**Populism in Russia Worksheet by the Numbers**

This project was designed for a survey history course on Russia (from 1000 to the present). Students are assigned three articles (available online) and two videos (available online) to watch.

1. Assign project and due date. Two videos and three short articles should require only a few days (three or four days should be sufficient). Students watch videos, read articles, and answer the worksheet questions outside of class.

2. Explaining grading criteria.

   a. Students earn points via responding to questions on the worksheet. Answering all the questions represents full-credit. Scores below full-credit are possible based on student not answering provided questions. Points are deducted based on the value of missed questions, e.g., out of forty-eight questions, ten are missed. Each question is valued at 0.75 points. $0.75 \times 10 = 7.5$ points are lost from the worksheet, or 40.5 points out of a possible 48 points.

   b. Students have the potential to earn above full-credit by answering extensively (something of a judgment call) and/or indicating where they found their answers (evidence). Since questions are drawn from provided information, a passage, quote, or page number suffices for evidence.

   c. On the assigned day of the worksheet’s completion, students will be organized into a seminar format and discuss the information they have examined. They are graded using the attached seminar-grading sheet. Students sign their names to the sheets, and the sheets are collected before the discussion begins. A workable system involves having the students arranged in a circle with the instructor on the outside of the circle. On a table in front of the instructor, arrange the seminar grading sheets (the sheets the students have just signed and the instructor has collected once they are seated in the seminar circle) into a circle mirroring the students’ placement. As students discuss the topic, score their comments based on categories on the seminar-grading sheet. Total score is thirty-five points.

   d. Although seminars can be structured in different ways, one successful way is to make the students responsible for the discussion. Keep notes while students discuss the topic. Ensure a few minutes are left between the expiration of the allotted seminar time (twenty-five to thirty minutes) and class dismissal. Once the seminar has ended, use the few minutes before dismissal to hit on any topics that students struggled with, missed, were in error, did an especially good job explaining, had an interesting insight, or any other action of note.

   e. Scoring for the seminar is a blend of quantity and quality. Certain responses, such as answering questions and providing evidence are worth more than summarizing other’s comments. But, full-credit will require participation throughout the seminar (quantity). A single, brilliant insight still only gets one check mark on the seminar grade sheet. In order to achieve full-credit, a student needs to raise multiple comments or questions. A full-credit seminar grade will have multiple check marks indicating different comments/questions the student raised during the seminar.

   f. The seminar grade sheet has a prominent dividing line (**********************) as well as a small #1 in the upper-right corner and a small #2 close to the right center of the page, below the prominent dividing line. The seminar grade sheet the students receive is only half a page, cut at the ********************** mark. If the class is too large for one seminar group, divide the class in half. First, cut the seminar-grading sheet in half. Organize seminar grading half-sheets in a stack alternating #1 (small 1 in the upper-right corner), #2 (close to the right center of
the page, but now with page cut in half, also in the top right corner), 1, 2, 1, 2, etc. Distribute to students and select a number (1 or 2) to go in the first seminar group, followed by the second group. Two seminar groups in one class period can make for a rushed class and students will be under pressure to gain points in a short time period, but this is a system workable in a fifty-minute class with an enrollment of thirty-five students.

3. All the information above is based on past experience and projects with similar structures but with different themes. Of course there are alternative methods, and none of this is written in stone, but I have found this system functionable. Teaching survey courses puts a premium on time, therefore, I shy away from large, student presentations, primarily because the time they gobble-up is time lost that was needed for other course topics. This system permits me to expose the students to a topic; they complete the work outside of class (again, class time is needed for other activities), and once completed the students’ focus on this theme collectively. In this fashion, one day of the course is devoted to a theme, but the students have been spending a number of days mulling over this topic.
**Populism in Russia Worksheet.** Read the following articles on populism in post-Soviet Russia:

Boghani, Priyanka. “Putin’s Legal Crackdown on Civil Society”
Deiwiks, Christa. “Populism.”

In addition, watch the *Frontline* video “Putin’s Way.” [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/putins-way/] or [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bst3LDAbhmU].

Answer the following questions associated with the listed readings and video. Bring your answers to class on November 30th for a seminar discussion.

**Worksheet Rubric (do not mark, project begins at the bottom of this page)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Answered all questions: (35 points possible)</td>
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<td>(If yes, move to item #3)</td>
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<td>1a. Number of questions skipped (0.75 points each)</td>
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2. **Worksheet Score**

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   (Value of skipped questions and pages subtracted from total value)

<table>
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<td>3. All questions answered with evidence or extensive response (Up to 10 points extra).</td>
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<tr>
<td>3a. Additional Worksheet Score</td>
<td>Questions answered with evidence (up to 5 extra points)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3a. Additional Worksheet Score</td>
<td>Questions answered with extensive responses (up to 5 extra points)</td>
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4. **Total Worksheet Score**

   ____________/35

**QUESTIONS BEGIN ON NEXT PAGE**
1. According to Margaret Canovan (Deiwiks article), what are two basic types of populism?

2. How might modernism generate populism (Deiwiks)?

3. According to Mény and Surel (Deiwiks article), what are three basic types of populism?

4. According to Taggart (Deiwiks article), what are two basic types of populism?

5. According to Deiwiks, what is the most to-the-point definition of populism, and what is that definition?

6. Considering the five paragraphs Deiwiks used to develop a definition of populism, what are striking changes and similarities within the definition as it has metamorphosize over time?

7. Who are the ‘People.’ (Deiwiks)
8. What are the complementary objectives with populist referring to the people? (Deiwiks)

9. Why is the ‘other’ critical for the construction of a populist ideology? (Deiwiks)

10. What are the different targets of right-wing populism and left-wing populism? (Deiwiks)

    right-wing populism                  left-wing populism

11. What are the conditions that promote populism?

12. Considering the framework presented in the Deiwiks article, as well as