’s, both right and left-wing authors scuttled their ideas, resulting in a new “end of ideology.” By the beginning of the 1990’s, as predicted by Bell, right-wing conservative ideology became again popular. Its adherents announced its superiority proclaiming the “end of history,” thus the end of all ideologies.

A common characteristic of the economic debate is that every author claims his/her personal beliefs to be pragmatism, while other ideas are considered to be “ideologies,” or false beliefs and distorted reality. A second one is that economists, implicitly or not, assume to know the real truth about human nature. Finally, a third characteristic is that usually it is also established as a political and economic system based on some newly established pragmatism. As politics and economics presuppose relationships of power, from the very beginning personal convictions masked as policy are used to justify or to deny the established order. This includes choosing specific macroeconomic policies as a vehicle for ideological dominance.

Populism may be understood in many ways. One of them is that it is “an ideology which pits a virtuous and homogeneous people against

<sup>1</sup> Joseph A. Schumpeter, *The Economics and Sociology of Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

<sup>2</sup> Joan Robinson, *Economic Philosophy* (Watts, 1962).

a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice”.<sup>3</sup> This definition can be used as a basis to define economic populism as a set of dangerous ‘others’ who implement economic policies which make virtuous, homogeneous, and sovereign people to lose their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice by creating an economic crisis.

At the same time, populists are not against the principal of political representation, but insist that only they are legitimate representatives of the people. Therefore, all political competitors are not legitimate.<sup>4</sup> This again can be applied when discussing economic populism. All too often economists of all schools of thought believe that only those agreeing with their views are legitimate representatives of Economics as a discipline, while all other are wrong. This is a form of methodological populism.

Economics “has always been a vehicle for the ruling ideology of each period as well as partly a method of scientific investigation,”<sup>5</sup> thus any “economic system requires a set of rules, an ideology to justify them.”<sup>6</sup> As a result, economics is ideological and can be right-wing, left-wing or center. Usually, a set of economic policies can be defined as economic populism if it follows four points. First, it is against the generally accepted common economic wisdom, the main economic ideology; second, it directly benefits the population in general; third, and as consequence of the second, it takes votes away from the parties and politicians in power, thus from the groups they represent; fourth, it often results in a deep economic crisis.

The most common definition of economic populism is the one coined by Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards. It is the use of

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<sup>3</sup> Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonell, *Twenty-first century populism: the spectre of Western European democracy* (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 123.

<sup>5</sup> Joan Robinson, *Economic Philosophy* (New York: Penguin Books, 1978), 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

macroeconomic policies for distributive purposes, relying heavily on expansive fiscal and credit policies and overvalued currency to increase growth and redistribute income, which ends with reducing real wages and deficits in the balance of payments. Its central features are, first, a deep dissatisfaction with the economy's performance as a result of moderate growth or stagnation, and often as a result of the implementation of conservative economic policies. Second, the rejection of this conservative economic ideology. Third, the prescription of reactivation, redistribution of income, and restructuring of the economy.<sup>7</sup> In the beginning the economy grows, but when bottlenecks appear it collapses resulting in implementing orthodox/conservative economic policies, usually under the guidance of the International Monetary Fund and the support of the middle-class.<sup>8</sup>

Accordingly to Rosenstein-Rodan, "Salvador Allende died not because he was a socialist, but because he was an incompetent. After he took office, he accomplished a major redistribution of income that dramatically increased demand, but he did nothing to increase production to satisfy that demand. Instead, he printed money. A breakdown was inevitable, and the resulting inflation not only destroyed the income redistribution that had taken place, but lowered real wages below the level of 1970."<sup>9</sup>

Although Rosenstein-Rodan might be right, an important question is why macroeconomic populists had political support to be in office and implement such policies. The answer is that macroeconomic populism is the direct result of conservative orthodox economic policies being unable

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<sup>7</sup> Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards, "The Macroeconomics of Populism," in *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*, eds. Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 7–14.

<sup>8</sup> Robert R. Kaufman and Barbara Stallings, "The Political Economy of Latin American Populism," in *The Macroeconomics of Populism in Latin America*, eds. Rudiger Dornbusch and Sebastian Edwards (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 15–44.

<sup>9</sup> Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, "Why Allende Failed," *Challenge* 17, no. 2 (May/June 1974): 7–13.

to increase the real income, often resulting in economic stagnation and income concentration, therefore inequality. To understand the rise of populism nowadays, it is necessary to discuss the shift of economic ideology that occurred in the last forty years.

## **Economic Policy as Political Ideology**

By the beginning of the 1970s, after approximately thirty years of Keynesian macroeconomic policies, a great number of changes ended the period of economic growth and full-employment in advanced countries, sustained by strategies of active national state intervention. These changes included the effects of the collapse of Bretton Woods and the first oil shock, which resulted in the world economy entering into defensive recession. With the crisis and the process of stagflation, supporters of economic liberalism began to question the Keynesian postulates, mostly in Europe and in the United States. It turned that neoliberalism, a regime of commercial and monetary policy based on neoclassical utilitarianism became the new mainstream. As a result, direct state intervention in the economy to promote growth and development became unacceptable. Countries with huge structural, cultural, and political differences adopted very similar macroeconomic policies, basically based on the neoliberal framework.

This is a result of economic policy being used as an instrument of populist politics, following serious economic crisis. For each period of time there is a specific set of economic policies considered to be acceptable, therefore non-populist, while other alternatives are considered to be wrong and populist. Taking into consideration that what is acceptable in terms of macroeconomic policy follows crisis, an important question needs to be answered: how does this ideological change occur? How do politicians shift from using one set of macroeconomic policies to another? The answer still relies on the process of economic voting. Bad macroeconomic performance will influence voting according to its impact on voters' wealth, forcing politicians to look for alternatives. In

this case, there are two variables determining how far macroeconomic policies will change.

First, the gravity of the crisis. Second, its geographic extent. Regional or country-specific crises will not result in ideological change, thus the base of the macroeconomic policy will be intact. As the economic system passes through deep structural crisis, sometimes the established economic ideology is not able to make the system go back to the previous level of accumulation, what makes the incumbents' popularity fall. Then, with the involvement of the media, of private interests, and contending political parties, a societal debate starts. This process soon becomes tied up with electoral competition. As a result, each party and/or coalition's offered economic policies comes under a process of social scrutiny led by the media and its pundits. This is the moment when politics meets the academic system, mainly Social Sciences and Economics.

The interest of politicians in the academic system are dual. On one hand, the academic system represents "science". To have the support of its members (or part of them) for some set of policies is a form of legitimization. It is almost tantamount to affirm that some specific set of policies is science. On the other, during serious crisis politicians will look for policy advice at universities and research centers, as it is natural to suppose that the best specialists on a subject are those people working in the academic system. As Myrdal put it, politics "is an art which is circumscribed by the Actual and the Possible, and precisely for this reason [...] The politician may [...] expect of the economist that he should explain the actual situation and the state and effects of different possible modes of action."<sup>10</sup> It is also possible to have a third one, when there is a genuine interest in Science, as politicians may be interested in acquiring knowledge for personal purposes.

Although it is expected that the task of Social Sciences, including Economics in this discussion, "is to observe and describe empirical

<sup>10</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 2.

social reality and to analyse and explain causal relations between [...] facts,”<sup>11</sup> usually a social scientist “proceeds to explain how the existence of the facts in question is consistent with social well-being and natural equity,” while generally succeeding “in deluding himself with the idea that he has solved an economic problem, when, in fact, he has only vindicated, or persuaded himself he has vindicated, a social arrangement.”<sup>12</sup> As a result, social scientists express views on what they consider to be socially imperative, implying the notion that social and economic analysis are able “of yielding laws in the sense of *norms*, and not merely laws in the sense of *demonstrable recurrences and regularities of actual and possible events*.”<sup>13</sup> One example is the theory of ‘free competition.’ Accordingly to Myrdal: “The theory of ‘free competition’ is not intended to be merely a scientific explanation of what course economic relations would take under certain specified assumptions. It simultaneously constitutes a kind of proof that these hypothetical conditions would result in a maximum ‘total income’ or the greatest possible ‘satisfaction of needs’ in society as a whole. ‘Free competition’ thus on logical and factual grounds becomes more than a set of abstract assumptions, used as a tool in theoretical analysis of the causal relation of facts. It becomes a political *desideratum*.”<sup>14</sup>

In other words, no author has ever discussed the economic consequences of a determined monetary system or principles of foreign trade without also providing precepts for political conduct. This attitude is explained by the fact that social scientists, including economists, have the honest ambition of seeing their work recognized as true science.<sup>15</sup> However, social scientists have values reflecting a moral system determined by their own life experience. This implies that even if these values are suppressed in the beginning of the research process, they

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<sup>11</sup> Gunnar Myrdal, *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, *Italic in the original*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

may re-appear when establishing economic policy recommendations. As these economic policy recommendations also reflect an ideal model of social organization to be achieved, it presupposes some form of social and economic control. Thus, they are ideological and, as ideology, they are transformed into political discourse/rhetoric, changing political ideology itself.

The ideological transformation occurs when, in times of crisis, agents expect the government to find a set of economic policies to end the crisis and to promote economic growth and development. According to the magnitude of the crisis, a more or less radical set of policies is chosen. In the case of a very serious crisis like the Great Slump or the stagflation of the 1960s, the economic ideology in force loses its validity. It is substituted by another ideology and the group connected to the previous ideology loses its academic prestige and respect. What was mainstream turns to be marginal, at the same time that what was marginal turns to be the new mainstream.

Because of ideological determinism, the set of economic policies available to the parties and coalitions to deal with crisis is limited to the boundaries of the macroeconomic ideology that became mainstream by the time of the last big crisis. The result is the process of party convergence identified by several authors,<sup>16</sup> where there was a general turn to the left until the 1980s, with macroeconomic policy privileging

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony Downs, "An Economic Theory of Political Action in a Democracy," *The Journal of Political Economy* 65, no. 2 (1957): 135–50; John Clayton Thomas, "Policy Convergence Among Political Parties and Societies in Developed Nations: a Synthesis and Partial testing of Two Theories," *The Western Political Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (1980): 233–46; James L. Sundquist, *Dynamics of the Party System: Alignment and Realignment of Political Parties in the United States* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 1983); Alesina Alberto, "Credibility and Policy Convergence in a Two-Party System with Rational Voters," *The American Economic Review* 78, no. 4 (1988): 796–805; Maria Victoria Murillo, "Political Bias in Policy Convergence: Privatization Choices in Latin America," *World Politics* 54, no. 4 (2002): 462–493; Ashley Lavelle, "A Critique of Murray Goot on Party Convergence," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 39, no. 3 (2004): 645–50; Peter Mair, Wolfgang Müller, and Fritz Plasser, *Political Parties & Electoral Change* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004).

more state intervention in the economy, when centre-right and right-wing parties abandoned traditional ideologies seeking a broader electoral support.<sup>17</sup> After the 1980s it was the contrary: there was a general turn to the right, with macroeconomic policy privileging less state intervention in the economy. As noted by other authors, in the last 40 years the process of convergence towards neoliberalism has been more intense, due to the effects of economic globalization on national economic policies.<sup>18</sup>

It is the result of major parties abandoning their role in linking citizens to the political system, while becoming agents of elites who do not believe in government action and support minimal state roles.<sup>19</sup> The result is that the formal political system has increasingly ceased to be a medium that represents, articulates, redresses, and refines citizen concerns, in favor of a specific ideology to guarantee political survival. This process of ideological convergence provides the evidence of political collusion, establishing cartel parties.<sup>20</sup>

At the political level, there are three consequences. First, the down-sizing of voters' expectations as all parties had an interest in reducing their policy commitments, including state intervention in the economy and offering public goods for free. Despite their political complexity, systemic economic changes started in the 1970s, none of them could

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed discussion see Andrea Volkens, "Policy Changes of European Social Democrats, 1945–98," in *Social Democratic Party Policies in Contemporary Europe*, eds. Giuliano Bonoli and Martin Powell (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; Mark Blyth and Robert Katz, "From Catch-all Politics to Cartelisation: the Political Economy of the Cartel Party," *West European Politics* 28, no. 1 (2005): 33–60; Susanne Soederberg, Georg Menz, and Philip Cerny, *Internalizing Globalization: the Rise of Neoliberalism and the Decline of National Varieties of Capitalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); Richard Katz and Peter Mair, "The Cartel Party Thesis: a Restatement," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 4 (2009): 753–766; Nils D. Steiner, "Economic Globalization and Voter Turnout in Established Democracies," *Electoral Studies* 29, no. 3 (2010): 1–16.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Mair, Wolfgang Müller, and Fritz Plasser, *Political Parties & Electoral Change* (London: SAGE Publications, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> Mark Blyth and Richard Katz, "From Catch-all Politics to Cartelisation: the Political Economy of the Cartel Party," *West European Politics* 28, no. 1, (2005): 33–60.

deal with traditional electoral demands like over-increasing public goods. Second, the externalization of policy commitments. The answer to the problem of competition over less was to create binding institutional fixes, making them not responsible for a large number of economic outcomes, at the same time insulating politicians from voters' preferences. Third, the declining relevance of the mass base changed the relationship between voters and politicians.

## Neoliberalism and Austerity as Economic Populism

At election time, politicians can effectively convince voters to vote for them. However, since the sources of funding, and thus re-election, are outside traditional mass-organizations and party membership has been reformed to the point of redundancy, after an election voters have no effective power over politicians.<sup>21</sup> As a result, a significant part of the population does not feel represented by the Center Left and Right Parties. This increases the support for politicians able to manipulate popular dissatisfaction with the system, usually based on the rhetoric of increasing nationalism and anti-Elitism. Nowadays, this is very much the direct result of neoliberalism and austerity. In more precise terms, there are seven main consequences for the adoption of both economic policies:<sup>22</sup>

- i. Higher unemployment rates;
- ii. Greater social inequality;
- iii. Greater tax burdens on households, while at the same time corporations face less fiscal pressure;
- iv. Drops in consumer spending because of lower wages and higher taxes;

<sup>21</sup> Mark Blyth and Richard Katz, "From Catch-all Politics to Cartelisation: the Political Economy of the Cartel Party," *West European Politics* 28, no. 1, (2005): 42–46.

<sup>22</sup> Lucas Juan Manuel Alonso, "Socio-Economic reflections on the Euro Zone," published February 18, 2016, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/eurocrisispress/2016/02/18/socio-economic-reflections-on-the-euro-zone/>.

- v. Precarization of labor, including resulting in poorly-paid work;
- vi. Reduction of social security contributions, as a result of precarious unemployment;
- vii. Drastic spending cuts in core government tasks such as health, education, social support for the poor, research and development, etc.

This should not be a surprise. Besides long-term structural changes resulting from globalization and neoliberalism, austerity made the situation more acute. A study from the International Monetary Fund which observed episodes of fiscal consolidation over the period 1980–2010 in some OECD countries concluded that 1 percentage point of GDP consolidation results in an increase of around 0.6 percent in inequality of disposable income as measured by the Gini coefficient in the following year.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the economic and financial crisis and subsequent austerity measures has resulted in an overall stagnation of real gross household disposable income since 2008, which was not mitigated by social policies, and were constrained because of budget cuts.<sup>24</sup>

Greece has been in recession for ten years. Ireland has seen the bottom decile's net disposable income reduced by 25 percent, although the top decile income increased by 5 percent. Those at risk of poverty now accounts for 700,000 people, of whom 220,000 are children. In Spain, public wages were reduced by 4 percent, gross capital formation by 57 percent, while interest expenditures increased by 70 percent. In Portugal, domestic demand contracted by 12 percent, meaning that in 2013 it was at the level of 1999. At the same time the unemployment rate increased by 3.4 percentage points. Youth unemployment (ages 15–24) peaked at around 39 percent.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> IMF, *Fiscal Monitor October 2012*, Taking Stock, A progress report on fiscal adjustment.

<sup>24</sup> Olivier Bontout and Terezie Lokajickova, "Social protection budgets in the crisis in the EU," *European Commission (Working Paper 1/2013)*, 2013.

<sup>25</sup> Vassilis Monastiriotes, et al., "Austerity Measures in Crisis Countries – Results and Impact on Mid-term Development," *Intereconomics* 48, no. 04 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10272-013-0441-3>.

In Hungary, the austerity measures included raising taxes and cutting public spending, freezing nominal wages in the public sector for two years, ending the thirteenth month wage and pension, increasing the retirement age from 62 to 65 years, reduced sickness benefits by 10 percent, the housing support system was suspended, the VAT was increased from 20 percent to 25 percent, and subsidies of gas and heating for the poor were suspended. At the same time, the official unemployment rate grew from 7.5 percent at the beginning of 2007 to 11.8 percent by April 2010.<sup>26</sup>

In the United Kingdom, since 2010 austerity has been the government's fiscal policy mainly with deep spending cuts, relatively small increases in tax, and with very few measures to stimulate the economy. Although austerity policies are implemented following the belief that reducing budget deficits increases market confidence and therefore economic growth, they have resulted in poor growth and at the same time public debt increased from 56.6 percent of the GDP in July 2009 to 90 percent of the GDP in 2013 or £ 1.39 trillion. It included significant cuts to social security and the planned loss of 900,000 public sector jobs between 2011 and 2018. The effects on society can be measured by a significant rise in the need for emergency food aid, by a sharp increase in poverty, where by 2022, almost one in three British children is expected to be living in poverty, while an extra 1.5 million working-age adults are estimated to fall into poverty or the equivalent of 17.5 percent of the working-age population.<sup>27</sup> Although the unemployment rate is 4.2 percent, real wages are still decreasing because of inflation and

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<sup>26</sup> Peter Farkas, *Hungary: Worsening Social Circumstances and Exclusion in Hungary* (ATTAC, Country Report), accessed October 15, 2017, <http://www.socialwatch.eu/wcm/Hungary.html>.

<sup>27</sup> See Department for Work & Pensions. *Households Below Average Income: An analysis of the UK income distribution: 1994/95-2015/16*, Department for Work & Pensions (The Households Below Average Income (HBAI) report), Financial year 2015/2016, published on 16 March 2017, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/600091/households-below-average-income-1994-1995-2015-2016.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/600091/households-below-average-income-1994-1995-2015-2016.pdf).

the devaluation of the Pound being at the same level as 2003. This is similar to what happened in Chile and was called macroeconomic populism, resulting in Pinochet's military coup.

A recent research carried out by German economists analyzing data from 1870 to 2014 showed that after financial crises the support for far-right parties increases on average by 30 percent, there is a fractionalization of parliaments, and the overall number of parties represented in parliament strongly increases. It also concluded that since political radicalization, declining government majorities and increasing street protests are characteristic of financial crises, politicians and central bankers carry a significant responsibility to avoid a financial crisis resulting in a political disaster.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the latest financial crisis and the failure of neoliberalism and austerity to deliver economic growth and development resulted in more than just increasing support for far-right parties created four main narratives, which goes from the far-right to the far-left political spectrum:<sup>29</sup>

- The alternative right: anti-mainstream media, pro-Christian, anti-LGBT, anti-feminist, anti-globalist, climate change denying, nationalist.
- The alternative left: anti-mainstream media, anti-corporatist, critical of police, anti-globalist or anti-New World Order/Cabal, anti-corporatist, conspiracy-focused, nationalist.
- The white nationalist and/or anti-Semitic: primarily white-nationalist or anti-Semitic positions.
- Russian multipolarity: supports Russian interests, anti-globalist, anti-United States, anti-European Union.

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<sup>28</sup> Manuel Funke, Moritz Schularick, and Cristoph Trebesch, "Going to extremes: Politics after financial crises, 1870–2014," *CEPR, Discussion Paper no. 10884 (2015)*.

<sup>29</sup> Adapted from Kate Starbird, "Examining the Alternative Media Ecosystem Through the Production of Alternative Narratives of Mass Shooting Events on Twitter," *Proceedings of the Eleventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media (ICWSM 2017)*, <https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM17/paper/view/15603/14812>.

The common denominator among them is anti-globalism, and an anti-Western democratic political and social model. They are based on a deep suspicion of free trade, multinational business and global institutions. They are anti-mainstream media, anti-immigration, anti-science, anti the US government, and anti the European Union. It is the combination of an incompetent economic policy, unable to deliver economic growth and development, with a lack of alternatives that resulted in the growing popularity of populist political movements. The politicians' lack of understanding or worse, empathy about the effects of their political choices towards society especially regarding economic policy, is a serious issue affecting the legitimization of democratic Western values and the sustainability of the Western political model. It is the reflection of the feeling that governments and politicians broke a social contract, are corrupted by the economic elite and financial institutions, and only care about their private interests.

According to the 2017 Edelman Trust Barometer, 71 percent of survey respondents said government officials and regulators are not at all or somewhat credible; 63 percent answered the same about CEOs, while only 52 percent trust a business to do what is right. More than three quarters of respondents among the informed and general population agree the system is biased against regular people and favors the rich and powerful and nearly half of the adults (aged 25–64) with a college education and consumers of large amounts of media have lost faith in the system. For the first time in seventeen years there was a combined decline of trust in businesses, the media, government, and NGOs, and the average level of trust for the four institutions is below 50 percent.<sup>30</sup>

Therefore, at the economic level, it is necessary to recognize that although conservative economic policies are effective in taming inflation and stabilizing the economy in the short term, this is usually done by creating economic contraction and stagnation. Forty years of neoliberalism resulted in wage stagnation because globalization and

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<sup>30</sup> Edelman, *2017 Edelman Trust Barometer* (Edelman, 2017).

the flexibility of labor markets destroyed labor's ability to negotiate and to increase its share of surplus. As a result, although productivity has consistently increased since the 1970s, wages have been declining as a share of the GDP. Second, capital mobility shifted the tax burden further to labor although maintaining the overall tax level in relation to GDP unchanged. Third, to compensate the effects of wage stagnation, there was an overall increase in personal indebtedness. Fourth, because Neoliberalism made the economic system to be inherently unstable, governments have chosen to spend money to bail out the financial system instead of finding ways to make this money reach sectors of the real economy and properly regulate finance. At the same time, since budget cuts are often not enough to keep the budget in equilibrium, public debt has been increasing.

Nevertheless, the economic aspect is not the only one to be taken into consideration. The process of globalization and technological development disrupted the traditional forms of social reproduction. First, by relocating production and eliminating traditional forms of labor. Since the establishment of industrial capitalism in the eighteenth century, the social norm has been that people work to get a wage, form a family, and raise children. The children would have a job similar to their parents or would study to have a better life. This worked for generations. Although this may be still true in certain parts of the world, in the West the process of productive reorganization in the last 40 years resulted in many professions becoming irrelevant from a purely economic perspective.

At the same time, getting a bachelor and even a master degree is not a guarantee for finding a good job. The youth is very much affected by structural underemployment or unemployment. The perception that immigration is a threat for locals' ability to find work exists, although it is debatable if it has any real foundation. Second, by challenging established norms and values; what might be considered a threat for the traditional family and its values. In other words, the future is not what it used to be. Uncertainty became the norm and a nostalgia for a golden past its expression.

## Conclusion

What has been called (macro)economic populism today, including the increasing popularity of far-right and far-left economic programs, Trump's victory, BREXIT, is just the reaction of people against economic and social policies which are clearly failing to deliver growth, development, and certainty about the future. They have been delivering the same results as Latin American macroeconomic populism in the 1970s. In this sense, they should be considered as populist as Allende, Peron, or Vargas' economic policies. The difference is that today these policies are supported by the political and economic elite, as by the media as well, and are considered the correct answer for economic crises. Other alternatives are considered by the mainstream to be economic populism because of the ideological faith on neoliberalism and austerity.

The result is exactly Dornbush's cycle: the failure of orthodox conservative economic policies results in redistributive economic policies and crises. However, if Keynesianism and later neoliberalism in the 1970s were ideologically pro-democracy and pro-Western values, nowadays the answers are anti-democracy and anti-Western values. This is a price too high to pay for intellectual myopia. It is necessary to go beyond the safety of the toolbox of neoliberal economic policies and austerity to pragmatically address what Adam Smith stated was the main objective of economics: to increase the welfare of the nation as whole. How to do that is not a secret.

The first step is to stop labeling everything that is not aligned with mainstream political and economic ideology as populism. As a concept it is overused and means so many things that in the end it means nothing. Second, it is necessary to relink economics and politics to the people. This is not populism. This is how democratic systems are supposed to be. Third, government officials, central bankers, regulators, and politicians should be responsible for the result of their policy choices as in Iceland after the crisis. The results of neoliberal economic

policies and austerity are the same as Latin American macroeconomic populism. The main issue nowadays is the increasing popularity of anti-Western democratic values alternatives. It is time for economists to go beyond methodological rigidity, accepting that what worked before might not work now.

# Donald Trump and American Populism<sup>1</sup>

*Michael Kazin*

Donald Trump is an unlikely populist. The Republican president inherited a fortune, boasts about his wealth and his many properties, shuttles between his exclusive resorts and luxury hotels, and has adopted an economic plan that would, among other things, slash tax rates for rich people like himself. But a politician does not have to live among people of modest means, or even tout policies that would boost their incomes, to articulate their grievances and gain their support. In 2016 Trump clearly tapped into a deep vein of distress and resentment among millions of white working- and middleclass Americans.

Trump is hardly the first politician to bash elites and champion the interests of ordinary people. Two different, often competing populist traditions have long thrived in the United States. Pundits often speak of “left-wing” and “rightwing” populists. But those labels don’t capture the most meaningful distinction. The first type of American populist directs his or her ire exclusively upward: at corporate elites and their enablers in government who have allegedly betrayed the interests of

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<sup>1</sup> This article is adapted and updated version of the article “Trump and American Populism: Old Whine, New Bottles,” published by *Foreign Affairs*, October 6, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2016-10-06/trump-and-american-populism>.

the men and women who do the nation's essential work. These populists embrace a conception of "the people" based on class and avoid identifying themselves as supporters or opponents of any particular ethnic group or religion. They belong to a broadly liberal current in American political life; they advance a version of 'civic nationalism', which the historian Gary Gerstle defines as the "belief in the fundamental equality of all human beings, in every individual's inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and in a democratic government that derives its legitimacy from the people's consent."

Adherents of the second American populist tradition – the one to which Trump belongs – also blame elites in big business and government for under mining the common folk's economic interests and political liberties. But this tradition's definition of "the people" is narrower and more ethnically restrictive. For most of US history, it meant only citizens of European heritage – "real Americans," whose ethnicity alone afforded them a claim to share in the country's bounty. Typically, this breed of populist alleges that there is a nefarious alliance between evil forces on high and the unworthy, dark-skinned poor below – a cabal that imperils the interests and values of the patriotic (white) majority in the middle. The suspicion of an unwritten pact between top and bottom derives from a belief in what Gerstle calls 'racial nationalism', a conception of "America in ethnoracial terms, as a people held together by common blood and skin color and by an inherited fitness for self-government."<sup>2</sup>

Both types of American populists have, from time to time, gained political influence. Their outbursts are not random. They arise in response to real grievances: an economic system that favors the rich, fear of losing jobs to new immigrants, and politicians who care more about their own advancement than the well-being of the majority. Ultimately, the only way to blunt their appeal is to take those problems seriously.

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<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Prewitt, *What Is "Your" Race?: The Census and Our Flawed Efforts to Classify Americans* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 64.

## Populists Past and Present

Populism has long been a contested and ambiguous concept. Scholars debate whether it is a creed, a style, a political strategy, a marketing ploy, or some combination of the above. Populists get praised as defenders of the values and needs of the hard-working majority and condemned as demagogues who prey on the ignorance of the uneducated.

But the term ‘populist’ used to have a more precise meaning. In the 1890s, journalists who knew their Latin coined the word to describe a large third party, the Populist, or People’s, Party, which powerfully articulated the progressive, civic-nationalist strain of American populism. The People’s Party sought to free the political system from the grip of “the money power.” Its activists, most of whom came from the South and the West, hailed the common interests of rural and urban labor and blasted monopolies in industry and high finance for impoverishing the masses. “We seek to restore the Government of the Republic to the hands of the ‘plain people’ with whom it originated,”<sup>3</sup> thundered Ignatius Donnelly, a novelist and former Republican congressman, in his keynote speech at the party’s founding convention in Omaha in 1892. The new party sought to expand the power of the central government to serve those “plain people” and to humble their exploiters. That same year, James Weaver, the Populist nominee for president, won 22 electoral votes, and the party seemed poised to take control of several states in the South and the Great Plains. But four years later, at a divided national convention, a majority of delegates backed the Democratic nominee, William Jennings Bryan, who embraced some of the party’s main proposals, such as a flexible money supply based on silver as well as gold. When Bryan, “the Great Commoner,” lost the 1896 election, the third party declined rapidly. Its fate, like that of most third parties, was like that of a bee, as the historian Richard Hofstadter wrote in 1955. Once it had stung the political establishment, it died.

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Kazin, ed., *The Concise Princeton Encyclopedia of American Political History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 384.

Senator Bernie Sanders has inherited this tradition of populist rhetoric. During the 2016 campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination, he railed against “the billionaire class” for betraying the promise of American democracy and demanded a \$ 15-an-hour minimum wage, Medicare for all, and other progressive economic reforms. Sanders calls himself a socialist and has hailed his supporters as the vanguard of a “political revolution.” Yet all he actually advocates is an expanded welfare state, akin to that which has long thrived in Scandinavia.

The other strain of populism – the racial-nationalist sort – emerged at about the same time as the People’s Party. Both sprang from the same sense of alarm during the Gilded Age about widening inequality between unregulated corporations and investment houses and ordinary workers and small farmers. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the champions of this strain of thought used xenophobic appeals to lobby Congress to bar all Chinese and most Japanese laborers from immigrating to the United States. Working- and middleclass white Americans, some of whom belonged to struggling labor unions, led this movement and made up the bulk of its adherents. “Our moneyed men ... have rallied under the banner of the millionaire, the banker, and the land monopolist, the railroad king and the false politician, to effect their purpose,”<sup>4</sup> proclaimed Denis Kearney, a small businessman from San Francisco with a gift for incendiary rhetoric who founded the Workingmen’s Party of California (WPC) in 1877. Kearney charged that a “bloated aristocracy ... rakes the slums of Asia to find the meanest slave on earth – the Chinese coolie – and imports him here to meet the free American in the labor market, and still further widen the breach between the rich and the poor, still further to degrade white labor.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Ronald H. Bayor, *The Columbia Documentary History of Race and Ethnicity in America* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2004), 269.

<sup>5</sup> *Student Almanac of Asian American History: From the exclusion era to today* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 41.

Brandishing the slogan “The Chinese Must Go!” and demanding an eight hour workday and public works jobs for the unemployed, the party grew rapidly. Only a few white labor activists objected to its racist rhetoric. The WPC won control of San Francisco and several smaller cities and played a major role in rewriting California’s constitution to exclude the Chinese and set up a commission to regulate the Central Pacific Railroad, a titanic force in the state’s economy. Soon, however, the WPC was torn apart by internal conflicts: Kearney’s faction wanted to keep up its attack on the Chinese “menace,” but many labor unionists wanted to focus on demands for a shorter workday, government jobs for the unemployed, and higher taxes on the rich.

Yet populist activists and politicians in Kearney’s mold did achieve a major victory. In 1882, they convinced Congress to pass the Chinese Exclusion Act – the first law in U.S. history to bar members of a specific nationality from entering the country. Two decades later, activists in the California labor movement spearheaded a fresh campaign to pressure Congress to ban all Japanese immigration. Their primary motivation echoes the threat that Trump sees coming from Muslim nations today: Japanese immigrants, many white workers alleged, were spies for their country’s emperor who were planning attacks on the United States. The Japanese “have the cunning of the fox and the ferocity of a bloodthirsty hyena,” wrote Olaf Tveitmoe, a San Francisco union official, who was himself an immigrant from Norway, in 1908. During World War II, such attitudes helped legitimize the federal government’s forced relocation of some 112,000 Japanese Americans, most of whom were U.S. citizens.

In the 1920s, another predecessor of Trump-style populism rose, fell, and left its mark on US politics: the Klu Klux Klan. Half a century earlier, the federal government had stamped out the first incarnation of the KKK, which used terror to try to stop black men and women in the Reconstruction South from exercising their newly won freedoms. In 1915, the Methodist preacher William Simmons launched the second iteration of the group. The second Klan attracted members from all over the nation. And they not only sought to stop African Americans

from exercising their constitutional rights under the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. In the 1920s, they also charged that powerful liquor interests were conspiring with Catholic and Jewish bootleggers to undermine another part of the Constitution: the recently ratified Eighteenth Amendment, which prohibited the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. “The enemy liquor gang – angry, vindictive, unpatriotic – is seeking the overthrow of the highest authority in the land,”<sup>6</sup> claimed *The Baptist Observer*, a pro-Klan newspaper in Indiana, in 1924. “They can count on the hoodlums, the crooks, the vice-joints, the whiskey loving aliens, and the indifferent citizen to help them win... Can they count on you?”<sup>7</sup> Like Kearney’s party, the second KKK soon collapsed. But with nearly five million members at its peak in the mid-1920s, the Klan and its political allies helped push Congress to pass strict annual quotas limiting immigrants from eastern and southern Europe to a few hundred per nation in 1924. Congress revoked this blatantly discriminatory system only in 1965.

Like these earlier demagogues, Trump also condemns the global elite for promoting “open borders,” which supposedly allow immigrants to take jobs away from U.S. workers and drive down their living standards. At the beginning of presidential campaign, he was brutally specific about which groups pose the greatest danger. He accused Mexicans of bringing crime, drugs, and rape to an otherwise peaceful, law-abiding nation and Muslim immigrants of favoring “horrendous attacks by people that believe only in jihad, and have no sense of reason or respect for human life”<sup>8</sup> – a stark truth that the “politically correct” Obama administration supposedly ignored. Trump’s unsuccessful attempts early in his term to ban travelers from several Muslim nations sprang from the same impulse.

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Cornell Paperbacks, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Roger Stone, *The Making of the President 2016: How Donald Trump Orchestrated a Revolution* (NY: Skyhorse Publishing, 2017).

## America First

American populists have tended to focus most of their attention on domestic policy. But foreign policy is also a target. Trump, for example, has disparaged international alliances, such as NATO, and populists from both traditions have long worried about nefarious foreign influences on their country. In its 1892 platform, for example, the People's Party warned that a "vast conspiracy against mankind" in favor of the gold standard had "been organized on two continents" and was "rapidly taking possession of the world." Of the two strains, however, populists in the racial-nationalist tradition have always been the most hostile to international engagement. In the mid-1930s, Father Charles Coughlin, "the radio priest," urged his huge broadcast audience to defeat ratification of a treaty President Franklin Roosevelt had signed that would have allowed the United States to participate in the World Court at The Hague. That court, Coughlin charged, was a tool of the same "international bankers" who had supposedly dragged the nation into the slaughter of World War I. The resulting torrent of fear-driven mail cowed enough senators to deny Roosevelt the two-thirds majority he needed.

In 1940, the America First Committee, an isolationist pressure group, issued a similar warning against U.S. intervention in World War II. The group boasted some 800,000 members and stitched together a broad coalition: conservative businessmen, some socialists, a student detachment that included the future writer Gore Vidal (then in high school) and the future president Gerald Ford (then at Yale Law School). It also enjoyed the support of a number of prominent Americans, Walt Disney and the architect Frank Lloyd Wright among them. But on September 11, 1941, its most famous spokesperson, the celebrated aviator Charles Lindbergh, took the antiwar, anti-elitist message a step too far. "The three most important groups who have been pressing this country toward war are the British, the Jewish, and the Roosevelt administration," he charged in a nationally broadcast speech. "Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence

in our motion pictures, our press, our radio, and our government.” By then, Hitler’s conquest of most of Europe had put America First on the defensive; Lindbergh’s anti-Semitic slurs accelerated its downfall. The group quickly disbanded after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor three months later.

In recent decades, however, several prominent figures on the populist right have revived America First’s brand of rhetoric, although most avoid overt anti-Semitism. In the early 1990s, Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition (a lobbying group for conservative Christians), warned darkly of a globalist cabal that threatened American sovereignty. “The one-worlders of the ... money trust,”<sup>9</sup> he warned, “have financed the one-worlders of the Kremlin.”<sup>10</sup> A few years later, the conservative political commentator Pat Buchanan proposed building a “sea wall” to stop immigrants from “sweeping over our southern border.” In 2003, he accused neoconservatives of plotting the US invasion of Iraq in order to build a “new world order.” This year, Buchanan has defended the reputation of the America First Committee and cheered Trump’s run for the White House. For his part, the Republican nominee vowed, in a major speech last April: “America First’ will be the major and overriding theme of my administration.”<sup>11</sup> He led crowds in chants of the slogan, while feigning indifference toward its dark provenance, and repeated the cry in his inaugural address.

## We the People?

Although Trump’s rise and election demonstrated the enduring appeal of the racial-nationalist strain of American populism, his rhetoric misses one crucial element of the traditional discourse. It lacks

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Cornell Paperbacks, 1994).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Douglas Kellner, *American Nightmare: Donald Trump, Media Spectacle, and Authoritarian Populism* (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2016), 42.

a relatively coherent, emotionally rousing description of “the people” whom Trump claims to represent.

This is a recent absence in the history of American populism. The People’s Party and its allies applauded the moral superiority of “the producing classes,” who “created all wealth” with their muscles and brains. Their virtuous majority included industrial wage earners, small farmers, and altruistic professionals such as teachers and physicians. For prohibitionists who backed the KKK, “the people” were the teetotaling white evangelical Christians who had the spiritual fortitude to protect their families and their nation from the scourge of the “liquor traffic.” Conservatives such as Senator Barry Goldwater and President Ronald Reagan asserted that they were speaking for the “taxpayers” – an updated version of the “producers” of old. In his 1968 presidential campaign, the third-party candidate George Wallace even described the people he claimed to represent by naming their occupations: “the bus driver, the truck driver, the beautician, the fireman, the policeman, and the steelworker, the plumber, and the communications worker, and the oil worker and the little businessman.”<sup>12</sup>

While vowing to “make America great again,” however, Trump has offered only vague, nostalgic clichés about which Americans will help him accomplish that mighty feat. His speeches and campaign website employ such boilerplate terms as “working families,” “our middle class,” and, of course, “the American people” – a stark contrast to the vividness of his attacks, whether on Mexicans and Muslims or his political rivals (“little Marco,” “lyin’ Ted,” “lowenergy Jeb,” and “crooked Hillary”).

In Trump’s defense, it has become increasingly difficult for populists – or any other breed of US politician – to define a virtuous majority more precisely or evocatively. Since the 1960s, the United States has become an ever more multicultural nation. No one who seriously hopes to become president can afford to talk about “the people” in ways that *explicitly* exclude anyone who isn’t white and Christian.

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Cornell Paperbacks, 1994).

Even Trump has tried to reach out, in a limited and somewhat awkward fashion, to African American and Latino citizens. Meanwhile, the group that populists in the racial-nationalist tradition have historically praised as the heart and soul of the United States – the white working class – has become a shrinking minority.

Yet progressive populists have also failed to solve this rhetorical challenge. Sanders made a remarkable run for the Democratic nomination in 2016. But like Trump, he was much clearer about the elite he despised – in his case, “the billionaire class” – than about who exactly would contribute to and benefit from his “revolution.” Perhaps a candidate who drew his most ardent support from young Americans of all classes and races could not have defined his “people” more precisely, even had he wanted to.

In the past, populists’ more robust concepts of their base helped them build enduring coalitions – ones that could govern, not just campaign. By invoking identities that voters embraced – “producers,” “white laborers,” “Christian Americans,” or President Richard Nixon’s “silent majority” – populists roused them to vote for their party and not merely against the alternatives on offer. Neither Democrats nor Republicans have been able to formulate such an appeal today, and that failing is both a cause and an effect of the public’s distaste for both major parties. It may be impossible to come up with a credible definition of “the people” that can mobilize the dizzying plurality of classes, genders, and ethnic identities that coexist, often unhappily, in the United States today. But ambitious populists will probably not stop trying to concoct one.

## **Playing With Fear**

It would be foolish to ignore the anxieties and anger of those who flocked to Trump with a passion they showed for no other presidential candidate in decades. According to a recent study by the political scientist Justin Gest, 65 percent of white Americans – about two-fifths

of the population – would be open to voting for a party that stood for “stopping mass immigration, providing American jobs to American workers, preserving America’s Christian heritage, and stopping the threat of Islam.”<sup>13</sup> These men and women believe that most politicians ignore or patronize them, and they feel abandoned by a mass culture that prizes the monied, the cosmopolitan, and the racially diverse. They represent roughly the same percentage of their country as do the French who back the National Front and only about ten percent less than the British who voted for a British exit from the EU.

But so long as neither of the two main US parties addresses their concerns in a serious and empathetic way – by severely limiting undocumented immigration and providing secure employment at decent wages – they will likely remain open to politicians who do make such an effort, however ill-informed he or she might be.

## Conclusion: A Necessary Evil

At its best, populism provides a language that can strengthen democracy, not imperil it. The People’s Party helped usher in many of the progressive reforms, such as the income tax and corporate regulation, that made the United States a more humane society in the twentieth century. Democrats comfortable with using populist appeals, from William Jennings Bryan to Franklin D. Roosevelt, did much to create the liberal capitalist order that, despite its flaws, few contemporary Americans want to dismantle. Even some populist orators who railed against immigrants, like those in California in the 1880s, generated support for laws, such as the eight-hour workday, that, in the end, helped all wage earners in the country, regardless of their place of birth or race.

To be sure, populism has had an unruly past. Racists and would-be authoritarians have exploited its appeal, as have more tolerant foes

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<sup>13</sup> Joe R. Feagin and Kimberley Ducey, *Elite White Men Ruling: Who, What, When, Where, and How* (London: Routledge, 2017).

of plutocracy. But Americans have found no more powerful way to demand that their political elites live up to the ideals of equal opportunity and democratic rule to which they pay lip service during campaign seasons. Populism can be dangerous, but it may also be necessary. As the historian C. Vann Woodward wrote in 1959 in response to intellectuals who disparaged populism, “One must expect and even hope that there will be future upheavals to shock the seats of power and privilege and furnish the periodic therapy that seems necessary to the health of our democracy.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Comer Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 166.

# Explaining the Vote for Brexit

*Matthew Goodwin*

On 23 June 2016 Britain voted by a margin of 52 to 48 per cent to leave the European Union (EU). The result of the referendum sent shockwaves around the world, rocking financial markets and rekindling debates about the lingering appeal of populism. Yet in some respects the vote for Brexit should not have been a surprise. Rather, it should be seen as merely the latest stage in a long and well documented tradition of British Euroscepticism. Even when Britain had first voted to join the European Community in 1975, academics who studied the vote noted a distinct lack of public enthusiasm for integration. As Sir David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger observed, British public support for joining the EC had been ‘unequivocal but it was also unenthusiastic. Support for membership was wide but it did not run deep’.<sup>1</sup> Yet nor was the vote for Brexit simply about the issue of Europe itself. As I will argue in this essay, aside from revealing a challenge to the EU the vote also threw light on much deeper political and social divides in Britain that had been cutting across traditional party lines for many years, and which in the years to come will likely continue to further destabilize British politics. Foremost, the Brexit should also be seen as a symptom of long-term social changes that at least since the 1960s have been reshaping public opinion, political behavior, and party competition in Britain, as well as in other Western democracies.

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<sup>1</sup> David Butler and Uwe Kitzinger, *The 1975 Referendum* (London: MacMillan Press, 1976).

## Deeper Currents – The Roots of the Brexit Vote

The social changes that made Brexit possible began decades ago. As I show elsewhere, since the 1960s there has been a slow but relentless shift in the structure and attitudes of British voters as they have experienced a number of linked trends, though in particular the rise of a new and more economically affluent professional middle-class and the rapid expansion of university education.<sup>2</sup> These trends are by no means unique to Britain but they are essential to making sense of the 2016 vote for Brexit.

In the decade before Britain first joined the European Community in 1975, more than half of those who had jobs did manual work. Fewer than one in ten voters had a university degree. By the 2000s, the working class had dwindled to around a fifth of the employed electorate, while more than one in three voters were university graduates. These underlying changes in the nature of the electorate had clear political consequences for the main parties, who until this point had organized their campaigns around class.

When the working class were dominant, Labour could win power by mobilizing core working-class supporters, while the Conservatives had to cultivate cross-class appeal. Yet by the 1990s, the changes in society meant that this reality had been reversed. Labour was compelled by repeated defeats and a shrinking working-class core vote to develop a new cross-class appeal, a strategy that was pursued by Tony Blair and New Labour, who downplayed traditional working-class values and ideology. Instead, between 1994 and 2010 Britain's social democrats offered a more managerial, centrist image that was chiefly designed to win over the middle classes. Blair and his team sought to attract middle-class professionals and graduates, whose numbers were rising but also held social values on issues such as race, gender, sexuality and EU membership that were a natural fit with the liberal left. At least in

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin, *Revolt on the Right: Explaining Support for the Radical Right in Britain* (NY: Routledge, 2014).

the short term this was a highly successful strategy. Blair and Labour enjoyed an unprecedented three successive general election victories. Nor were they alone. Social democrats across much of the West followed a broadly similar strategy.

Yet the strategy had negative consequences for Labour and would in later years play an important role in the drift toward Brexit. During the New Labour era, socially conservative, working-class white voters with few qualifications gradually lost faith in Labour as a party that represented them and responded to their concerns. A significant number of working-class voters, who felt anxious over immigration and were instinctively hostile to Britain's EU membership, either stopped voting, identified less strongly with Labour or in some local areas defected to new right-wing parties like the British National Party and, in later years, the UK Independence Party.<sup>3</sup>

Although this could have provided an opening for the Conservative Party, from 2005 David Cameron focused on building a very different brand of conservatism than that which had been followed by his predecessors, such as William Hague and Michael Howard. Cameron said he wanted to stop talking so much about the issue of Europe and also distance his party from the earlier crude campaigns on immigration and against the EU. Alongside George Osborne, who would soon be chancellor, Cameron also sought to win support from the growing pool of university graduates and middle-class professionals who the Conservative Party had lost to New Labour in earlier years. Working-class voters were often concentrated in safe Labour seats, with daunting majorities and weak local Conservative organizations, and so the middle-class suburbs appeared to offer a much more promising path back to power. While demographic change increased the incentive for Labour to focus on middle-class university graduates, enduring

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<sup>3</sup> Geoffrey Evans and James Tilley, *The New Politics of Class: The Political Exclusion of the British Working Class* (Oxford University Press, 2017); Robert Ford and Matthew Goodwin "Understanding UKIP: Identity, social change and the left behind," *Political Quarterly* 85, no. 3 (2014): 277–284.

geographical differences in vote patterns blunted the incentive for the Conservatives to respond by seeking the votes of working-class school leavers. As a result, white working-class voters were neglected by both parties and began to feel alienated in a political world where the main parties had converged on the centre ground.

Another longer-term change in British society was also important to explaining the Brexit revolt that would soon arrive – a growing value divide over identity, immigration and attitudes toward social liberalism more generally.<sup>4</sup> New and rapidly growing groups of voters in Britain, including ethnic minorities, university graduates, and middle-class professionals, also tend to hold very different values to those that were held and cherished by older, white, working-class and less well educated groups. As Labour and the Conservative Party redirected their efforts to focus on the more socially liberal segments of society, there emerged a new ‘liberal consensus’ that mass immigration was beneficial and Britain’s EU membership, though not perfect, should be supported. This outlook regards ethnic diversity as an unquestionable social strength; views any discrimination by gender, race, religion, or sexual orientation as a social evil; regards national identity as a matter of civic attachment, not ethnic ancestry; and thinks individual freedom matter much more than communal values. This was not just about winning votes. Graduates and social liberals have come to dominate the top tiers of politics and society. Most politicians come from the professional middle classes and share its values.

But this outlook also contrasted sharply with the more nationalistic, communitarian, and inward-looking values of the declining segments of the older, white, and working-class voters who left school with few qualifications. These “left-behind” voters feel cut adrift by

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<sup>4</sup> On values and the Brexit vote see Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath, *Brexit vote explained: poverty, low skills and lack of opportunities* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016); Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath, *The UK 2017 General Election examined: income, poverty and Brexit* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2017).

the convergence of the main parties on the liberal, multicultural consensus, a worldview that is alien to them. Among these voters, national identity is linked to ancestry and birthplace, not just institutions and civic attachments, and Britishness is more important to them than it is to liberal graduates.

The left-behind are more focused on order and stability than on freedom and diversity, so the very things that social liberals celebrate – diversity, mobility, rapid change – strike them as threatening. Their policy preferences reflect this: They favor harsh responses to criminals and terrorists who threaten social order, tough restrictions on immigration, and feel opposed to a more ethnically diverse and rapidly changing Britain. Intolerance plays a role here too. Such voters tend to emphasize a more exclusive and exclusionary sense of national identity and express more negative stereotypes of minority groups that fall outside this identity. But this is not just about intolerance. Many of the things that such voters value – order, stability, tradition – are valid and legitimate ideals. They are just profoundly different from the values of the liberal consensus that has emerged over the past twenty years. Mainstream politicians attached to that consensus were not only ignoring the values and priorities of the left-behind, they were actively promoting a vision of Britain that the left-behind found threatening and rejected.

By the twenty-first century, therefore, Britain had a large number of marginalized, politically alienated and low-skilled white working class whose values and attachments differed from the mainstream liberal consensus. The issue of immigration and the arrival of Nigel Farage and the UK Independence Party provided these voters with an outlet.

## **Immigration and the Rise of UKIP**

In some respects, Tony Blair was an unintentional architect of the Brexit vote. In years to come historians may look back at New Labour's decision in 2003 not to impose temporary restrictions on

the inward migration of EU nationals from Central and Eastern Europe as a key moment in Britain's drift toward Brexit. Britain's low unemployment and growing economy attracted EU migrants in much larger numbers than originally forecasted by the government. Between 1997 and 2004, net migration rose from 48,000 to 268,000 per year and would surpass 300,000 in the years immediately before the referendum. The statistics regarding net migration, which was the focus of government policy targets, routinely dominated debate and coverage of immigration in the media. This produced a very strong public reaction.

The share of voters naming migration as one of the nation's most important issues increased from under 3 percent at the start of 1997 to over 40 percent toward the end of 2007. Immigration was routinely named by voters as one of the top two most important issues, even in the worst moments of the post-2007 financial crisis and Great Recession. By the time of Britain's 2016 referendum, immigration had been at the top of the political agenda for well over a decade, something which had never happened before. In Britain, as elsewhere in Europe, the strongest opposition came from voters who saw this as a source or symbol of rapid social change that threatened traditional identities and values. And because much of the focus was on EU nationals from Central and East European states many voters came to see immigration as an issue that was closely bound up with the issue of Britain's EU membership. This made the 2016 referendum completely different from that earlier referendum which had been held in 1975. As Britain headed toward the referendum a large majority of voters believed that only by leaving the European Union could they reduce the overall levels of immigration into the country.<sup>5</sup>

Though both Labour and the Conservatives were aware of the growing revolt over immigration neither could respond effectively. Labour made efforts to limit or restrict migrant access to welfare benefits

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<sup>5</sup> Harold D. Clarke, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

and toughen up the asylum system, but obviously many on the left also defended immigration as economically and socially beneficial. David Cameron, meanwhile, had pledged to reduce net migration to “the tens of thousands” but this was an undeliverable promise. EU treaty rights guarantee the free movement of EU nationals, making this degree of control impossible so long as Britain remained as a member of the European Union. Thus, between 2010 and 2015 the government’s efforts to reduce immigration were continually undermined by continued migration from within the EU, including new arrivals from countries in Southern Europe that were grappling with the fallout from the Great Recession, as well as from the newer EU member states of Romania and Bulgaria that gained access to Britain in 2014.

Against this backdrop, those voters who felt especially anxious about immigration gradually lost faith in the mainstream and the ability of the main parties to manage the issue effectively. Shortly before the 2016 referendum a plurality of voters actually viewed Nigel Farage and UKIP – which were demanding an immediate halt on immigration – as the most favoured political party on this specific issue.<sup>6</sup> This potent cocktail of concern over immigration and distrust of the main parties was concentrated among those socially conservative and less-educated white voters who already felt left behind by rapid social, economic, and value changes. Immigration was the catalyst for these voters, symbolizing the value divides that put them at odds with the liberal consensus, eroding their trust in the political system, and providing an opening for a new pro-Brexit challenger.

By 2015, UKIP had become the most successful new party in English politics for a generation. By fusing its message of withdrawal from the EU with strident opposition to immigration, the party attracted rising support, particularly between 2013 and the general election in 2015, which saw the party poll almost 13 per cent of the national

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<sup>6</sup> James Dennison and Matthew Goodwin, “Immigration, issue ownership and the rise of UKIP,” *Parliamentary Affairs* 68 (2015): 168–187.

vote.<sup>7</sup> The party's votes came mainly, though not exclusively, from older white social conservatives who had few qualifications, had voted for the Conservative Party in the past, were strongly opposed to immigration and EU membership, and felt dissatisfied with the main parties. The rise of UKIP was a key factor that led David Cameron in 2013 to commit to holding a referendum on Britain's EU membership, and had also cultivated support for Brexit in many of the Conservative and Labour-held seats that would soon vote in a majority to leave the European Union.

### **Voting to Leave the European Union**

When all votes had been counted 52 per cent of people in the United Kingdom, and nearly 54 per cent in England, had opted to leave the European Union. Local authorities across England, from economically disadvantaged Labour heartlands to prosperous Conservative suburbs, reported big majorities for Leave on very high turnouts – the overall turnout was the highest recorded in a U.K. – wide vote since 1992.

Areas with large numbers of pensioners and which also had a history of voting for UKIP recorded very high turnouts and strong support for Brexit. Support for Brexit was higher than 70 per cent in fourteen local authorities, many of which had been cultivated by the UKIP in the past. This was particularly so in parts of eastern England with large concentrations of “left-behind” voters. Leave attracted majority support in approximately 70 percent of Labour-held areas, winning especially strong support in poorer northern areas like Hartlepool and Ed Miliband's constituency of Doncaster.

These Brexit-voting areas contrasted very sharply with London, Northern Ireland, Scotland, and the university towns such as Oxford and Cambridge which all voted in a large majority to remain in

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo, *UKIP: Inside the campaign to redraw the map of British politics* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

the European Union. Of the fifty local areas where the vote to remain in the EU was strongest thirty-nine were in London or Scotland and most of these areas had large universities with student populations.

In a country that had become divided along unfamiliar lines, London – home to the political, business, and media elite – was profoundly at odds with the country that it dominates and overshadows. London wholeheartedly embraced Europe, even as most of England emphatically rejected it. Diverse urban areas and university towns returned large Remain majorities while the bulk of English local areas backed Leave.

Support for leaving the EU also had strong class, education, and ethnic components. The biggest majorities for Leave were in the least diverse local jurisdictions, or in those with large concentrations of working-class voters and voters with few qualifications. The vote for Brexit was anchored predominantly, albeit not exclusively, in areas that are filled with pensioners, low skilled and less well educated blue-collar workers and citizens who have been pushed to the margins not only by the economic transformation of the country over recent decades but also by the values that have come to dominate a more liberal media and political class. Interestingly, rates of turnout in the heartlands of Brexit were higher than average, indicating that it is citizens who have long felt excluded from the mainstream consensus who used the referendum to voice their distinctive views not only about Britain's EU membership but a wider array of perceived threats to their national identity, values and ways of life.

Local experiences with migration also mattered. The popular argument that it was mainly heavily white areas with little experience of immigration that voted for Brexit is quite inaccurate. On the contrary, it was areas that had experienced significant inward migration as a result of EU migration over the past ten years preceding the referendum that were significantly more likely to vote for Brexit.<sup>8</sup> This provides further

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<sup>8</sup> Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath, "The 2016 Referendum, Brexit and the Left Behind: An Aggregate Level Analysis of the Result," *Political Quarterly* 87, no. 3 (2016): 323–32.

evidence that it was not only concern about immigration at the national level that was a key driver of the vote for Brexit but also – in some areas – the experience of witnessing sudden change in the ethnic composition of local communities that pushed some people toward voting to leave the European Union.

Among individual voters, support for Brexit was 30 points higher among people with only GCSE-level qualifications (awarded to school leavers at sixteen) than it was for people with a degree. Support for Brexit was also far stronger among those who felt anxious over the effects of immigration, who identified as English rather than British, and who exhibited socially conservative or authoritarian values. Support for Brexit also overlapped very strongly with support for the UKIP in earlier elections, suggesting that the vote for Leave was driven at least in part by the same forces. Those who felt they had been left behind by the transformation of the British economy were also among the most likely to play down the perceived risks for Brexit and vote to leave the EU.<sup>9</sup>

The vote for Brexit, obviously, had real consequences. Whatever form Brexit takes in the end the public vote to leave the European Union (EU) has accelerated the polarization of values, outlooks, and political priorities that increasingly divides university-educated cosmopolitans from poorly qualified nationalists. The negotiations between Britain and the EU will likely entrench the divides that separate England's more socially liberal youth from its socially conservative pensioners, and its diverse and outward-looking big cities from its homogeneous and introspective small towns and declining industrial heartlands.

The 2016 vote laid bare the depths of the divisions between these groups and placed them on opposite sides of the defining political decision for a generation. Both traditional governing parties now have to wrestle with open conflict between Leavers and Remainers, between those who now want to prioritize single-market access and those who

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<sup>9</sup> Harold D. Clarke, Matthew Goodwin, and Paul Whiteley, *Brexit: Why Britain Voted to Leave the European Union* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

want to prioritize stronger curbs on free movement and migration. Reconciling these completely different worldviews will be difficult, if not impossible.

## Conclusion

Although the shifts that culminated in Brexit appear to have been remarkably rapid, the fuel that Euroskeptics and Leavers ignited to spectacular effect had been accumulating for a long time. A slow but steady alteration in the structure of the electorate and the shift in the focus of political competition away from the working class and toward the middle class opened up a gap in the political marketplace.

The roots of the vote for Brexit can be traced back over decades to changes in British society and politics that, by 2016, had left a growing segment of older, white, nationalist, and socially conservative voters marginalized from mainstream politics and opposed to the socially liberal values that have become dominant in their politics and media.

Repeated failures by the political mainstream to respond to a clear public demand for controlled migration stoked a high-profile and deeply polarizing debate that pushed latent conflicts over identity and nationalism, values and social change, to the forefront of British politics. Between 2010 and 2016 these conflicts were then cultivated further and brought more forcefully into politics by the rise of the UK Independence Party, which against the backdrop of record immigration levels fused this issue with that of Britain's EU membership. This has been deeply disruptive for a political system in which electoral battles for at least the past two decades had focused instead on questions of economic stewardship and the management of public services, with the main parties split primarily over redistribution and the relative roles that should be played by the state and the market.

The 2016 referendum and the vote for Brexit exposed and deepened a newer set of cleavages that are cultural rather than economic. Across the West, these divides between nationalists and cosmopolitans, liberals

and conservatives, and cultural traditionalists and multiculturalists cut across old divisions and present established parties with new and difficult challenges. In Britain, negotiating an acceptable deal with the EU is the primary challenge for the government today. But articulating and responding to the divisions that were laid bare in the Brexit vote will be the primary challenge of tomorrow.

*It's migration, stupid!*  
Lessons from the Elections  
in Germany and the Netherlands  
in the Light of Populism

*Florian Hartleb*

The year 2016 was full of populism: the refugee crisis, terrorism and Brexit on the one side, the electoral wins of populist challengers in this political climate on the other. After the dramatic accumulation of warning signals for liberal democracies and the EU as a *political system sui generis*, two scenarios have been discussed: Has “2016” become the zenith in the wave of populism with the Dutch and French elections as a reality check (Marine Le Pen and Geert Wilders couldn’t reach the unrealistic goal to become President or Prime Minister of their country) or is it just the start for populism as a central political force in European politics. In the light of the debate, the national elections in two Western European neighboring and culturally connected countries took place in 2017: on 14 March in the Netherlands, and on 24 September in Germany. Both countries faced the populist challenge. Insofar it makes sense to compare and analyze developments in the two countries.

The fact that even in Germany, for the first time in post-war history, a radical right-wing party – Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD) – entered national parliament as third-biggest

party getting 12.6 percent of the vote. The political earthquake has its roots not in the economy but in a cultural backlash based on a fear of migration and refugees. In its short history the AfD has rapidly morphed from being a ‘professors’ party’ of Eurosceptic economists into one focused on nationalist conservatism and anti-migration policies, similar to other European radical populist parties such as the Dutch Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV). In January 2017 AfD invited to the German city of Koblenz Dutchman Geert Wilders, Frenchman Marine Le Pen and Italian Matteo Salvini for a “counter summit”. Geert Wilders, leader of the PVV, promoted the meeting on his Twitter feed, using the hashtag #WeWillMakeOurCountriesGreatAgain – a nod to US President Donald Trump’s promise to “Make America Great Again”.<sup>1</sup> The populists wanted to use for the first time an international occasion in order to get domestic support. In fact, they were unified in the wish “to trumpetise European politics” – at least in terms of a political marketing effect.<sup>2</sup>

There are two central aspects of populism:<sup>3</sup>

- The *vertical dimension* is a general characteristic of populism, the dissociation from the political classes (institutions and traditional parties). The attitude is one of ‘us’ against ‘the powers that be’.
- The *horizontal dimension* is a specifically right-wing variant of populism, with dissociation from immigrants, aliens and criminals: the attitude of ‘us’ against ‘the outsiders’.

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<sup>1</sup> “After the US, far right says 2017 will be the year Europe wakes up,” *The Guardian*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/21/koblenz-far-right-european-political-leaders-meeting-brexit-donald-trump>.

<sup>2</sup> Florian Hartleb, *Die Stunde der Populisten. Wie sich unsere Politik trumpetisiert und was wir dagegen tun können* (Schwalbach/Ts: Wochenschau-Verlag, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Florian Hartleb, *After their establishment: Right-wing Populist Parties in Europe* (Brussels: Centre for European Studies/Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2011).

The following criteria are common to all types of anti-establishment parties, despite their differences:<sup>4</sup>

- the doctrine that '*there is an alternative*' (in terms of the EU and migration);
- the construction of a *homogenous people* (one people's common interests in the sense of a *volonté général*) and a front line against the political elites and mainstream parties;
- the image of an *underdog*, perpetuating the myth that they are excluded from the establishment, including the media;
- the label of an *opposition party* (on current issues and in the format of representative democracy, but not necessarily against the democratic system itself);
- the promise to clean up '*dirty politics*' (with slogans such as 'we know the truth') and fight against corruption and clientelism;
- a *cynical approach* to politics (attacking either the morality or competence of the establishment);
- the image of a *taboo-breaker* with the aim of polarizing the political discourse (on both issues and structural-based matters);
- an *aggressive attitude* towards political adversaries (conflict instead of consensus).

In the following, I want to analyze the 2017 elections in both countries in order to figure out similarities and differences and come to a conclusion.

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<sup>4</sup> Florian Hartleb, "Here to stay. The rise of Anti-Establishment Parties in Europe," *European View, Springer Press* 12 (2015): 1, <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12290-015-0348-4>.

## The Dutch Case

The Netherlands had its populist revolt at the start of the twenty first century. A newly founded party around the anti-Islamic Pim Fortuyn (List Pim Fortuyn), professor for sociology, got in at the national elections on 6 May 2002 with 17.0 percent of the vote making it the second-strongest force in the government. Just a few days before the election Fortuyn, a dandy who was openly living an almost exhibitionistic gay lifestyle, was murdered by a lone-wolf terrorist. The party, with the loss of the name-giver, initiator and spiritus rector and without having an elaborated program, disappeared from the political landscape. The climate behind – the distrust towards the political elites, the widespread Euroscepticism (in 2005 the Dutch people clearly said “no” to an EU constitution via a national referendum) and growing anti-Islamism along with the fear of anti-immigration in such a multicultural society set the ground easily for a new populist wave. This came years later with a “new” Pim Fortuyn, Geert Wilders.

Wilders, born in 1963 in Venlo, close to the Dutch-German border, with a mother from Indonesia, a former Dutch colony, was once a Member of the Parliament People’s Party for Freedom (VVD). Addicted to politics he stepped out after he got a bad place on the parliamentary list in spring of 2002 and radicalized himself, especially with his anti-Islamic views bringing the Koran to the same level as Adolf Hitler’s “Mein Kampf” (even with a film called “Fitna” released in 2008) including the use of conspiracy theories. Supporting the US war on terror and having a good network in the US where he is a regular speaker at Ground zero, he published a book in Washington DC with the title “*Marked for Death. Islam’s War against the West and Me*”: Islam is not a religion that we must do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Instead, it is a totalitarian system aiming for political domination in the world.”<sup>5</sup> Wilders points out later in the book: “A free society should

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<sup>5</sup> Geert Wilders, *Marked for Death. Islam’s War Against the West and Me* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 42.

not grant freedom to those who want to destroy it. Every halal shop, every mosque, every Islamic school, and every burka is regarded by Islam as a step toward the ultimate goal of our submission. As such, we must close down all Islamic schools, for they are totalitarian institutions where young children are indoctrinated into an ideology and hatred. We must also close down all radical mosques and forbid the construction of new mosques, which Islam regards as symbol of its triumph.”<sup>6</sup> Wilders, who has visited Israel many times and has many contacts there, is a great friend and supporter of Israel (Wilders regards Israeli politician Avigdor Lieberman as a friend; an individual who is widely considered to be on the far-right of the Israeli political spectrum). Wilders can also be linked financially to American and Israeli conservative groups. Unlike other Dutch political parties, the PVV is self-funded.

In difference to his ally, Marine Le Pen, Wilders shows his distance to Vladimir Putin but gives interviews to *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*.

The egocentric Dutchman also created a “one-man-party” launched in February 2006. In organizational terms the PVV is a “couch or one-seat party” as it has only two formal members: the natural person Wilders and the legal person, a political foundation in which Wilders is the only member on the executive board. Wilders who was and is still under constant security protection and changes his unknown sleeping places permanently did not recruit any members, initially for fear of infiltration by right-wing extremists and troublemakers, later due to the strategy of being a virtual or network party beyond the classical membership<sup>7</sup>. Wilders is the only one who has a formal say in the creation of the party program, candidate list, coalition negotiations, and any other party affairs. Of course, Wilders uses modern technology to gain support. In

<sup>6</sup> Geert Wilders, *Marked for Death. Islam's War Against the West and Me* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2012), 214.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Lucardie and Gerrit Voerman, “Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom in the Netherlands: A Political Entrepreneur in the Polder,” in *Exposing the Demagogues. Right-wing and National Populist Parties in Europe*, eds. Karsten Grabow and Florian Hartleb (Brussels & Berlin: Centre for European Studies/Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2013), 194.

2012 he (who is long-time married with a Hungarian) created a website titled “Report Middle and Eastern Europeans”, asking people whether they have been annoyed by noise, drunkenness or squalor associated with migrant workers, or have lost jobs to them. Wilders programmatic pillar is also Euroscepticism in many regards. He speaks about the loss of sovereignty as a result of European integration, not least regarding the area of immigration, and the EU’s high costs to the taxpayer. In the 2010 PVV manifesto the EU was dubbed a “multicultural super state”, and the party complained that ‘thanks to that club in Brussels, Europe is swiftly turning into Eurabia’. The issue of European integration truly took center stage in the program of 2012, which was titled “Their Brussels, our Netherlands”. At this time Mr Wilders explicitly attacked the EU’s handling of the financial and economic crises. In the 2014 European elections Wilders promoted a Eurosceptic fusion with Marine Le Pen including a common Press conference. Consequently, Wilders saw the Brexit-referendum as a role model: “A Nexit would be the ‘best that that could happen to us. We will become the boss of our own country again. We’ll again have the key to our own front door”.<sup>8</sup> For the election campaign, *Nexit* wasn’t the highest priority due to the fact that Dutch citizens’ support for a *Nexit* is clearly limited. Wilders focused therefore on a nativist campaign.<sup>9</sup> Different to other radical right-wing populist parties, the PVV’s socio-economic position is more left-wing than that of the radical left Socialist Party. Wilders’ libertarian views on ethical issues are also quite unique. He supports the right to abortion, euthanasia and embryo selection, while the party

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<sup>8</sup> “Dutch PM says Geert Wilders’ Nexit would cause chaos like Brexit,” *Sky news*, March 14, 2017, <http://news.sky.com/story/netherlands-election-dutch-pm-says-geert-wilders-backed-nexit-would-cause-chaos-10801138>.

<sup>9</sup> Stijn van Kessel, “Geert Wilders is no longer so keen on pushing for a ‘Nexit’ – and it’s because Dutch people don’t want it,” *Blog*, London School of Economics, March 2, 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/03/02/nexit-evolving-euroscepticism-geert-wilders/>.

also presents itself as a defender of women and gay people “in the face of the advance of an ‘intolerant and backward Islam.’”<sup>10</sup>

Geert Wilders has played a role in the Dutch government before the elections of 2017. He won 24 seats (16 percent) in 2010, which gave him a role as a minor partner supporting a coalition between the Christian Democrats and the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy in the first cabinet of Mark Rutte. In 2012, Wilders refused to accept major budget cuts which the cabinet had to take in order to meet EU requirements. When the government collapsed, Wilders stayed to be the controversial figure in Dutch politics. In March 2014 and during a party meeting in the Hague on the evening of local elections, he sparked widespread controversy when he asked his attending supporters “Do you want, in this city, and in the Netherlands, more or fewer Moroccans?” After which they chanted: “Fewer! Fewer!” Wilders’ response was, “Then we’ll fix it!” This action led several PVV representatives to resign. On the other hand, Wilders had gone on trial on hate speech charges using the opportunity to proclaim himself as saver of free speech in the Netherlands.

The elections in 2017 mobilized – the result was the highest turnout in more than 30 years (82 percent). A long time before the Election Day, opinion polls expected Geert Wilders to take first place. Wilders campaigned only with a one-page election manifesto which included pledges to close borders to immigrants from Muslim nations, shutter mosques and ban the Koran, as well as take the Netherlands out of the European Union. For a variety of reasons – security, a lack of funds, a fight with television producers – Wilders has been notably absent from the campaign trail. In February, Wilders canceled all public appearances after an officer tasked with protecting him reportedly leaked information about his whereabouts to a Moroccan criminal gang. His strategy was certainly to portray himself as a victim in a period

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<sup>10</sup> See Koen Vossen, “Classifying Wilders: The Ideological Development of Geert Wilders and His Party for Freedom,” *Politics* 31, no. 3 (2011): 179–89.

when the polls went down for him – as a court case. Despite all this the party still reached second place with 13.1 percent, but the result was interpreted as a defeat. It is no doubt that he influenced the political discourse. With the resources he had he couldn't compete. Koen Vossen, an expert on the Freedom Party points out: "Where the other parties have invested a lot in a campaign with professional ads, a whole strategy, and a whole professional bureau of consultants that work for them, Wilders really has nothing. He doesn't have any money, his personnel is maybe 50 people in the whole country. It's not much. Maybe there are a few hundred people at most who are willing to put up posters."<sup>11</sup> The new government without Wilders sets its priorities on a strict law-and-order course against immigrants and patriotism in general. The last-minute pro-Rutte swing and the turn against Wilders has its cause in a strong stance against Turkey. The Turkish family affairs minister was detained by the authorities to prevent her addressing a Rotterdam rally in support of the Turkish president and escorted to the German border. Earlier, Erdoğan branded the Netherlands "Nazi remnants" and "fascists" after the Dutch government withdrew permission for his foreign minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu to land in the Netherlands for a planned visit. Mark Rutte, announced in a statement on Facebook that the plane carrying Çavuşoğlu had been barred from landing<sup>12</sup>. In this sense, it is a pyrrhic victory over Dutch populism.

## The German Case

For a long time Germany seemed to be a European exception. In difference to all its neighboring countries, from the Netherlands via

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<sup>11</sup> See "Three biggest Dutch election myths," *Politico*, March 13, 2017, <http://www.politico.eu/article/three-myths-dutch-election-wilders-nexit-analysis-politics-eu-vote-populism-rutte/>.

<sup>12</sup> "Dutch police expel Turkish minister as 'Nazi remnants' row escalates," *The Guardian*, March 12, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/11/erdogan-brands-dutch-nazi-remnants-for-barring-turkish-mp>.

Austria to Poland, there seemed to be no ground for right-wing populist parties due to two main obstacles. Because populism in Germany has to operate in a historically encumbered environment, media have developed a fear of contact with it which prevents any unconstrained debate and constantly exposes the right-wing parties to the risk of being linked with National Socialism. A second major obstacle to success is posed by stigmatization and the parties' inability to establish themselves as a political force. A further difficulty facing German parties in particular is that they exert an irresistible appeal for groupings and sub-cultural milieus within the ultra-right camp. Even moderate representatives of right-wing populism are not immune to being infiltrated by ultra-right individuals and groupings seeking to escape political isolation.

The AfD's launch in early 2013 was all about challenging the Eurozone bailouts and rejecting the EU's arguments for keeping the euro. Leading figures included economists as well as conservative politicians and journalists who left the CDU being accused of losing its core identity. In opposition to further Eurozone bailouts by liberal-conservative economists, the AfD has since moved further to the radical-right, and the party campaigned primarily on an anti-immigration and anti-Islam message in the run-up to the 2017 election. The AfD website features pictures of German towns and cities with the slogan: "It's about us, our culture, our home, our Germany." The party has used more explicit and controversial slogans and posters too, including those proclaiming "Get your country back!" Others have called for "bikinis instead of burkas" referring to the full-body covering some Muslim women wear, and "Islam does not fit our kitchen" on a poster depicting a piglet, referring to Islam's dietary prohibition of pork. After the AfD slim loss at the 2013 Bundestag elections (reaching 4.7 percent with a 5 percent hurdle in the system) as a consequence of the epochal refugee crisis the radicalization process even strengthened the party in terms of votes. It became the major protest option against the "refugee-welcome" euphoria in autumn and winter 2015 (after chancellor Angela Merkel announced the openness with the phrase "Wir schaffen das" which means "We can make it". The German state

permitted about one million (in part) *refugees* from Syria and Iraq to enter Germany, in many cases without having a passport. A long-term alienation of society is visible – independently from the fact that government took measures both at a national and European level to cope with the challenge. The slogan “Uns geht es so gut wie nie zuvor” (“we are doing so well especially in economic terms as never before” could not convince all parts of society. In other terms “It’s migration, stupid!” to paraphrase the former adviser of American President Bill Clinton, James Carville, who said in the 1990s: “It’s economy, stupid.” The grand coalition formed by the CDU and SPD in 2013 has been to the detriment of both parties. Due to the CDU plotting their course along the middle (not only with the migration policy but also in terms of gender and gay rights), part of Germany’s conservative voter base has inevitably decamped further to the right.

In Eastern German society, where entire demographic groups have drifted into anomie due to the pace and circumstances of systemic change, the potential for a party or movement from the right is probably higher than average. Despite positive factors such as economic growth and a high quality of infrastructure, education etc. parts of society feel alienated. In Eastern Germany, the party is highly successful – independent with their links to the radical right. In Saxony, a country which was dominated by the CDU after 1990, the AfD became the strongest force in national elections with 27 percent of the vote. It indicates that Germany has, nearly two decades after unification, two different electorates and large protest potential in Eastern Germany. The sensitive fact is the phenomenon of “hostility against foreigners without having foreigners”, as the Pegida-phenomenon in Dresden revealed. It would of course be misleading to portray the AfD alone as an Eastern-German creation. In Bavaria where the CSU highly successful integrate the populist right, the AfD could get third place with 12.4 percent (whereas the CSU fell to their lowest score since 1949 with 38.8 percent). The AfD in Bavaria has no structure and known candidates whereas the CSU has tradition, networks, power and structure.

The increasing influence of radical and extreme right currents has resulted in radical party chairwoman Frauke Petry from Saxony (who replaced moderate Bernd Lucke, a more technocratic professor for economics) becoming the target of inner party attacks. Paradoxically, she is now the one calling for moderation and it is her leadership that is now being questioned by radical nationalist currents in the party. She argued with her new husband, the Pro-Russian Markus Pretzell, both a Member of the European Parliament and the Parliament of lower Saxony (which reflects a lack in the German constitution), that she would enable the AfD to take part in future coalition governments, both at a regional and national level. One day after the election victory and her statements in media, she, elected via a direct mandate, announced her stepping out during a press conference. It is likely that members of the fraction on the national and country level will follow her. Whether the member score of 28,000 (a record in the party's young history, but still significantly behind other parliamentary small parties such as the Greens, Liberals and The Left having between 50,000 and 70,000) will decrease significantly, can hardly be predicted. The moderate wing of the party is isolated (also the leader of the Christian wing left after the election announcing the project to create a moderate conservative party had failed).

Björn Höcke, a teacher of history and gymnasium sports and a leader of the Thuringia-AfD and right-wing stance within the party, (who has strong links to the intellectual circles of German New Right nationalism), openly called for ending the "cult of guilt" around the holocaust. Instead, in Höcke's view, Germany needs to take a more "positive" attitude toward its history. Even if the party leadership reacted by instituting procedures to remove Höcke, he has stayed and remained a powerful figure who won the battle against Frauke Petry who stepped down. The party wants to be a provocateur (as an internal strategical paper for the election campaign revealed) including targeted attacks against the German "Vergangenheitsbewältigung". The established parties regularly fall in traditional media in the populist trap giving all the attention to the AfD, being blamed as a "shame to Germany",

“as new Nazis” or for “attacking the voters”. How difficult this is revealed with the top candidate for the national election, Alice Weidel. She has been called the prototype of a cosmopolitan young professional, lived in China for six years, is fluent in mandarin and worked for Goldman Sachs. Holding a PhD in economics (with a scholarship from the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung) where she was supervised by one of Lucke’s early supporters, the 38-year-old is portrayed as symbolizing the continuing importance of ordo-liberalism in the party (as the whole project started under Lucke). Weidel, who represents a homophobic party, is a lesbian. She lives with a woman adopted from Sri Lanka, and they have adopted two children together. The other top-candidate Alexander Gauland, a 76-year-old former CDU state secretary, has been a fervent supporter of Höcke and his New Right nationalism. In addition, he stands for a closer connection with Putin’s Russia, typical for parties such as Front National and FPÖ. Gauland also said that Crimea is officially reunited with Russia “in the wake of 2014’s peaceful exercise in democratic self-determination”<sup>13</sup> (TheDuran.com 2017). In the fall of 2015, he met in St. Petersburg with members of Putin’s political party, United Russia. The AfD is using similar professional social media strategies to its counterpart’s including manipulation via social bots and trolls. AfD supporters used the hashtag #Wahlbetrug (“election fraud”) throughout the last week of campaigning. The traffic was not organic, but boosted by a network of automated “bot” accounts which operates largely in Russian.<sup>14</sup> In their elections, the AfD also addressed the Russian-German community. In the Berlin elections, they printed their flyers in Russian. The AfD has estimated that about a third of its support comes from Russian-speaking voters, several

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<sup>13</sup> “Germany’s surging AfD party calls for recognition of Russian Crimea,” *TheDuran.com*, August 19, 2017, <http://theduran.com/germanys-surging-afd-party-calls-for-recognition-of-russian-crimea/>.

<sup>14</sup> #ElectionWatch: Final Hours Fake News Hype in Germany. Bots and trolls push vote-rigging claim ahead of German election, *Medium.com*, September 24, 2017, <https://medium.com/dfrlab/electionwatch-final-hours-fake-news-hype-in-germany-cc9b8157cfb8>.

million of whom have settled in Germany since the 1990s; they now make up as much as 5 percent of the population. The AfD thus had no difficulty in attracting Russian-speakers not only to join the party but also to run for office. In the region of Lower Saxony, for instance, three out of the party's top 12 candidates for parliament were native Russian speakers.<sup>15</sup>

A first look at the exit polls can help us better understand the election result. A significant number of voters switched from the centrist CDU and its Bavarian sister party, the CSU, to the AfD. It also attracted many voters who previously voted for the center-left SPD, and most surprisingly perhaps from the far-left Die Linke. However, the largest number of new AfD voters did not cast a ballot in the previous federal elections. Far from just attracting disgruntled voters from other parties, the AfD was also able to mobilize a significant number of previous non-voters. The electoral success of the AfD can thus be seen in part as the result of mobilizing individuals who have previously been disaffected by the lack of a political "voice" in the party system. At the same time, centrist and left-wing voters were also more likely to cast a ballot due to the polarization of the party system brought about by the emergence of a new party on the far right. It remains to be seen whether the rise of the AfD will lead to a long-term shift to the right in German politics. In general, AfD voters are less attached to the party and vote for it less out of conviction than voters for other parties.<sup>16</sup>

Various studies have shown, in contrast to the popular "losers of modernization thesis", that the majority of AfD-voters are economically successful members of the middle class. Thus some argue that the basis for the AfD's rise is neither a fear of economic globalization, nor economic

<sup>15</sup> "How Russian Voters Fueled the Rise of Germany's Far-Right," *Time.com*, September 25, 2017, <http://time.com/4955503/germany-elections-2017-far-right-russia-angela-merkel/>.

<sup>16</sup> Julian M. Hoerner and Sara Hobolt, "The AfD succeeded in the German election by mobilizing non-voters on the right," *Blog*, London School of Economics, September 29, 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/09/29/the-afd-succeeded-in-the-german-election-by-mobilising-non-voters-on-the-right/>.

need, but a perceived lack of positive national self-consciousness and a perceived decline of German cultural identity.<sup>17</sup> Many voters still see the AfD as the only political force that has continuously opposed Merkel, be it in terms of their policies on the economy and migration, or by standing up for German sovereignty and identity in times of social change and perceived crises. As long as this is the case, the party will continue to play an important role in German politics and remain a means to ensure the influence of far right ideas in mainstream politics. The refugees-welcome culture with the shadow of dangers for security therefore has a long-standing impact. In the 2017 campaign, she tried to produce a scandal by leaving a TV debate in ZDF after it was said that AfD is a “radical-right-wing party”.

What is clear is that the AfD is now part and parcel of the German political landscape in strict opposition to other political forces. In other words: it's the AfD against all others, or vice versa. Even if it is in relative decline now, the party is in 14 out of 16 state parliaments today (only Bavaria and Hessen are missing where elections will take place in 2018). With the fraction in Bundestag, they receive state funding to build up a stable network. Ninety-four elected Members of Parliament (including dropouts such as Petry) can hire more than 400 employees paid by the German state, as well as millions of euros every year are used for Public Relations and press work). Also, one of the vice speakers from Bundestag will be the biggest enemy in the party. In almost every country party unit, they deal with personal clashes, struggles about the party line and general political goals beyond just protest. Because right-wing populist challengers have previously stood no chance in Germany, it is not surprising the AfD, who hit the ground running, has become a haven for various strands of the political radical right which

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<sup>17</sup> Julian Göppfarth, “The rise of Germany’s AfD: From ordo liberalism to new right nationalism and into the Bundestag?” *Blog*, London School of Economics, June 27, 2017, <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/06/27/the-rise-of-germanys-afd/>; <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12290-015-0348-4>.

seemed to have won the battle over the liberal-conservative wings who already stepped out of their party.

## Comparison

To compare both phenomena, similarities and differences can be pointed out beyond the organization: one-man-party versus traditional party hierarchy with some anarchistic elements towards a way of professionalization.

Both parties share the following similarities:

- Both parties could increase voter turnout and bring former non-voters to the election (including grass roots movements and protests within civil society against populism and extremism).
- The right-wing populist parties have dominated national and international debates in the general political framework especially in the fields of migration and planned provocations.
- In terms of the election campaign and political discourse they received more influence than just votes. The (im)migration debate still is very controversial and ongoing.
- Debates over Brexit, the EU, Trump & Co, and general discussions on migration lead to a high turnout as was shown in both elections.
- All parliamentary parties announced, in the light of 2017, to not consider any kind of coalition with the radical right party.
- The parliamentary groups are heterogeneous and have a high risk of splitting. In Baden-Württemberg, two AfD fractions existed (first party chairman Bernd Lucke has already stepped down). A new split has occurred with the attempt of former party chairwoman and Lucke's successor, Frauke Petry, which has created a new party. Also in Wilders' fraction, several candidates and MPs turned out after severe clashes.
- Both parties have limited resources in terms of funding and organization.

- Both parties used the refugee crisis as unique opportunity structure to mobilize against German chancellor Angela Merkel and the so called “welcome culture”.
- Both parties attack traditional media in producing fake news (the “lying press”, in German “Lügenpresse”).

PVV and AfD also differ in some regards:

- The PVV is clearly a one-man-show with the dominant figure of Geert Wilders, whereas the AfD clearly lacks when it comes to charismatic leadership. Most significantly, the party’s leader Frauke Petry stepped down one (!) day after the national elections.
- The political culture of the two countries differs. Whereas the Netherlands already have (following the “Pim Fortuyn” revolt in 2000) a second generation of experience dealing with radical-right wing populism, Germany still seems to be in shock. The established parties agree on a moralistic rejection of the AfD due to its fascist heritage.
- The AfD is a new creation without a direct heritage. There were only a few prior attempts in the history of the Bundesrepublik, such as the “Republikaner” in the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s, the Schill party in Hamburg with 19.4 percent of the vote in local elections, and the right-wing extremist National Democratic Party with successes in Saxony and Mecklenburg-Pomeria. All attempts failed to be a political factor at a national level – different to the AfD. In the Netherlands, the PVV can be seen as a follow up of the populist breakthrough of the “Fortuyn-revolt” at the beginning of the twenty first century.
- Dutch populism is created by two eccentric personalities (Fortuyn and Wilders) whereas German populism is not directly related to any charismatic figure. However, the role of experienced Alexander Gauland as a strategist shouldn’t be underestimated.

- Whereas the AfD has close ties to Putin's Russia, Wilders still goes in distance emphasizing the importance of transatlantic ties (despite interviews in *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*).
- The PVV is much more libertarian than the AfD despite the latter's tolerance of a lesbian top candidate for the 2017 Bundestag-election.

## Conclusion

The Europe-wide success of new parties is in many ways astonishing considering their lack of resources, members, and to some extent traditions. The latter factor has become less important because of anti-elitist tendencies in the media, the public's attraction to new and unconventional parties, and the logic of the media systems themselves (e.g. the popularity of talk shows and short slogans, and the arrival of social media). Furthermore, the new parties sometimes have creative financing tools, or entrepreneurs as sponsors. The anti-establishment parties have frequently achieved this success by breaking up the elite's commitment to consensus and disrupting the classical method of reaching compromises in meetings, parliaments, summits and so on. As the polarization between establishment parties decreases (as in Germany due to a grand coalition and consensus in the refugee topic), the anti-establishment parties are able to gain more electoral support.

The fast-growing character of anti-establishment projects also leads to internal rivalries about the course being taken, the issues covered and so on, as has been the case from the beginning for the AfD. Personal scandals cast doubt on the claim that the parties will clean up corrupted politics. However, due to the protesting characteristic of these parties, such scandals may not automatically endanger or damage the whole project. Political scientists now agree that these new parties are an expression of a deep-seated crisis of confidence, a lack of faith in the ability of democratic politics to truly represent the people, which can be attributed to the disintegrative impacts of today's modernization

processes. If these analyses are to be believed, then populists exert the greatest appeal for those individuals who see themselves as part of the disadvantaged groups in society – i.e. groups which are at the greatest risk of further social decline. In other words, populism is a protest phenomenon, a response to the impacts of individualization, bearing witness to the need for identity. In this context, migrants, especially refugees, become the central focus of populist resentment culminating in the fear towards Islam. Many experts agree that politicians and social establishments have already accommodated the radicals among immigrants for far too long, saying they have overlooked the cultural conflict between orthodox Islam and libertarian European societies where, for example, women are emancipated.<sup>18</sup> The refugee crisis strengthens this argument in many regards – with the fear of terrorism, more crime (also from European communities against immigrants), and difficult integration into the labor market (due to limited skills not only in terms of language). Not to mention many refugees come from the Islamic culture.

The effects on the coalition-building processes are visible despite the fact that both right-wing populist parties play the role of opposition (against the establishment): It took 209 days or 7 months for the former and new center-right Prime Minister Max Rutte to form a new government in the Netherlands. His party won the elections with only 21 percent – as much as the weakened German Social Democrats got. How difficult the government-building process is can be also observed after Germany's national elections on 24 September. There is a clear cut away from the old "Bonn model" having a two-party coalition between a bigger and smaller partner. Due the fact that – in difference to the Netherlands and Scandinavia – minority governments are not part of the national political culture, only two options remained:

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<sup>18</sup> René Cuperus, "Der populistische Dambruch. Die niederländische Volksparteien unter Druck," in *Populismus in der modernen Demokratie. Die Niederlande und Deutschland im Vergleich*, eds. Wielenga Friso and Florian Hartleb (Münster: Waxmann-Verlag, 2011), 163–178.

the unpopular “big coalition” between the CDU/CSU and the weakened Social Democrats for a third time (which the SPD-top candidate and party chairman Martin Schulz immediately excluded) or a so called “Jamaica” coalition between CDU/CSU, the Liberals (who made a comeback in the Bundestag) and the Greens. The so-called “losers of globalization” are not the only ones who vote for Wilders these days. The question of cultural identity in the welfare states affect the middle class who have concerns of insecurity and see refugees as a danger to their own welfare – more than any kind of economic questions.<sup>19</sup> The unsolved question of migration has shaken the traditional rules of the consensual models of democracy in both countries, which have many different parties in their respective parliaments. The established parties then should learn to give less attention and moralistic outrage towards unwelcome guests in the party landscape, as well as in parliament.

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<sup>19</sup> Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris, “Trump, Brexit and the Rise of Populism. Economic Have-Nots and Cultural Backlash,” *Working Paper*, Cambridge/Massachusetts, Harvard Kennedy School, August 2016, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2818659](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2818659).



# The Front National's Populism: From the Far Right to the Normalization of an Identity Party

*Thierry Dominici & Jean-Louis Alessandri*

*"I will be leading in the elections on the night of the first round because I can feel there is an unbelievable mobilization, a fantastic dynamic, I know my electors quite well and I think they are going to vote me in leading position on Sunday night."*

Vaticinated or prophesied by Marine Le Pen  
on radio Europe 1, on 20 April 2017.

Indeed, it is quite natural that Marine Le Pen rejoiced in front of her supporters gathered in Hénin Beaumont (Pas de Calais), on the night of the first round of the elections, – the result is historical – but, most important, she had achieved a better score than her own result in 2012 with 17.9 percent of the vote. In fact, as was stipulated on French radio by Bruno Gollnisch for a long time number two of the Front National (FN), everybody thought it normal that Marine Le Pen should be in the final round, which is quite a prodigy considering the campaign of 2002.

However, a shadow appeared on this picture. Despite qualification for the second round, grassroots activists showed a certain disappointment because, notwithstanding appearances, this score was far from being the FN's triumph. With it, Mrs. Le Pen could no longer reasonably claim, as she had done in December 2015 after the by-elections, that with 27.1 percent of the votes the Front National was "the first party in France". She had to prove it was so in the second round of this presidential election against the least experienced candidate in political life: Emmanuel Macron. With more than a third of the vote in the election to the highest office, Marine Le Pen took her party to a new level. Nevertheless, the day after the first round, and unlike in 2002 with Jean-Marie Le Pen who had raised the crowds, collective reactions and street demonstrations were few. Like other presidential elections in representative democracies, we can note an obvious crisis of representation. "The first round ratified a major decomposition of French political life, by the elimination of old parties. This second round organizes a major political reorganization around the rift between the patriots and the globalists," said Marine Le Pen during her televised speech between the two rounds.

We will see first that, although demonized and tainted with primitive fascism and even popular racism<sup>1</sup>, the FN has an internal and structural history (1). Then, we will look back briefly on the fact that this political force has been since the 1980s the one organization capable of challenging government parties and that it thus can count on a weighing growing electorate (2). These two first points, will enable us to deal with the question of populism or rather the marinism which has appeared in French political life since 2011. Indeed since Marine Le Pen took the presidency, the FN seems to have changed skins. By getting closer to Northern models and examples, it seems to have shifted from a protest

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Wieviorka, *La démocratie à l'épreuve: nationalisme, populisme et ethnicité* (Paris: La Découverte, 1993); Michel Wieviorka, *Le Front national, entre extrémisme, populisme et démocratie* (Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme, 2013).

populism,<sup>2</sup> to a well-worn one<sup>3</sup> whose mobilization (antiestablishment, citizen, people's party, and people<sup>4</sup>), has appeared in our society as freed from some prejudices and preconceived ideas which used to be inherent to the far right before (3).

## **A Brief History of a Political Phenomenon from 1972–2017**

Although not a government party, nor a traditional force of French political life, no political party has been studied as much as the Front National. French singularity or sense of detail, in several hundred books and a multitude of chapters, articles in scientific journals that dissect, study and analyze the FN phenomenon in its originality and complexity can be found in France.<sup>5</sup> In this sense we can easily say that the mass of these research works<sup>6</sup> makes it possible to have a global or general view of the FN.

Appearing on the French political scene in 1972, the FN is the only party that during these forty-five years has not had to change names or patronymic. More importantly, unlike the other parties, it has not encountered real organizational or structural changes in its path. Although historically false, one tends to believe that Jean-Marie Le Pen is the founding father of the party. Originally, the idea of cementing several forces of the French far right between them, whose multiplicity only gave low visibility in the political landscape, came from some leaders

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<sup>2</sup> Dominique Reynie, *Populismes: la pente fatale* (Paris: Plon, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Thierry Dominici, "Populismes européens et partis populistes. Essai typologique," *Revue Politeia*, no. 24 (automne), (2013): 301–320.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> See the article by Alexandre Dézé "Que sait-on du Front National?" in *Sociologie plurielle des comportements politiques*, eds. Olivier Fillieule, Florenc Haegel, Camille Hamidi, and Vincent Tiberj (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2017), 241–70.

<sup>6</sup> Leaders' biographies, history of the organization, study of the electorate, program analysis, surveys on the inside functioning of the apparel.

of a fascist or neo-fascist nebula, the New Order (Ordre Nouveau). The idea of making the FN a political party (or rather a platform of all tendencies) came to fruition in 1969 when these factions decided that it was time to broaden the partisan audience towards a more respectable electorate. In order to carry out this project, they needed a champion, a herald, a voice. They would choose a young parliamentarian from the Poujadistes ranks: Jean-Marie Le Pen.

The FN was officially created on 5 October 1972 in the *Journal Officiel*. A tricolor flame, suggesting a penchant for Italian fascism was chosen as an “emblem”. In fact, the FN borrowed this symbol from the Italian fascist party MSI. This reference is not synonymous, as some think, of an allegiance to the MSI but results from the fact that the Italian fascist party, in addition to the quasi-carnal links (on an ideological and propagandist level) with the ON, participated in the project to build the FN including financing it.

To put it in a nutshell, the creation of the FN proceeds from a strategy of far-right groups, helped by their European networks, seeking respectability within civil society and political opinion for the sole purpose of entering electoral competitions. Some specialists, like Alexandre Dézé,<sup>7</sup> speak of the first attempt to “de-demonize” far-right thinking.

It is only from 1973, that Le Pen took control of the whole structure. Indeed, the meeting organized on the theme Stop Wild Immigration of 21 June 1973 led the ON to its dissolution as an organization, as it ended with violent clashes between supporters of the ON and the Communist League. Jean-Marie Le Pen took advantage of this weakening to impose relatives in key positions of the party. From this moment he appears among the grassroots activists as the only person able to gather all the aggregate of the right-wing extremist groups and thus he imposed himself as the titular figure. This legitimation is certainly the result of the electoral breakthrough of the party at the height of the 1980s and became the European example (or the French exception?) for

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<sup>7</sup> In *Comprendre le Front National* (Paris: Editions Bréal, 2017).

specialists studying the rise of the far right in Europe. At this moment in its history the FN had just finished its “crossing of the desert”.<sup>8</sup>

We know that the ideas of the Front National progress in opinion in a cyclical way. These cycles follow periods of political crises. The 1980s were marked by a severe economic and social crisis. Rising unemployment, welfare state disruption, but also the weakening of traditional frameworks (family, class, etc.) and finally all the questions inherent to the management of the immigration and its corollary; the question of the galloping insecurity. If the FN acquired a popular success it is because of the populist or pragmatic nature of its political offer, but also the multiplicity of members<sup>9</sup> and the field work of the militants.

What characterized the FN of the 1980s was the intense production of propaganda tools (posters, leaflets, stickers, flyers, etc.). This strategy gave a more positive image of the party and participated in the demonization. From then on, there was a modernization of the old image of the far right party which resulted in the unprecedented use of certain techniques of marketing and corporate communication. Between 1980 and 2011, the strategy of becoming respectable,<sup>10</sup> undertaken by relatives of Jean-Marie Le Pen, almost made the FN a “normal party” of French political life.

Driven by this new partisan reality the image of the FN progressed significantly as soon as Marine Le Pen took the chair of the party in January 2011. She knew how to put the fringe of the French (of the undecided, of those without convictions and disappointed by political life) in accordance with the ideas of the far-right party. Since her election in 2011 to the Presidency of the FN she has worked to ensure that the party is finally a real “presidential” alternative in the same way as the two breathless government parties that she qualifies by the formula “the UMPS”. This strategy involves changes in the organization chart and grooming some ideological assertions. This strategy results in a constant

<sup>8</sup> Phrase used by the FN supporters.

<sup>9</sup> They rose from a mere hundred to more than 70,000 in 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Formule d’Alexandre Dézé In *Comprendre le Front National*, op. cit. 5.

work of public opinion to reassure those who might have suffered some embarrassment at the idea of admitting their support or sympathy with the ideas of the proposed society offered by the FN. That said, her campaign between the two rounds against the candidate Emmanuel Macron was punctuated by a series of odds which have damaged or even tainted efforts made in recent months by Madame Le Pen to appear as the candidate of a party, even though populist, but with an appeased radical ideology because they are less rooted in propaganda discourse like that of the classical far right. One of the processes used by the FN is to use what Alessandri Jean-Louis described as “Apophatic Racism” which is based on the non use of racist terms but having a clear enough rhetoric that the public understands the target are immigrants.<sup>11</sup>

However, like her father, as the debate between the two rounds of the 2017 presidential election showed, two recurring weaknesses will prevent Marine Le Pen from turning the FN into a true government party: its extremist or radical character and especially its vivid incapacity to present a relevant economic program.

### **The FN: A Voters’ Party?**

According to the two leading scholars in the study of the French right Jean-Marie Donegani and Marc Sadoun “beyond the sociological explanations that are usually given to the rise of the Front National, we should not forget the strictly political reasons related to the organization of space and the distribution of roles. By neglecting a while what defined it – the immediacy of its relationship to the people – Gaullism has left the space of the tradition it would express vacant. Decidedly, even differently incarnated, two traditions, two spaces, two rights seem immutable.”<sup>12</sup> The right from which the FN emerged is a very disparate

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<sup>11</sup> See Alessandri Jean-Louis’ works for his PhD thesis *Antisemitism in England from 1905 to 1936*, Université Bordeaux-Montaigne.

<sup>12</sup> Jean-François Sirinelli, ed., *Les droites Françaises de la révolution à nos jours* (Paris: Folio Histoire), 822.

electorate, focused on protest and extreme right-wing militancy. Yet since 1982 the FN has conquered a larger section of voters including young employees and the unemployed right and left. This will stabilize it at an average of 15 percent in the major elections. He met his first success in 1984 in the European elections. Unexpected victory, taking advantage of cyclical factors and a crisis in the generalized context (economic, social, political and cultural) and a programmatic offer based on immigration and insecurity. This electoral success opened a will of power conquest by professionalizing, in particular the management team, and reinforcing the political offer. This internal strategy allowed the FN to gain a differentiation from its direct competitors: the government parties.

Finally, we should note that since 1995, the FN has been reinforced by a more popular electorate, as noted by Professor Pascal Perrineau,<sup>13</sup> in that the anti-system and anti-elite speech of the FN is reflected in the opinion by a kind of “Leftish-populism”, which some political scientists like Professor Nonna Mayer<sup>14</sup> call this ideology “labour-lepenism.”

Proof that the FN is able to compete with traditional parties appeared in the 2002 Presidential Election. Indeed, for the first time in the history of the party its leader qualified for the second round of the Presidential election. Since this key moment in the history of the Fifth Republic the explanatory factors of the FN vote have been widely analyzed by French political science. We know, for example, that in terms of elective representation the FN vote has reflected, for more than twenty years, the fears and anxieties of a French society deprived of certain social references, undermined by recession and unemployment and especially faced with modernity and globalization. For example, on 21 April 2002, according to a survey of the Ipsos-Vizzavi-Le Figaro-France 2 polling institute, the three concerns of this electorate

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<sup>13</sup> De Pascal Perrineau, *Le symptôme Le Pen: radiographie des électeurs du Front National* (Paris: Fayard, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Nonna Mayer, *Ces Français qui vote FN* (Paris: Flammarion, 1999).

were for some voters insecurity, for others immigration and for some unemployment. All the work shows that the political success of the FN goes through the rejection of traditional parties. Also the media coverage of the politico-financial affairs which enameled the big government parties will give force to the anti-establishment rhetoric and to the ideals proposed by Jean-Marie Le Pen to the traditional elites and the protest vote will give body to a kind of right-wing populist party.

Since the election of Marine Le Pen to the presidency of the party, in January 2011, the FN has continued to chain electoral victories to the point where it could be placed at the forefront of French political life.

In the results of the first round of the 2012 presidential election some political analysts said that the score of Marine Le Pen was “a mini-earthquake” on the French political scene. For example, according to the Kantar Sofres barometer for the radio France Info and the daily newspaper *Le Monde* published in March 2017, the FN went from 18 percent to 33 percent of the voting intentions.

In the 2015 by-elections, with more than 27 percent of the vote, the FN could boast at having become the first party of the French.

In April 2017 with 21.4 percent of the vote, the president of the Front National achieved the best score in the history of the FN in a presidential election. Even more surprising, for the grassroots activists and sympathizers of the FN is to see that in the second round of the Presidential election on 8 May 2017, even though they were ahead of the most unexperienced of the candidates and after dethroning the candidates of both government parties, Marine Le Pen failed to go beyond the threshold of 50 percent. Nevertheless, it is also clear that at the same time she got 34 percent of the vote, doing much better than her father and his 17.8 percent in the second round of the presidential election of 2002 (against President Chirac).

The votes of FN activists and supporters denotes the ability for this political force to parasitize the system of traditional parties while gaining in the minds of supporters a legitimate place in the political system. In other words, in the middle of a political crisis, as the specialist

of nationalism Ernest Gellner claimed, paraphrasing Marx, a “ghost travels the world: populism.”<sup>15</sup>

## Marine Le Pen’s Populist Party

Has the FN really become a populist party since Marine Le Pen took over the presidency? Populist is a portmanteau word in political science. Points of view diverge as to the definition of this term, as the phenomenon is polymorphous, ambiguous, “almost elusive, [because] ephemeral, and phantasmagorical”.<sup>16</sup> Yet, we know that populism has a clearly identifiable history,<sup>17</sup> ranging from the politico-literary movements of revolutionary Russia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the far-right European party groupings,<sup>18</sup> and finally to the nationalists who succeeded the Cold War.<sup>19</sup>

On this ground, we know that the FN, as offered by Marine Le Pen, cannot be compared, despite appearances, to the parties of a monopolistic type of the totalitarian regimes of fascist Italy or NAZI Germany and even less to the populist movements that appeared in the 1950s in Latin America or Eastern Europe.<sup>20</sup> Marine Le Pen’s FN is more akin to the European populist parties stemming from the extreme right-wing or *droite extrême*<sup>21</sup> parties of the late 1990s. We should add

<sup>15</sup> Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (New York: Macmillan, 1969).

<sup>16</sup> Alexandre Dorna, *De l’âme et de la cité. Crise, populisme et machiavélisme* (Paris: l’Harmattan, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> See Guy Hermet, *Les populismes dans le monde. Une histoire sociologique XIX<sup>e</sup>-XX<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris: Fayard l’Espace du politique, 1993).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Pierre-André Taguieff, *Le nouveau national-populisme* (Paris: CNRS, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Guy Hermet, *Les désenchantements de la liberté. La sortie des dictatures dans les années 90* (Paris: Fayard l’Espace du politique, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> Giovanni Sartori, *Partis et systèmes partisans. Un cadre d’analyse* (Bruxelles: éditions de l’Université de Bruxelles, 2011), 320.

<sup>21</sup> Gilles Ivaldi, *Droites populistes et extrêmes en Europe occidentale* (Paris: La documentation française, 2004).

that these parties are at the core of a geopolitical sphere,<sup>22</sup> palpable and worrying because they are quantifiable. Indeed, to date, we can find in more than eighteen European countries, thirty or so parties intending to practice right-wing populism. During the last two years, in national polls, some of these groups have had an electoral breakthrough such as in Belgium, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Netherlands and Norway. The French case then is not a geopolitical exception anymore but a fact observable to and in almost the whole of Europe.

Moreover, we can emphasize that beyond the diversities of the discourse of these formations, a shared ideological assumption has existed for a decade. A kind of common theme of a shared newspeak that are Islamophobia, anti-globalization, anti-Europe, unemployment and national preference. According to the philosopher Pierre-André Taguieff it is necessary to distinguish two modes of expression: protesting populism (or identity) and right-wing new-populism. These two considerations make it easy for the social scientist to observe these courses in an operating paradigmatic conceptual framework.

For example, with the help of these two distinctions, we have already noted in previous works<sup>23</sup> three types of right-wing populist parties: state-nationalists, ethnic-nationalism and extreme right (neo-fascists, xenophobes, etc.). The former includes anti-European Union, and sometimes neo-Jacobin or separatist organizations; the FN belonged to this category for quite a while. The second group structure themselves around several common characteristics with state-nationalists. But they are different from the latter, because they intend to practice a radical

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<sup>22</sup> See Béatrice Giblin, "Extrême droite en Europe: une analyse géopolitique," in revue *Hérodote*, dossier "L'extrême droite en Europe" no. 144 (Paris, first trimestre 2012).

<sup>23</sup> Thierry Dominici, "Populismes européens et partis populistes. Essai typologique," in revue *Politeia* no. 21, thème "Populisme d'hier et d'aujourd'hui. Regards croisés," Bordeaux, 26, décembre 2013 (à paraître) et aussi Thierry Dominici, "Le souverainisme, le nationalisme et le régionalisme dans la France d'aujourd'hui," 161–87, in revue *Politeia* no. 6, thème "souverainisme, nationalisme et régionalisme," vol. 1 Bordeaux, June, 2005, 26.

right policy, sometimes racist but often elitist, nationalist and anti-globalization. We can easily place Marine Le Pen's FN in this category. Finally, the last type is essentially constituted by the movements of extreme right and ultra-nationalist tendencies (sometimes neo-fascist, neo-Nazi), xenophobic and anti-European.

The latter organize their structure on unconventional (often violent) behaviors or deviant cultures on the margins of democratic life such as identity blocks. The FN has tried to undo this militant reality and that since its creation. Today, it seems, at least apparent, that the "demonization" policy conducted by Marine Le Pen's team since 2011, and especially the electoral breakthrough that ensued, has allowed some detachment with this type of mobilization. Since the analysis of Tocqueville we have known that citizens have an unfortunate tendency to glorify "democratic despotism".<sup>24</sup> That is to say, at the heart of a political mobilization which, instead of tending towards a democratic dimension (pure, direct, participative, representative, etc.), the choice of the citizen is directed towards the subjective personalization and the centralization of the power on a single leader, the head, the providential man,<sup>25</sup> or more exactly: the democratic leader.<sup>26</sup> On the international scene this paradox appears as the translation of a political crisis of citizen representation and popular mobilization.

Due to this widening gap between the representatives and the represented, only popular exaltation, a sort of post-modernity of speech, seems to be able to break the daily routine of citizens and, thus, nourish the hope of a promising future for the lower classes. All specialists of populism agree on this point, it is this phase of charismatic domination that is favourable to current populist discourses and messages from right and left. Of course, the populisms of the extreme right have surfed on

<sup>24</sup> See Alexis de Tocqueville, *Le despotisme démocratique*, ouvrage tiré du dernier chapitre *De la démocratie en Amérique* (Paris: Carnet de l'Herne, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jean Garrigues, *Les hommes providentiels. Histoire d'une fascination française* (Seuil, Paris: 2011), 480.

<sup>26</sup> Jean-Claude Monod, *Qu'est-ce qu'un chef en démocratie ? Politiques du charisme* (Seuil, Paris: 2012); Yves Cohen, *Le siècle des chefs* (Paris, Amsterdam, 2012), 864.

this leader phenomenon for a long time. Le Pen in France, Kjaersgaard in Denmark, Griffin in the United Kingdom, Fini in Italy, are or were leaders of this type. Nevertheless, unlike the ideologies of inter-war mass movements, this charismatic dimension is not comparable to the “personality cult of the leader” experienced in the fascist era, it is not based on political or mass religion leading to a concrete change in society, it does not propose a new order either. In fact, the populist leader’s voice creates a chaotic path of mythical-popular and politico-media thoughts. As a result, it fits in a situation when one or more political leaders and/or entrepreneurs attempt to impose the idea that it is high time to break with the lost illusions of a past that has become too dark, too tumultuous and especially dysfunctional. This allows these populist leaders to propose new societal frameworks based on ideals and a universal defense of general interests, whose leitmotif remains the lower classes and the denunciation of a scapegoat: the elites, governance, experts from the European Union, and the austerity policy.

Indeed, there is more and more proof of populist mobilizations carried by leaders using consensual and moderate speech. It must be recognized that today, alongside our national-populist and extremist movements, all kinds of “well-worn” populisms are emerging: leftist, opinion, homosexual, cultural, media-political,<sup>27</sup> postmodern postures<sup>28</sup> oscillating between “citizen populism” and “Internet populism”. These two phenomena result from a questioning of the pluralistic system of the current democratic regimes.<sup>29</sup> The strategies used are simple. They start from a denunciation of the integrity of the ruling elites accused especially of corruption and deception,<sup>30</sup> or even patronage, nepotism or clannish patronage. Today this populism is concretized

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<sup>27</sup> G. Sartori, *Homo videns. Televisione e post-pensiero* (Rome: Éditions GLF, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> Thierry Dominici, “Populismes européens et partis populistes...” Op. cit. 23.

<sup>29</sup> H. Deleersnijder, *Démocratie en péril: l’Europe face aux dérives du national-populisme* (Waterloo: Renaissance du livre, 2014); Tzvetan Todorov, *Les ennemis intimes de la démocratie* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2012).

<sup>30</sup> D. G. Bianchi, *Elite in crisi. La revoca degli elitti in democrazia* (Rubbetino: Soveria Manelli, 2012).

by the “democracy of opinion” and carried by social networks.<sup>31</sup> This is what we observe in the populist speech of Marine Le Pen. And this explains why, during the last major elections, the place of the FN in civil society was the major attraction of opinion polls institutes. For the 2017 Presidential election, the latter gave in all their opinion polls the leading position, and above all a score of a Government Party, because it was close to 26 percent. This being so, with the rise in public opinion of another “opportunistic” or pragmatic type of populist speech by Emmanuel Macron and with the breakthrough in the popular sphere of Jean-Luc Mélenchon (designating himself as being its fierce adversary and its direct competitor on the path of populist or popular speech) sympathy with FN ideas slowly eroded.

So, why would you want to be recognized by public opinion as a populist party more than an extreme right-wing party of more than 70,000 members?

Because this new type of mobilization would be, as Pierre-André Taguieff explains, simply “a normal pathology”<sup>32</sup> of the current political game. It is on this smooth and respectable populism that Marine Le Pen has tried to build its political formation since 2012. And it is this image that allowed her to continue, without much difficulty, to the second round of the presidential election in May 2017.

## Conclusion

We have shown that the FN has a long political history behind it. Founded in 1972 to embody the uniqueness of the far-right forces the FN paradoxically had as a President who is the most moderate of men in this political sphere: Jean-Marie Le Pen. We pointed out how he, although a late addition to the far-right groups, became the major and

<sup>31</sup> Dominique Albertini et David Doucet, *La faschosphère. Comment l'extrême droite remporte la bataille du net* (Paris: Editions Flammarion, 2016).

<sup>32</sup> See *Le nouveau national-populisme*, CNRS éditions, op. cit. 18.

emblematic piece of the political machine imagined by the ideologues of the ON.

We wanted to remind the reader briefly about how this strategy made this new political force emerge in the French political landscape. It would be led for about forty years by the charismatic posture of Jean-Marie Le Pen. He alone symbolizes the history of the FN for public opinion and its activists. Later in the mid-1980s he managed to turn this group into a major party in French politics.

Therefore, in a second phase we also wanted to remind people that although the FN has undertaken to take power since the 1980s, beyond some electoral successes (of which the most astonishing was the qualification for the second round of the presidential election), the FN under Jean-Marie Le Pen remained in the political landscape and in the collective imagination as a far-right party. In contrast with Marine Le Pen at the helm of the FN, the party seems totally banal. Seeking to move away from the outrageous frenzies and nauseating puns her father (Jean Marie Le Pen) was customary of, Marine Le Pen has never ceased to give credibility and respectability to her party.

As a last point we wanted to show that if we want to take the measure of the populism of the FN we must account for another phenomenon that is increasingly emerging in democratic societies: the crisis of participation. By opening onto a well-worn populism the FN hoped to obtain a last pledge of democratic respectability. However, the resignation of Florian Philippot, the party's number two, in September 2017, augurs a return to the principles of racism, a discourse based on Islamophobia and ethnic identity. With the various ISIS' jihadist attacks that have undermined the foundation of the republican values in Western societies and especially the current crisis of representation, which is undermining liberal democracies, the time has come for the legitimization of a "liberated fascist speech". This discourse is reinforced by the hatred of the "other" (often the Muslim) and societal division. Could this last configuration suggest the limits of so-called "moderate" populist parties?

# The Three Faces of Greek Populism Under EU Membership

*Angelos Chryssogelos*

Populism is a long-standing and endemic phenomenon of Greek politics, often associated with pervasive negative features of the Greek polity such as clientelism, irresponsible fiscal management and weak state capacity. Here I will argue that populism is a structural feature of Greek politics and society due to Greece's peculiar historical and geographical positioning on the fringe of European modernity. Since its founding in 1830, the Greek state has experienced a contradictory and fragmented process of economic and social modernization.

In this analysis, I understand populism as a phenomenon closely related to broader structural processes of international political and economic transformation. Populism constitutes a reaction to the concurrent sense of material dislocation and representational impotence often experienced by broad strata of the population in peripheral social formations that experience Western modernity. But populism can also go beyond frustration. Acting first as the conduit for reaction and discontent, populism can also eventually become a mode of incorporating dislocated strata in economic and social modernity through a selective satisfaction of some of their demands. Yet inevitable representational and material frustrations will bring about the emergence of new populist forces, in a recurring cycle.

These pressures have intensified in Greece because since 1981 it has been partaking in the EU, a comprehensive and intrusive institution that lays huge demands on the country's polity to adopt and adapt to standards and practices of good governance, a well-regulated economy, and modernized management of social affairs. Indeed, populism has been much less prominent during earlier Greek history than what Greeks commonly think. Rather, populism has intensified and has been present throughout most of the time of Greece's EU membership, reflecting changes in the character and predominant issues running through the Greek–EU relationship.

This chapter will proceed in the following way: First I will explain how we can think conceptually of populism as a phenomenon of world politics, related to structural shifts beyond the nation-state. Then I will offer a very small review of Greek history, presenting the cycles of emergence, radicalization and normalization of populist phenomena. The main part of the chapter will analyze three distinct phases of populism in Greece during its EU membership: left-wing populism during the 1980s, nationalist and radical-right populism during the 1990s and 2000s, and anti-austerity populism in the 2010s. The question becomes, what character will the next populist wave in Greece have? The concluding chapter will speculate on this question.

## **Populism and International Structure**

There is voluminous literature on populism in the social sciences, covering most historical periods and world regions. But until now there has been very little effort to bring together different geographical and analytical insights to assess how populism relates to structural conditions of world politics. This is important however, as the current surge of populism in multiple regions – Europe, Latin America, North America, and Asia – poses questions as to whether and how populism relates not just to specific local conditions, but to broader structural conditions within which national politics is embedded as well. It is

thus important to approach the existing literature on populism trying to decipher the way it accounts for international and structural factors.

Some earlier analyses of populism acknowledged that populism appears primarily under conditions of contested and late modernization. As such, these analyses accepted that populism is a feature of broader structural processes that transcend national borders.<sup>1</sup> But the fall from grace of the modernization theory in social sciences also pushed aside these budding approaches to populism, with the result that analyses of populism soon retreated to single case-study analyses or, at best, limited comparisons. In any case, the international/structural dimension also weakened substantially. This started to change a few decades later when the proliferation of populism on a regional level allowed comparative research to generalize not just about domestic, but also broader structural conditions affecting whole world regions and thus informing regional clusters of similar populisms.

This international/structural dimension has been, implicitly or explicitly, present in analyses of populism in Latin America. It has been characteristic of populism in Latin America that it appears in waves of broadly populist politics that in turn can be related to specific structural conditions concerning Latin America's position in international politics and the economy.<sup>2</sup> For example, a wave of Peronist populisms in post-World War II years reflected the desire across Latin America to accelerate industrial development through protectionism. So-called neoliberal populisms in the 1990s undertook to mediate between Latin American societies, and the norms and policies promoted by the 'Washington consensus', seen as inescapable after the spectacular failure of protectionism and regulation in the previous decades.<sup>3</sup> In the 2000s a wave of "red" (or "pink") populisms reflected dissatisfaction across

<sup>1</sup> Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its meanings and national characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969).

<sup>2</sup> Juan Grigera, "Populism in Latin America: Old and new populisms in Argentina and Brazil," *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 4 (2017): 441–455.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth M. Roberts, "Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism in Latin America: The Peruvian case," *World Politics* 48, no. 1 (1995): 82–116.

the region with neoliberalism and Latin America's perceived colonial-type patterns of dependence to global capitalism, and particularly the force of the US imperium.

In Europe as well it became evident that populisms did not just emerge out of idiosyncratic national circumstances, but reflected broader processes of political and socioeconomic change. Herbert Kitschelt for example related the rise of the new radical right (which is also overwhelmingly populist) to broader changes in the West European industrial economy that have weakened the traditional working class and created new insecurities to specific strata of the (lower) middle class.<sup>4</sup> Peter Mair, in his celebrated analyses of the malaise of West European party democracy, discussed how the increasing limitation of the nation-state's policy discretion under conditions of globalization and the strengthening of EU integration 'hollows out' representative democracy and creates space for the emergence of populists who promise to address representational deficits at the national level.<sup>5</sup>

An important work in this tradition is the research project of Hanspeter Kriesi and his associates on the emergence of the populist radical right in Western Europe.<sup>6</sup> Building on the work that saw right-wing populism as supported primarily by so-called "modernization losers",<sup>7</sup> Kriesi et al. see the populist radical right reflecting the support of so-called "globalization losers". Thus, Kriesi et al. explicitly relate the transformation of Western European politics to the structural forces of globalization that threaten both the material and the social capital

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<sup>4</sup> Herbert Kitschelt, *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> Peter Mair, *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing-Out of Western Democracy* (London: Verso, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Hanspeter Kriesi, Edgar Grande, Romain Lachat, Martin Dolezal, Simon Bornschier, and Timotheos Frey "Globalization and the transformation of national political space: Six European countries compared," *European Journal of Political Research* 45, no. 6 (2006): 921–56.

<sup>7</sup> Hans-Georg Betz, *Radical Right-Wing Populism in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's, 1994).

of significant portions of West European electorates. Seen this way, the populist right's emphasis on immigration does not just reflect its nationalistic and racist past, but also expresses considerations about cultural and economic modernization that are closely linked to the denationalization of policymaking and loss of sovereignty of nation-states.

EU integration has also been used as an explanation for the rise of populism in Europe. Populism has been linked to the transformation of European states under the impact of EU integration. According to this view, the elites of European states use EU integration and institutions to shield themselves from societal demands in order to put through a more efficient management of their economies. As broad parts of European electorates see competitive politics being diffused and diluted in opaque policymaking processes in the EU and 'Brussels', they react by voting for parties that demand a re-politicization of party competition.<sup>8</sup>

Finally, populism has been assessed from a global perspective as well. For some scholars, populism (esp. in Western democracies) is an effort to politicize at national level policymaking processes that increasingly concern issues of transnational interest and are being regulated in international and supranational institutions. In this view, populism represents the frustrations of those who do not have the resources to pursue contestation and participation at a level above the nation-state, which itself is increasingly losing powers. Thus, populism can be attributed to the growing but uneven development of global governance and the dilemmas it creates for democratic accountability.<sup>9</sup>

From a social perspective, the argument has been made recently that populism represents a reaction to economic dislocation and representational impotence created by neoliberal globalization. The idea here is that social and economic modernization brought about by peripheral

<sup>8</sup> Christopher J. Bickerton, "A union of member states: State transformation and the New Intergovernmentalism," in *The New Intergovernmentalism: States and Supranational Actors in the Post-Maastricht Era*, eds. Christopher J. Bickerton, Dermot Hodson, and Uwe Puetter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 51–72.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Zürn, "The politicization of world politics and its effects: Eight propositions," *European Political Science Review* 6, no. 1 (2014): 47–71.

countries' gradual incorporation in global capitalism creates new representational demands by emerging political identities engendered and shaped by processes of (often painful) social transformation. Populism expresses both a reaction to economic hardship and a sense of political exclusion, as well as a desire for new popular strata to be incorporated in global capitalism in more equitable terms.<sup>10</sup>

As we will see, all these dimensions of populism as a response and feature of structural international processes can be relevant in the case of Greece. As a country in a historical position of peripherality towards global and European capitalism,<sup>11</sup> populism in Greece reflects both a reaction to the contradictions of socioeconomic modernization and a desire for a more equitable participation in economic and social modernity. As an EU member-state on the other hand, Greece also experiences the pressures mature Western democracies feel to surrender large parts of their sovereignty to international and supranational institutions. In short, Greece's positioning on the fringe of European modernity means that it lies on the interchange of pressures that inform the rise of populism in both advanced and semi-advanced settings.

## Populism in Modern Greek History

Successive appearances of populism in Greek history reflect evolving pressures of modernization and Westernization under shifting international geopolitical and economic conditions impacting on the Greek state. As Greek state elites have been trying to navigate and adapt to these pressures in their effort to "catch up" with the Western standards of the day, large parts of Greek society have been feeling

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<sup>10</sup> Vedi R. Hadiz and Angelos Chrysosogelos, "Populism in world politics: A comparative cross-regional perspective," *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 4, (2017): 399–411.

<sup>11</sup> Nicos P. Mouzelis, *Modern Greece: Facets of Underdevelopment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1978).

politically and economically excluded. This has fed successive waves of populist resentment, explosion and (ultimately) accommodation.<sup>12</sup> Part of the reason why populism feels so omnipresent in Greek history and society is because key elements of every successive populist wave have been incorporated in the official discourse of elites, in the process renewing the legitimacy of the Greek state. Some examples will illustrate the argument:

a) For the first 10 years of its existence (1833–1843), the small and poor Greek state was administered by a Bavarian regency that came with Greece's young monarch, a Bavarian prince. The Bavarian administration undertook to modernize the Greek state, chiefly by streamlining and centralizing administration, tax collection and the organization of the army. Its local allies were mainly educated and Westernized Greeks who came to the new kingdom from the cosmopolitan cities of the Ottoman Empire and Europe. This alliance of outsiders alienated a big part of a still agrarian and rural society. In a first explosion of popular mobilization against elites and the state, a popular revolt demanded a constitution from the king in 1843 who relented. Then, in the constitutional assembly of that year, a loose alliance of politicians, the press and street agitators demanded that only Greeks born within the then borders of the Greek state – or 'autochthones' – be allowed to hold political office. Given that the leaders of all parties at the time were born outside the Greek state (i.e. they were 'heterochthones'), the autochthone movement represented a bona fide populist revolt against the elites of the state and their agenda of modernization along Western lines.<sup>13</sup> In response to popular resistance to modernization, elites decided to adopt nationalist irredentism (i.e. liberating and incorporating all areas of the Ottoman Empire with Greek populations) as the official ideology of

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<sup>12</sup> The historical narrative in this section draws on Angelos Chryssogelos, "The people in the "here and now": Populism, modernization and the state in Greece," *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 4 (2017): 473–487.

<sup>13</sup> John A. Petropoulos, *Politics and statecraft in the kingdom of Greece 1833–1843* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

the state, thus managing to capture the imagination and ensure loyalty from the society of the kingdom.

b) Another major populist rupture was the reaction to the modernization program of Eleftherios Venizelos in the decade 1910–1920. Venizelos was a determined modernizer who sought to reform the still ineffective, fragmented and clientelist structures of the state while aiming at the same time to enlarge Greece through a great military push against the Ottoman Empire. His program was met with strong resistance by traditional state elites and old politicians firmly implanted in the heartland of the original Greek state. While Venizelos' agenda promised a great nationalist expansion, his vision created unease among traditional agrarian strata who were accustomed to the borders and character of Old Greece. For anti-Venizelists, the 'people' of Old Greece took precedence over the 'nation' of Greeks still living in areas of Ottoman Turkey that Venizelos aimed to liberate. In 1915–16 violent mass demonstrations erupted in Athens against Venizelos. The anti-Venizelist populist coalition included established financial and administrative elites, Athenian small shop owners who opposed Venizelos' pro-capital and pro-industrialization agenda, and peasants of southern Greece opposed to expansionist war. These groups were united by opposition to Venizelist-led modernization within an expanded Greece.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, and following a painful military defeat against Turkey, anti-Venizelists were progressively converted to the agenda of modernization. Ideological heirs of anti-Venizelism implemented conservative and authoritarian versions of Venizelos' originally liberal and radical program of state modernization and industrialization in the 1930s and 1950s.

c) Following an atrocious civil war that kept it in the Western camp of the Cold War in the 1940s, Greece embarked on a program of capitalist development and industrialization embedded within the economic institutions and structures regulating the interactions

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<sup>14</sup> George Th. Mavrogordatos, 1915: *The National Schism* (Athens: Pattakis (in Greek), 2015).

of market economies at the time. This process of economic growth was coupled with a peculiar political system of multi-party electoral democracy, where the losing side of the Civil War – the Communist Left – was, however, severely harassed and oppressed. By the 1960s, this system of authoritarian capitalist modernization had reached its limits. Broad parts of Greek society – particularly a new class of poor urban dwellers created by massive immigration after the Civil War to the big cities – demanded full democratization, material advancement and national independence against US dominance. A new political identity of the ‘people’ was crystalized through mass mobilization and demonstrations during a series of constitutional and foreign policy crises in the first half of the 1960s.<sup>15</sup> It was to preempt the emergence of a bona fide populist movement that a group of reactionary officers instituted a military dictatorship in 1967. After the fall of the junta, conservative leader Constantine Karamanlis founded a republic taking on board many of the demands of the pre-dictatorship popular movement: legalization of the Left, free and fair elections, and more state intervention in the economy.

## **Populism in Greece during EU Membership**

### a) Leftwing populism in a post-peripheral society: PASOK in the 1980s

It is one of the great ironies (and perhaps tragedies) of Greek history that Greece’s prototypical populist party, PASOK led by Andreas Papandreu, entered government the same year that Greece joined the EU, in 1981. PASOK’s initial populism reflected prior tensions in Greece’s incorporation in the Western capitalist economy, but its establishment as the dominant Greek party over the next 30 years also meant that PASOK’s residual populism decisively shaped

<sup>15</sup> Elias Nicolacopoulos, *The Cachectic Democracy. Parties and Elections 1946–1967* (Athens: Pattakis (in Greek), 2001).

Greece's relationship with the EU. In many ways, even though Greece was a European country, its social formation, and thus its populism, resembled the Latin American experience in terms of long-term effects on the functioning and capacity of the state<sup>16</sup>.

PASOK's leftwing populism in the 1980s distilled the frustrations of major parts of Greek society with the country's political and economic development after World War II. As we saw, anti-establishment demands were frustrated in the 1960s and only partly accommodated in the 1970s. By 1981 Papandreou had constructed a political identity of the 'non-privileged people' who were united by their grievances against the so-called 'state of the Right' and its harassment of the Left, dependence on the Americans, and unequal economic development. PASOK's platform promised substantial expansion of the state (both in terms of public spending and in terms of hiring into the public sector), redistribution, social justice, and national sovereignty against Greece's Western allies.<sup>17</sup>

Sure enough, upon assuming power, Papandreou implemented his program, substantially increasing public spending and the national debt, overseeing the expansion of the state via a system of partisan clientelism (i.e. only PASOK voters were hired)<sup>18</sup>, and instituting a more "independent" foreign policy that included anti-Americanism, overtures to the Soviet bloc, and demands towards the EU to address "injustices" in terms of Greece's membership. All of this was underpinned by Papandreou's trademark divisive rhetoric against the "old established interests", the "authoritarianism of the Right", and the "enemies of the people and democracy". In the 1980s Greece became a politically mobilized and very divided society.

<sup>16</sup> Nikos P. Mouzelis, *Politics in the Semi-Periphery* (London: MacMillan, 1986).

<sup>17</sup> Christos Lyritzis, "The power of populism: The Greek case," *European Journal of Political Research* 15, no. 6 (1987): 667–86.

<sup>18</sup> George Th. Mavrogordatos, "From traditional clientelism to machine politics: The impact of PASOK populism in Greece," *South European Society and Politics* 2, no. 3 (1997): 1–26.

Papandreou's policies helped transform Greek society and change its outlook from a peripheral economy to one of a developed country (at least in appearance). Ironically, given PASOK's early Euroscepticism, its expansive program was supported by a massive transfer of EU funds. With PASOK's populism as the mediator between Greek society and Europe, Greece's relationship with the EU came to be based on rather shallow and perverse incentives. The EU was positively associated mostly because it allowed in many ways the new PASOK elite to continue its policy of partisan clientelism and mismanagement of state resources. It also created a generally utilitarian attitude among Greeks about Europe. The EU was good as long as it gave Greece money.

Gradually PASOK abandoned its radical rhetoric and after the mid-1980s adapted to the program of the European common market and then in the 1990s the monetary union. From an expression of popular frustration with the terms of Greece's incorporation in the Western capitalist economy, PASOK became the instrument of legitimation of pro-market reforms and alignment of Greece with EU integration. Following Papandreou's death, PASOK elites realized that their stay in power depended on a delicate balancing act between maintaining access to EU resources (political legitimacy, cohesion funds, an integrated capital market) and distributing these resources to a targeted clientele in Greece, while nominally maintaining commitment to EU rules on market liberalization, fiscal deficits etc.<sup>19</sup>

After the mid-1990s, PASOK (which overall stayed in power for 19 out of 23 years between 1981 and 2004) ceased for all intents and purposes to be a populist party. It remained however the only Greek party that could mediate between popular demands and Greece's commitment to the EU. On the one hand, its role was now completely reversed. From an expression of popular discontent with Greece's adaptation to Western modernization, PASOK had become a transmission belt for the justification of this adaptation to Greek society. On the other hand, this

<sup>19</sup> Costas Eleftheriou and Chryssanthos Tassis, *PASOK: The Rise and Fall (?) of a Hegemonic Party* (Athens: Savvalas (in Greek), 2013).

meant that Greece's adaptation to EU rules and norms was never more than superficial and nominal. As became evident in 2009–10, the Greek state and economy maintained under the veneer of modernization many of the traits of an underdeveloped, peripheral country.

b) Rightwing populism in the 1990s and 2000s: The cultural discontent with globalization in a newly developed society

Next to its own socioeconomic transformation, Greece experienced in the 1990s a significant change. For the first time in its history it became a country that received immigrants, especially from Albania and Eastern Europe. With the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization, Greece experienced international modernity less as a peripheral country on the receiving end of Western ideas, and more as a Western developed society with a hierarchical view of its relationship with the rest of the world. In this context, and much like in other Western European countries, the concerns of Greek society about the outside world became less economic and more cultural.

For a substantial part of Greek society, the victory of the West in the Cold War and Greece's full-blown embrace of EU integration and global governance presented cultural risks. Concerns over national identity cut across party lines and allegiances. Indeed, in all three party families, a new crosscutting cleavage between pro-Western modernization and nationalist populism emerged. In the center-right (New Democracy), conservatives were pitted against liberals. In the center-left (PASOK), social-democrats opposed socialist populists. And in the left, the orthodox Communist Party took a nationalist turn whereas the reformed left embraced EU integration. The two big parties – PASOK and New Democracy – contained these divisions effectively however. The budding populist identity around questions of sovereignty, identity, culture and immigration was expressed primarily outside of the party system.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Christoforos Vernardakis, *Political Parties, Elections and the Party System. Transformations of Political Representation 1990–2010* (Athens: Sakkoulas (in Greek), 2011).

A first expression of the divide between people and elites became evident in the early-1990s due to the so-called “Macedonia name-issue”. This was a foreign policy issue that touched upon powerful feelings of national identity, history and belonging in Greek society. Under immense public pressure and mass mobilization, Greek governments at the time begrudgingly instituted a policy of blocking FYROM’s recognition due to its use of the name ‘Macedonia’, even though this policy strained Greece’s relationship with the EU. But, following the hyper-partisan decade of the 1980s, the mass demonstrations ‘for Macedonia’ in the early-1990s highlighted the potential of a budding populist political identity that was only with difficulty accommodated by both parties’ choice to anchor Greece to the West and Europe.

Another expression of identitarian cultural populism was the mobilization around the identity card issue in 2000–01 under the leadership of charismatic Archbishop Christodoulos. In 2000, the PASOK government decided to end the practice of ID cards stating their holder’s religion. The Church of Greece reacted vehemently to this, initiating a signature collection campaign to request a referendum on keeping religion on the ID cards. Christodoulos staged two massive rallies in Thessaloniki and Athens in the summer of 2000 where he expounded on the importance of national identity in an ever-globalized world (note the dual semantics of the word: ‘national identity’ and ‘identity card’). In his two speeches, which resembled in tone and style a Sunday sermon at church, Christodoulos spoke on behalf of a “people” defined by its membership in the body of the Orthodox Church. This “people” was juxtaposed to culturally insensitive elites who embraced globalization and European integration with little concern about the dislocations these caused.<sup>21</sup>

As we mentioned already, these cultural concerns had trouble finding expression in party politics due to the dominance of a traditional

<sup>21</sup> Yannis Stavrakakis, “Antinomies of formalism: Laclau’s theory of populism and the lessons from religious populism in Greece,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9, no. 3 (2004): 253–267.

two-party competition between PASOK and the New Democracy. ND at the time had a vocal right wing that tried to capture in a populist way some of the cultural concerns of the time. For example, the powerful ND-backed governor of the region of Thessaloniki, Panagiotis Psomiadis, was a familiar figure well beyond his constituency, thanks to his popular communication style and frequent TV appearances. Psomiadis' rhetoric combined nationalistic positions on foreign policy (esp. the Macedonia name-issue), religious sentiment, opposition to multiculturalism, and traditionalist positions on new social issues and questions of morality. Psomiadis expressed a typical blend of rightwing populism of the time.

Rightwing populism entered the party system in the 2000s with the Popular Orthodox Rally, a party whose initials (LAOS) not coincidentally formed the Greek word for 'people' (ΛΑΟΣ and λαός). LAOS was founded by Giorgos Karatzaferis, a rightwing MP who had been expelled from ND in 2000. Karatzaferis belonged to ND's dwindling traditional authoritarian and royalist wing. But on his own he broke with traditional Greek conservatism to cultivate a populism that drew heavily on the then emerging radical right populism in Western Europe.<sup>22</sup> Just as parties of the populist radical right like the Front National in France, LAOS expressed an anti-systemic populism, nativism and strong anti-immigration feelings, nationalist foreign policy positions, Eurocepticism, ultra-religious sentiments, authoritarianism on questions of law and order, shock-factor anti-Semitism, and cultural traditionalism. LAOS entered the parliament in 2007 and then again in 2009, but it never surpassed 5 percent in national elections. Unlike other West European countries, Greece's leftist political culture and memories of the junta hampered the rise of the populist radical right.

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<sup>22</sup> Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

c) Anti-austerity populism in a re-peripheralized society: The Eurozone crisis in the 2010s

The debt crisis and ensuing austerity crashed Greece's confidence as a modern and affluent EU member. The EU-imposed austerity terminated the capacity of the two major parties to act as mediators between Greek society and the EU, using the latter's resources to maintain legitimacy domestically while concealing the extent of mismanagement at home from their European partners. With the EU acting now not as a provider of funds but as a source of austerity, its popularity in Greece collapsed.<sup>23</sup> The economic crisis ushered in a period of general loss of trust in the political system and the elites.

Populism during this period can be divided into two periods. First, from the advent of austerity in spring 2010 until fall 2011, populism was expressed in a generalized loss of trust in the political system, punctuated by the massive mobilization in the big squares of Greek cities, most notably at Constitution Square in front of the Greek parliament in Athens. The opposition to the 'memorandum' (referring to the bailout agreement signed between Greece and the EU, IMF and ECB) coalesced a broad array of frustrations with how democracy worked in Greece, the endemic corruption of political and economic elites, and social inequality that had persisted in times of the boom but now was even more accentuated. The political symbol of the anti-memorandum only partly contained economic anti-austerity demands (although these of course played a major role), instead serving as an 'empty signifier'<sup>24</sup> on which a broad array of frustrations could be projected.

In the second phase, populism started migrating from the squares and the street to the party system. On the left, PASOK's embrace of austerity meant that it quickly lost its traditional popular support.

<sup>23</sup> Ben Clements, Kyriaki Nanou, and Susannah Verney, "We no longer love you, but we don't want to leave you": The Eurozone crisis and popular Euroscepticism in Greece," *Journal of European Integration* 36 no. 3 (2014): 247–65.

<sup>24</sup> Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

On the right, ND initially opposed austerity, but when in 2011 it was forced to accept a new bailout and form a caretaker government with PASOK it suffered a split. Because of the collapse of support of the two main parties (that as recently as 2009 had together won 77 percent of the vote), new populist forces emerged. On the right, the MPs who split from ND formed a new anti-austerity, nationalist-populist party: the Independent Greeks (Greek acronym ANEL). Even further to the right, the disappearance of LAOS (that, paradoxically for a populist radical right party, had accepted EU-dictated austerity) allowed the emergence of the hardcore Neo-Nazi Golden Dawn party. Most consequentially, PASOK was supplanted as the main party of the center-left by SYRIZA, a party of the radical left that adopted anti-austerity populism.

SYRIZA's success was indeed sensational. Starting from little over 3 percent of the vote in 2009, in 2015 it became the largest party in Greece with 36 percent of the vote. Led by the young and charismatic Alexis Tsipras, SYRIZA used populism to rally a long chain of frustrated political and economic demands in a way that transcended its leftist profile. SYRIZA blended its leftist credentials as a force against austerity with populism to present itself as a force of democratic renewal and popular sovereignty inside an oppressive EU. Thus, SYRIZA effectively harnessed the political identity of the anti-memorandum, which from the beginning had a broader meaning than economic material grievances. Economic justice, democratic accountability, and popular and national sovereignty constituted mutually dependent elements of a new popular identity that SYRIZA was speaking for.<sup>25</sup>

Following the January 2015 elections, SYRIZA and ANEL formed an anti-austerity coalition government that aimed to renegotiate Greece's

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<sup>25</sup> Giorgos Katsambeki, "Radical left populism in contemporary Greece: Syriza's trajectory from minoritarian opposition to power," *Constellations* 23, no. 3 (2016): 391–403; Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis, "Left-wing populism in the European periphery: The case of SYRIZA," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 19, no. 2 (2014): 119–42.

relationship with its creditors. After six months of brinkmanship, Tsipras' government was forced to accept a new bailout agreement in July 2015. This U-turn was approved by Greek voters in another election, in September 2015. With SYRIZA and ANEL now implementing EU-dictated austerity as well, it is highly doubtful whether we can still call these parties populist.

## Conclusion

Since the summer of 2015 the populist surge in Greece seems to have been halted. Yet it is questionable whether this will remain so for much longer. The party system today is composed overwhelmingly of parties that accept EU policies and austerity. But this is out of tune with large parts of Greek society. An agenda of material and representational frustration should still command significant support in Greece. The question is what shape the next populist explosion will take in Greece, when it comes. This is of course a speculative question, but I will offer some thoughts here.

First, the next major populist party in Greece will most probably belong again to the left rather than the right. This is not only because leftwing populism has a much stronger tradition than rightwing populism in Greece. It is also because any populist agenda in Greece must address the question of Greece's place in the EU. Unlike the 1990s and 2000s, and like the rest of its history, Greece finds itself today in a subordinate, dependent, and peripheralized position towards Europe and the West. Hence the next populist explosion must express egalitarian and emancipatory feelings, which are better captured by a populism of the left.

Second, populism may very well emerge from beyond the party system and enter party competition from non-party settings. This is how populism entered Spanish politics (with Podemos arising from the square movement) and Italian politics (with comedian Beppe Grillo using his open-air performances to launch a new party).

Politicians today in Greece are hopelessly tarnished and delegitimized in the eyes of many voters. A successful populist appeal will have to come from an entirely new place – perhaps boosted by powerful economic interests.

Third, and finally, the future populism in Greece will not prevaricate over Greece's place in Europe, as SYRIZA did in 2015. It will be a hard Eurosceptic populism through and through, challenging Greece's place in the Euro and perhaps in the EU as such. Whether such a radical appeal will find as broad support as the anti-memorandum agenda did in 2010–15 will largely depend on the state of the Greek economy at the time.

# Populism in the Baltic States

*Daunis Auers*

Europe and much of the world continues to sigh with concern about the perceived growing success and influence of populism on the political system. In contrast, populism has long been entrenched in the region and has become an established part of the Baltic political landscape over the last twenty-five years. Indeed, research on Latvia indicates that the volume of populism in party manifestos has been increasing with every post-1991 parliamentary election.<sup>1</sup>

This chapter initially defines populism and then explains how it has been understood in the region. It then goes on to briefly outline the post-1991 historical development of populism in the region, explaining that deep levels of distrust have created fertile ground for populists as well as highlighting major populist figures and parties. The following parts discuss the style and character of Baltic populism, the enduring themes used by populists as well as the widespread use of accusations of policy populism to explain swings in party popularity. The conclusion looks to the future and argues that populism is likely to maintain its presence and influence in years to come. Indeed, populist innovation in Latvia indicates that it may well grow in strength.

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<sup>1</sup> Ilze Balcere, "Populism in the manifestos of Latvian political parties: Increasingly used but ineffective?," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 45 (2014): 477–97.

## What is Populism?

Populism is the political conflict between *us* (the people) and *them* (powerful political and economic elites). *They* are portrayed as corrupt ignorant and emotionally distant from *us*. As Cas Mudde explains, it is a vision of a world divided between the “pure people” and the “corrupt elites”.<sup>2</sup> Populists praise and exalt the former but criticize and denigrate the latter. Further, it is a ‘thin’ ideology, being stitched on to other, deeper ideologies of the left and the right rather than being a stand-alone ideology.<sup>3</sup>

This is a broadly accepted scholarly definition of populism in the study of political parties.<sup>4</sup> However, anyone attending annual foreign policy and security themed events such as the annual Riga Conference, watching a televised political debate or reading a newspaper will know that the public, media and politicians themselves often conceive the concept of populism far more broadly. These other uses of populism can be placed into two different categories.<sup>5</sup>

First, populism is often used to describe an emotional and overly simplified popular style of discourse – what Cas Mudde has famously called the politics of the pub. This is reflected in particular styles of language, behaviour and even dress that politicians adopt in order to signal that they are with the people and oppose the political elite. Nigel Farage, the on/off leader of the anti-European United Kingdom Independence

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<sup>2</sup> See Cas Mudde, “The populist zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4. (2004): 542–63; Margaret Canovan, “Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy,” *Political Studies* 47, no. 1 (1999): 2–16.

<sup>3</sup> Ben Stanley, “The thin ideology of populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 95–110.

<sup>4</sup> For studies of radical right populist parties in the Baltic states see: Andres Kasekamp and Daunis Auers, “Explaining the electoral failure of extreme-right parties in Estonia and Latvia,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 241–54; Daunis Auers and Andres Kasekamp, “Comparing radical right populism in Estonia and Latvia,” in *Right Wing Populism Across/Beyond Europe*, eds. R. Wodak et al. (London: Bloomsbury Academic Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Cas Mudde, “The populist zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 542–563.

Party (UKIP) is a wealthy former City of London stockbroker married to a German national. Yet he maintains his populist image as a man of the people through a wardrobe of traditional British “mustard tweeds and moss-coloured cords... [as well as a] flat cap and Barbour jacket”.<sup>6</sup> This style of dress is matched by his regular behaviour of smoking and beer-drinking in traditional British pubs. In Finland, the former leader of the Finns party, Timo Soini, who later rose to the position of Foreign Minister, maintained his image as a man of people through his cheap, baggy suits and an affection for wearing a Millwall FC football scarf, a team he supports because it plays in the colours of the Finnish flag (it is also a football team associated with a particularly downtrodden part of London and whose fans are regarded as being among the most violent in England).<sup>7</sup> The leader of the Sweden Democrats, Jimmie Åkesson, adopted a different approach, attending the opening session of the first parliament to which his party had been elected in (rented) traditional Swedish folk costume. Different styles of speaking, regional dialects and particular words (especially slang) can also achieve the same affect.

Second, populism is also frequently conceived as the practice of making irresponsible promises or policy proposals that are not grounded in any economic or political realism but are used in order to appeal to the baser instincts of the crowd.<sup>8</sup> Mainstream politicians can also use the “irresponsible” policy proposals of the opposition as an explanation for why a particular party or politician has fared well in the polls, an election or a referendum. Brexit and the rise of Donald Trump to the US presidency in 2016, for example, are frequently mentioned as being the result of populist claims – increased funding for the British

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Doig, “Do you cover Nigel Farage’s covert coat?,” *The Telegraph*, April 9, 2015, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/fashion-and-style/11524581/Do-you-cover-Nigel-Farages-covert-coat.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Orange, “Far-right Finnish politician Timo Soini bids for presidency,” *The Guardian*, November 13, 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/13/timo-soini-finnish-presidency>.

<sup>8</sup> Although objectively evaluating whether something is, or is not, irresponsible or unrealistic can be quite challenging.

National Health Service or a fuzzy declaration to *Make America Great Again*. As Kevin Deegan Krause explains, populism is often identified as the “mystery ingredient that explains why a rival political leader [as well as a party or policy] has inexplicably large support.”<sup>9</sup>

## **From Dull to Interesting: A Brief History of Populism in the Modern Baltic States**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the following years of state and institution building presented an opportunity for populist ideas to take hold in the Baltic states. First, the economic transition from a socialist to market economy initially led to falling incomes and rising unemployment accompanied by high rates of inflation and a general feeling of insecurity. Economic output in the Baltic states fell by 50 per cent. Indeed, the 1990s saw a sharp polarization of society between the winners – often former members of the Soviet *nomenklatura* who had access to information and resources not available to broader society as well as new entrepreneurs, and young people with foreign language skills or training in the new information technologies – and the losers, particularly those who were economically and socially dependent on rapidly dwindling state resources and enfeebled state-owned enterprises (pensioners, farmers, the unemployed and low-skilled manufacturing workers).

This economic catastrophe inevitably fed into attitudes towards the new state institutions and towards the political elites dictating the speed and direction of the reforms. Distrust towards political institutions is central to the rise of populist feeling. The feeling that political elites do not identify with the masses, that they do not *care*, that they act in the interests of others – whether it be the interests of a small national elite, international bankers or foreign institutions – mobilises

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin Deegan-Krause, “Populism and the logic of party rotation in postcommunist Europe,” in *Visegrad Elections: Domestic Impact and European Consequences*, eds. Olga Gyárfášová and Grigorij Mesežnikov (Bratislava, Slovakia: Institute for Public Affairs (IVO)), 141–156.

populist feeling and creates the *us* versus *them* feeling needed to underpin a populist movement.

A brief glance at the data on trust in political institutions in Table 1 and Table 2 indicates that the Baltic states were fertile ground for anti-elite feelings in the first decade of renewed independence. Just two years into independence, between one-quarter (Lithuanian-Russians) and almost half (ethnic Latvians and ethnic Lithuanians) of the Baltic populations tended to not trust parliament while more than half of all the Baltic publics distrusted political parties at that time. Distrust rose throughout the 1990s although the swift economic growth of the early twenty-first century temporarily improved trust in the Baltic parliaments in 2004.

**Table 1.** How much do you trust Parliament? (% answering ‘a little’ or ‘none’ in 1993, ‘general distrust’ or ‘complete distrust’ in 1996, ‘do not trust’ in 2001)

	Latvians	Latvian-Russians	Estonians	Estonian-Russians	Lithuanians	Lithuanian-Russians
<b>1993</b>	44	36	37	40	44	27
<b>1996</b>	67	68	45	65	67	63
<b>2001</b>	75	74	67	62	70	68
<b>2004</b>	59	69	56	60	60	51

Source: Baltic Barometers I (1993), III (1996), V (2001), VI (2004), <http://www.balticvoices.org>

**Table 2.** How much do you trust political parties? (% answering ‘a little’ or ‘none’ in 1993, ‘general distrust’ or ‘complete distrust’ in 1996, ‘do not trust’ in 2001)

	Latvians	Latvian-Russians	Estonians	Estonian-Russians	Lithuanians	Lithuanian-Russians
<b>1993</b>	65	58	66	63	65	51
<b>1996</b>	85	85	84	87	73	84
<b>2001</b>	76	74	71	79	68	65
<b>2004</b>	73	75	70	81	69	63

Source: Baltic Barometers I (1993), III (1996), V (2001), VI (2004), <http://www.balticvoices.org>

In the 1990s the political systems of all three states were open to populist ideas. Indeed, the first decade of renewed independence was marked by “political party fission, fusion, fragmentation and creation” that allowed for new parties to easily access the political system.<sup>10</sup> New political parties had begun to organise in advance of the 1992 (Estonia and Lithuania) and 1993 (Latvia) founding parliamentary elections, loosely based on the three big political blocs that shaped the politics of the late Soviet years – nationalist congress movements, centrist “broad umbrella” popular fronts and reactionary pro-Russian *inter* movements. These parties had few links with partners in Western Europe and tended to have a smorgasbord of policy proposals, many of a clearly populist nature.

Populist mobilisation in the 1990s rallied around two key issues: (1) Relations between the titular populations and ethnic Russians (and, in the case of Lithuania, also relations with the Polish minority) and the connected issue of lustration and purging the system of former communists and the Soviet legacy. The most radical nationalist parties in the 1990s preached a three D’s policy of De-occupation, De-colonization and De-bolshevization denounced as populist in the sense that Latvia’s precarious relations with Russia and pursuit of integration with Western Europe made these ambitions utterly unrealistic.<sup>11</sup> (2) The painful “valley of tears” of economic and social reform that needed to be crossed in the transition from socialism to capitalism was used by populists who claimed that the deep economic downturn had not been inevitable and was caused by the mismanagement and theft of the political elite.<sup>12</sup>

The most successful populists rallied support by combining these two themes. Perhaps the most interesting of the mid-1990s populists was the mysterious German-Latvian politician Joachim Siegerist. Despite

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<sup>10</sup> Daunis Auers, *The Government and Politics of the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in the twenty-first century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> “The Three Ds flame is still kept burning by the Latvian National Front,” accessed October 15, 2017, <http://fronte.lv/>

<sup>12</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf, *After 1989: Morals, Revolution and Civil Society* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997).

being unable to speak Latvian (he was expelled from his party six months after first being elected in 1993 due to his poor Latvian skills) and his seeming lack of interest in day-to-day politics (he was later kicked out of parliament for non-attendance) his People's Movement for Latvia-Siegerists' Party (*Tautas kustība Latvijai – Zīgerista Partija, TKL*) won sixteen seats in the 1995 Latvian parliamentary election. The campaign was targeted at the losers of the early years of the transition and based on promoting national concerns – “Russians to Russia and Latvia for Latvians” – and handing out bananas and free medicine to emphasise the perceived failure of government economic policies in the mid-1990s.<sup>13</sup> At the same time, his party manifesto promised to weed out and punish corrupt bureaucrats and politicians.<sup>14</sup> There were some more extreme political calls – one Lithuanian member of parliament in 1992 called for the mass execution of former communists.<sup>15</sup> However, this type of radicalism was the exception rather than the rule. Most populists rallied around one (or both) of the twin themes of lustration of communist era cadres and the managerial incompetence and corruption of the political and economic elite.

The early twenty-first century appeared to bring greater stability to politics, particularly in Estonia. Lithuania, in contrast, experienced an upswing in populism in the 2000s after a decade of what one scholar has referred to as the “dull stage” in Lithuanian electoral politics.<sup>16</sup> The Baltic states experienced rapid economic growth in the years leading up to, and immediately after, accession to the European Union and NATO in 2004 and this seemed to dampen demand for new parties and populist appeals. Indeed, the 2006 parliamentary election in Latvia

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Tarm, “Extremists strong showing shakes up Latvian vote”, *LA Times*, October 3, 1995.

<sup>14</sup> “Latvia’s Central Election Commission,” accessed October 15, 2017, [www.cvk.lv](http://www.cvk.lv).

<sup>15</sup> Anatol Lieven, *The Baltic Revolution, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Path to Independence* (Yale University Press: 1994), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Darius Žeruolis, “Lithuania,” in *Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe*, eds. Sten Berglund, Tomas Hellén, and Frank H. Aarebrot (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 1998).

saw no new parties win seats in the legislature for the first (and hitherto also last) time in Latvian political history. Estonia's parliament was even more stable in terms of established parties in this period. Lithuania, however, saw its *Seimas* fragment as new parties, utilising increasingly anti-elite populist appeals, won seats in parliament.

While populist ideas were not dominating Estonian political party politics at this time, this is not to say that populist ideas were not being discussed in society. Mikko Lagerspetz and Henri Vogt recount how an open letter from 26 Estonian social scientists entitled "Two Estonia's" published in the *Postimees* newspaper in 2001 kicked off a public debate on the extent to which the Estonian political elite had distanced itself from the people – it began with the words "the power elite has become alienated from ordinary people to the extent that it is appropriate to talk about two different Estonias".<sup>17</sup> On the back of this debate, a few years later, in the 2003 parliamentary election, a new party, The Union in Defence of the Republic, (*Ühendus Vabariigi eest – Res Publica – Res Publica*) was elected to parliament on the back of a political campaign oriented around an anti-corruption message and a simple populist slogan – 'Choose Order!' (*Vali kord!*).

The deep economic recessions of 2008–2010 saw renewed and heightened distrust towards key political institutions. Tables 3 and 4 show Eurobarometer data on levels of trust in national parliaments in the Baltic states, as well as the EU average, in 2009, 2012 and 2015. Two things are very clear. First, distrust towards both parliament and political parties rose in this period, even compared to the high levels in the 1990s. Second, distrust has tended to be significantly higher in Latvia and Lithuania than in Estonia, where trust in political institutions is often above the EU average.

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<sup>17</sup> Mikko Lagerspetz and Henri Vogt, "Estonia," in *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Cheltenham: Edwards Elgar, 2004).

**Table 3. Trust in national parliament (% tend not to trust)**

	Latvia	Estonia	Lithuania	EU average
<b>2009</b>	91	65	86	61
<b>2012</b>	84	59	90	66
<b>2015</b>	75	51	77	62

Source: Baltic Barometers I (1993), III (1996), V (2001), VI (2004), <http://www.balticvoices.org>

**Table 4. Trust in national political parties (% tend not to trust)**

	Latvia	Estonia	Lithuania	EU average
<b>2009</b>	93	80	86	76
<b>2012</b>	90	76	89	78
<b>2015</b>	88	70	84	78

Source: Standard Eurobarometers 71 (2009), 77 (2012), 83 (2015), <http://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion>

These differences in trust towards political institutions, along with Estonia's superior economic performance, may help to explain variations in the extent to which populism has permeated the three states. While Lithuania and Latvia in particular have seen continuing high levels of political party volatility in the twenty-first century and populist rhetoric and policies have often helped new parties win parliamentary representation in national elections, the Estonian party system has been more settled.

Indeed only in the parliamentary election of 2015 was an explicitly radical right *populist* party elected to the Estonian parliament (Conservative People's Party of Estonia, *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond*, EKRE). Although other parties, particularly the Centre Party (*Eesti Keskerakond*) and its long-time chairman Edgar Savisaar, have been prone to advocating populist policies and using populist rhetoric, EKRE is the first major Estonian party in two decades to have populism as a central part of its core ideology. Moreover, with a membership

over 8,000 in 2017, it is now the largest radical right populist party in the Baltic states.

However, it is worth repeating that it is not just parties and politicians of the radical left and right that utilise populist appeals. Mainstream politicians can also mobilise this kind of feeling. For example, at the height of the economic recession in Lithuania in 2009, Dalia Grybauskaitė, then a European Commissioner campaigning (successfully) for the Lithuanian presidency stated that:

“I tried to calculate how many people actually ruled Lithuania. According to my calculations the number is around a hundred. Fifteen individuals are at the very top – they govern almost all the main political parties, and there are a few people in the government and parliament” (Dalia Grybauskaitė, 17 April 2009).<sup>18</sup>

This type of rhetoric from the mainstream helps to legitimise more marginal, populist parties. Not only was Grybauskaitė later elected president, but just a few years later in the October 2012 parliamentary elections, Lithuania saw a new populist party (*The Path of Courage*), based on a controversial alleged paedophilia case, breakthrough and win almost 8% of the proportional vote. The following Lithuanian parliamentary election saw Lithuania’s Peasants and Green Union (LPGU), who had won only one seat in the previous 2012 parliamentary election, receive the biggest share of votes – and 56 of 141 seats. LGPU had campaigned on a populist anti-corruption, clean-up-the-system platform in a year when domestic Lithuanian politics was dominated by high profile corruption cases. LGPU went on to take the prime minister’s post and take the lead in constructing a new governing coalition.

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<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Raimundas Urbonas, “Corruption in Lithuania,” *The Quarterly Journal* (Winter), 67–94 (2009): 83.

## Is There a Baltic Populist Style?

As the above section has outlined, the Baltic states have seen their fair share of populist parties and politicians. But is there a distinctive *style* to Baltic populism?

Each Baltic state has had a politician with lasting political success largely on the back of populist rhetoric. In the case of Estonia, Edgar Savisaar (who spent a decade as the Mayor of Tallinn) has remained front and centre in Estonian politics since being at the forefront of the independence movement in the late 1980s. He has very much built up the core image of his Centre Party (*Eesti Keskerakond*, founded in October 1991) as representing the “silent majority” of Estonians that have been forgotten by the political establishment.<sup>19</sup> In Latvia Aivars Lembergs, another municipal leader who has served as the Mayor of the wealthy oil transit city of Ventspils since the late 1980s, has remained among the most popular of national politicians despite a string of court cases, corruption charges and other controversial events marring his career. Finally, in Lithuania Rolandas Paksas, who has been prime minister, an impeached president and a European Parliamentarian, all while being implicated in various different criminal and corruption cases.<sup>20</sup>

These three politicians have several commonalities. First, they all convey the image of being political mavericks, outside the established political elites. They speak in a blunt, often crass style, that contrasts with the polished words of others leading politicians. And it is this sense of them being with *the people* rather than with the mainstream sophisticated, liberal, urban *elite* that is at the heart of their enduring success. They are certainly polarising figures, disliked by a significant

<sup>19</sup> Mikko Lagerspetz and Henri Vogt, “Estonia,” in *The Handbook of Political Change in Eastern Europe 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* (Cheltenham: Edwards Elgar, 2004), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Arturas Paulauksas and Arturs Uspaskich are two other leading politicians in Lithuania that fall into the populist category – Uspaskich, as a left-wing populist, is particularly interesting.

part of the electorate and often described as being a threat to democracy or even national sovereignty. Nevertheless, they continue to be electorally successful.

All three are also sceptical and critical about the West, advocating greater neutrality or even closer ties with the East. Edgar Savisaar campaigned against membership of the EU and NATO and has had a pact with Putin's United Russia party since the mid-2000s. Aivars Lembergs has frequently spoken out against the liberal agenda coming from the West and even went so far as to compare the increased NATO presence in Latvia following the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea to the 1940s occupation of Latvia by Soviet troops. Paksas similarly was impeached because of his close links to Russia and sits in the euroskeptical Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy group in the European Parliament.

The three have also been tied up in various political scandals and court cases. In the mid-1990s, while serving as Minister of the Interior, Savisaar admitted to illicitly taping conversations – and keeping the copies at a private security company run by two ex-KGB employees – with other politicians. He was subsequently fired by the prime minister. A decade and a half later Estonia's Security Police alleged that the head of Russia's Railways, Vladimir Yakunin, had offered Savisaar funding of 1.5 million euros to help the Centre Party compete in Estonia's parliamentary election. Savisaar was later also investigated following accusations of money-laundering. Similarly, Latvia's Aivars Lembergs has long been accused of being an 'oligarch' and having illicit control over sections of Latvia's media and political system. In 2007 he was arrested and placed behind bars after being charged with large scale bribery, money laundering, blackmail and abuse of authority. As of late 2017, the case was still going through the Latvian courts. Lembergs, in turn, has been re-elected to office in Ventspils three times (in 2009, 2013 and 2017). In April 2004 Rolandas Paksas became the first European president to be successfully impeached and was removed from the Lithuanian presidency just 14 months after winning the popular vote following charges that he had

violated the Lithuanian constitution as well as the presidential oath in dealings with a Russian-Lithuanian businessman allegedly closely connected to the Russian mafia (although Paksas implies that it was foreign forces that forced him from office). In 2016, Paksas, now a member of the European Parliament, was questioned by Lithuania's Special Investigation Service in connection to a corruption case. That same year Lithuania's General Prosecutor asked the European Parliament to waive Paksas' legal immunity so that charges of influence peddling could be brought against the MEP.

Thus there is clearly a common style to the leading figures of Baltic populism – despite the political offices they hold, they portray themselves as *outsiders*, defenders of the people who offer an alternative path of development and are subsequently attacked in the courts by the established elite, which further fuels their *outsider* status.

## Populist Themes

Populism in the Baltic states, however, reaches well beyond the three prominent political figures discussed above. Populist ideas and language are firmly established in political discourse and are effective instruments to be wielded by established political figures and new parties entering the political system alike. Populists tend to stick to two broad, tried and tested themes: (1) The domestic political system has failed / is failing because of the corruption and incompetence of domestic elites; and (2) international elites are undermining national sovereignty.

Rolandas Paksas' Order and Justice Party perfectly captured both these issues in its party manifesto for the 2008 Lithuanian parliamentary election. It begins by stating that “people today do not have the opportunity to meet their most important everyday needs... part of the nation is scattered around foreign countries, while another part is knee-deep in alcohol, while others commit suicide and kill each other...” and then goes on to argue that “No independent foreign policy

exists, the state obediently implements the wishes of the powerful world forces, corruption and oligarchs flourish and the state is run by KGB reservists.”<sup>21</sup>

Addressing the alleged failure of the existing system is an obvious and understandable tactic for new parties – after all, if all was well then they would not be needed.<sup>22</sup> Populists typically make an appeal oriented around a cleansing of the existing system. For example, in 2002 the Governor of the Bank of Latvia, Einars Repse, dramatically left his post in order to launch a new party – New Era (*Jaunais Laiks*) – that promised to tackle corruption as its number one priority and bring about an “honest and ordered Latvia... we will drive corruption underground. And then tackle drug dealers!”<sup>23</sup>

The second populist theme creates a *we* that is the nation and a *them* of international forces attempting to subordinate or even capture the state. It is centred on the idea that foreign values being imposed on traditional Baltic societies. This can be seen in the form of euroskepticism or anti-Americanism, although the most recent example is the anti-refugee rhetoric that has described the European Union’s refugee relocation plan as an attempt to swamp Europe with multiculturalism and radically change the established societies in the Baltic states.<sup>24</sup>

However, it has been most prevalent in an anti-Soros rhetoric that has been prevalent in the region for at least two decades. Anti-Soros rhetoric is not, of course, just a Baltic phenomenon. The billionaire investor and philanthropist has been a target for populists all around

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<sup>21</sup> Order and Justice Party, “Party Programme for 2008 Seimas election,” accessed October 7, 2017, [www.tvarka.lt](http://www.tvarka.lt).

<sup>22</sup> Indeed, a 2012 report on comparative populism in the Baltic states found that new parties were far more likely to make populist appeals in their party manifestos. Mari-Liis Jakobson et al., *Populism in the Baltic States: A Research Report* (Tallinn: Open Estonia Foundation and Tallinn University).

<sup>23</sup> “Jaundibinātās partijas "Jaunais laiks" prioritāte – korupcijas apkarošana”, *Tvnet*, February 2, 2002, [http://www.tvnet.lv/financenet/finansu\\_zinas/115865-jaundibinatas\\_partijas\\_jaunais\\_laiks\\_prioritate\\_korupcijas\\_apkarosana](http://www.tvnet.lv/financenet/finansu_zinas/115865-jaundibinatas_partijas_jaunais_laiks_prioritate_korupcijas_apkarosana).

<sup>24</sup> George Soros is frequently implicated as a participant in this plan, particularly in Hungary where it is often specifically referred to as Soros’ plan.

the globe.<sup>25</sup> But this rhetoric – which has an element of anti-semitism, as Soros is both Jewish and an international financier – has certainly become embedded in the Baltic discourse, particularly in Latvia where it is a favourite weapon of Aivars Lembergs, the Mayor of Ventspils. Indeed, pro- and anti- George Soros discourse in Latvia divides the Latvian political system into cosmopolitan, pro-liberal and pro-Soros parties, and technocratic nationally conservative parties that aim to protect Latvians from the unfettered internationalism of Soros. Indeed, even the most theatrical political event of modern Latvia – the then president Zatlers’ decision to call for a referendum on the recall of parliament in May 2011, was blamed on George Soros by one Latvian daily newspaper.<sup>26</sup>

## Populist Promises and Policies

Finally, populism is also prevalent in the Baltic political systems as an accusation implying a policy proposal that may be popular but is unrealistic perhaps because of international constraints brought about by membership of international institutions such as the European Union (EU) or the Council of Europe (CoE) or also because the budget cannot bear the proposal. This refrain is heard particularly often during election campaigns or as an explanation for a sudden surge, or drop, in support. For example, in February 2016, the chairman of Estonia’s Social Democrats’ parliamentary party claimed that his party’s swift fall in recent polls of party popularity was down to government opposition party’s increased use of irresponsible, populist rhetoric: “where the opposition can engage in populism, the ruling coalition has to deal with reality.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Gideon Rachman, “Soros hatred is a global sickness,” *Financial Times*, September 18, 2017.

<sup>26</sup> Uldis Dreiblats and Ritums Rozenbergs, “Sorosa fonda cilvēki solījuši naudu par Zatlera atbalstīšanu,” *NRA*, June 11, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> “Party ratings: Social Democrats accuse opposition of populism, IRL optimistic,” *BNS, ERR.ee*, accessed October 19, 2017, <http://news.err.ee/117672/party-ratings-social-democrats-accuse-opposition-of-populism-irl-optimistic>.

The idea of populism being based on irresponsible appeals has been well-researched in the Baltic states. This typically takes the form of analysis of campaign promises in electoral programmes. In 2015 the Praxis Centre for Policy Research, based in Tallinn, had a 135-strong team of experts evaluate party programmes for populist promises, eventually agreeing on a “Devils Dozen” of the most egregious and populist promises. These included economically unviable promises: “We will raise the minimum wage to 1,000 euros” or “We will push through an extraordinary rise in pensions. We will restore the purchasing power of pensions. We will free the average old-age pension from income tax.” (both *Centre Party*). There were also proposals that could not be realised because of international commitments: “We will halt land sales to foreigners and impose a real estate tax on them.” (*EKRE*), as well as promises that imply that the party will not fall into the trap of becoming elitist and distant from the public such as “We vow that if we get into the Parliament, we will give to charity half of the state budget funding allocated to our party” (*Estonian Greens*).<sup>28</sup> The same sort of populist promises can be found in Estonia and Latvia.<sup>29</sup>

## **Conclusion... and a Look to the Future of Populism in the Baltic States**

This chapter has outlined how deeply populism is embedded in the Baltic states. For the last quarter century populist appeals to the electorate – complaints about corruption or the illicit influence of oligarchs or international institutions – have attracted votes in national elections. Indeed, three of the most enduring politicians in the Baltic states – Edgar Savisaar, Aivars Lembergs and Rolandas Paksas – are

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<sup>28</sup> “Populismi edetabel 2015,” *Praxis*, accessed October 19, 2017, <http://www.praxis.ee/tood/praxis-jalgib-valimisi-2015/populismi-edetabel/>.

<sup>29</sup> See Mari-Liis Jakobson et al., *Populism in the Baltic States: A Research Report* (Tallinn: Open Estonia Foundation and Tallinn University).

the most skilled in formulating populist appeals to the people. Despite their extensive political experience as mayors, parliamentary deputies, prime ministers and even presidents, they still successfully present themselves as political outsiders. As the *we* rather than the *them*. And the core themes of underperforming states and excessive foreign influence continue to attract support for both established and new political actors.

All these populist activities are possible because of the low levels of trust in existing political institutions, particularly parliament and political parties which are the main representatives of the people in the political systems of the Baltic states. Indeed, the enduring depth of anti-establishment feeling in the region means that populism will remain embedded in the Baltic political systems, especially Latvia and Lithuania, well into the future.

Indeed, the last few years have seen an interesting innovation in populist politics in the Latvian parliament. Artuss Kaimiņš, a popular actor with a side line in a shock-jock DJ talk show, was elected to the Latvian parliament in 2014. Kaimiņš' big brainchild has been carrying a pocket-sized camera with him throughout his brief political career. He films casual encounters with other politicians in the street or in the office, himself grandstanding in a parliamentary committee and even brings the camera to the parliamentary chamber to film himself addressing plenary sessions of parliament.<sup>30</sup> All the time he is driven by the core populist argument that the political elite have distanced themselves from the public, although he himself remains with *us*, the people. Similar technological innovations to the practice of populism will likely be seen in the future, hand-in-hand with continued development in the information technology (IT) field. Baltic populism remains alive and kicking and likely to frame politics well into the future.

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<sup>30</sup> See Kaimins' web site [www.sunubuda.tv](http://www.sunubuda.tv) or his party Who Owns the State? Accessed October 19, 2017, [www.kpv.lv](http://www.kpv.lv).



# Conclusion

*Andis Kudors & Artis Pabriks*

Today, the phenomenon of populism has become one of the most debated topics in the European Union and the United States, among politicians, experts and journalists. If in the nineties of the last century, populism was commonly referred to in connection with radical right-wing parties in the Western Europe, then in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, populism should be seen as a phenomenon of a wider nature, which is more likely to be viewed as a style of political communication that can be used by numerous parties supporting different ideologies. Various European opposition parties use populist arguments in the struggle for power. Even the mainstream parties are increasingly using populist communication styles and messages, so as not to lose in competition for popular support.

The theoretical discussion involves research of the causes of populism. One of the most frequently mentioned reasons is disappointment of certain segments of society in the mainstream political parties that, in their opinion, have switched only to serving the interests of the elite. 2015 and 2016 manifestations of discontent from those groups of European countries that have not gained sufficient benefits from the process of globalization have emerged; with the intensification of the immigration crisis, populism has obtained very good soil. Crisis and populism often go hand in hand. In times of crisis, part of the public may become confident that usual policy methods are not enough to cope with it, therefore, it is necessary to start something unconventional.

The German example also shows that political shocks in recent years have roots not in the economy, but in a cultural sphere, based on a fear of migration and refugees. Significantly, that for the first time in post-war history, a radical right-wing party Alternative for Germany has entered the national parliament with the third best result scoring 12.6 per cent.

It is habitual to talk about populism in politics, but there are other areas where populism is seen as an approach, for example in the media and economics. Media populism is associated with market-led journalism, which is more seeking economic benefits than looking at the real public interest. Lack of resources in the media promotes the publication of outside-media content and the exploitation of populist messages. For example, the Brexit voting result in the UK was influenced by populist media messages. The Twitter communication activities by US President Donald Trump also show a new, populist style in political communication. Thus, both media and social networks play an important role in spreading populist messages. In the context of mediated populism, Donald Trump's case is a vivid example. Although D. Trump is often referred to as a populist, he is not a typical populist from the angle of a theoretical study. Is he a man of 'ordinary people'? How does desire to reduce taxes for the rich like himself go along with the idea of standing up against an elite who "thinks only of his own interests"? Nonetheless, D. Trump found how to effectively use the dissatisfaction of millions of white working- and middle-class Americans in the pre-election campaign. This was helped by the use of populist messages and communication practices.

The US check and balance system will likely withstand Donald Trump's presidency as a stress test, however, the populist style of communication will hardly disappear from the political discourse in the near future. This style includes "contemptuous rhetoric addressing political rivals, attacks towards opponents, emotional communication and a desire for provocations in order to remain in the centre of attention."<sup>1</sup> Part of media are quite pleased with the sharp wording by populists, because they attract attention of a certain segment of

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<sup>1</sup> See more in A. Rožukalne's article, 38.

audience. For instance, the promise to clean up *dirty politics*, as well as cynical approach to politics and self-proclamation as *taboo-breakers* pay dividends to such media which already have used to produce publications on the margins of ethics.

In the context of the media role in populism, it is noteworthy that official Russia has used social networks to disseminate populist and divisive messages for Western societies through Internet trolls and advertising contracts. Both activities supported by the Kremlin and organized by extremist organizations urge EU and US governments to seek solutions to media regulation, including, how to transfer the existing regulation to virtual networking formats. Both Russian trolls and propagandists, as well as legitimate actors, have the same opportunities to disseminate information; the only difference is that extreme movement websites do not follow the standards characteristic of traditional media.

Repeated mistakes by political mainstream, unable to respond swiftly and adequately to the call of a large portion of society to control immigration, contributed to polarizing society and cultivating ideas of populism before the referendum on Britain's departure or stay in the EU. In Germany and the Netherlands, the agitator of populism was initially indecisive response from the leaders of these countries to the problems of migration. In Greece, for its part, the main causes were the economic crisis and the call of the EU institutions (and Germany) to implement austerity measures as well as deeper roots in Greek history. Populism in the Baltic states is significant because often the most brilliant populists, like D. Trump, have skillfully managed to present themselves as political outsiders, although they have both occupied important positions in the country and have been rich entrepreneurs. Such a practice is possible, because there are low levels of trust in existing political institutions in the Baltic states, particularly parliament and political parties.

One of the reasons for the rise of populism and nationalism is the belief of EU mainstream that European integration policy has no business in protecting and preserving of national identity. Is the policy just about achieving maximum economic prosperity and

military security? If the EU's leading politicians continue to answer this question in the affirmative, then let us not be surprised that we will experience new waves of radicalization and populism. Fathers of European integration did not think of safeguarding identities, because after the Second World War they did not feel threatened in this regard. The situation has changed and one of the worries caused by globalization is the concern about national identity. Even if they are sometimes unsubstantiated or exaggerated, European politicians must take into account the fact that citizens engage in politics appealed not only by material and security matters. Another factor from the lessons learned is the awareness that democracy must be prepared to protect itself from external authoritarian regime information and disinformation attacks. Official Russia has tried to deliberately weaken the United States and the EU from the inside – by using media and social networks it adds fuel to the fire of internal problems. Russia's financial support for the National Front, led by Marine Le Pen, is one of the most significant examples of how the Kremlin is trying to split the European Union and the societies of its Member States. Support for both radical left and right, as well as populists is not related to the pursuit of the Russian elite for certain values. Russia's intervention in the EU and US public and political processes is linked to the desire to weaken the West as a whole, in order to make Russia's weakness less obvious. Support for populists and radicals is just a means of breaking and confusing. So far, the response to this problem within the EU has been a rather sporadic reaction of civic society, without a serious strategy at the EU's official level. Both the European Commission and Federica Mogherini, Head of the European External Action Service, have to deal much more seriously with Russia's disinformation and influence campaigns, aimed at brushing Europe's throats against each other.

The authors of this collection of articles do not agree on whether the current populist wave is episodic or enduring. It is believed that the populist parties grow fast, but they can not sustain the intrigue for a long time and therefore demise. For example, that happened to populist movement “People’s Movement for Latvia” led by Joachim Siegerist,

which flared up in Latvia in the 1990s and quickly crashed. The second reason is the conversion of the populists themselves into a political elite and the inability to maintain its anti-elitist appeal. Routine policy where promises are not enough, but real problem-solving and necessary compromises are needed (especially in countries where party coalition governments are in place) rapidly reduce the popularity of populists. Whether it is the case in today's Europe, time will tell.



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**The Centre for East European Policy Studies (CEEPS)** is a thinktank founded in Riga in 2006. The main objectives of CEEPS are: to make its contribution to the development of Latvian foreign policy by doing research work in the scientific fields of politics and history of Eastern European countries; to develop cooperation with scientific institutions and other organisations of Latvia and foreign countries; to be aware of, and explain, Latvia's state interests abroad. The most recent CEEPS studies have focused on the influence of Russian public diplomacy and propaganda on the social and political processes in Russia's neighbouring countries. CEEPS activities up until now have been financially supported by the following institutions: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Latvia, the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Latvia, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia, the Social Integration Foundation (Latvia), Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Friedrich Ebert Foundation (Germany), the National Endowment for Democracy (US), the American Latvian Association (ALA), the NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, the European People's Party (EPP) Group at the European Parliament, and private donors.

**The Rise of Populism:  
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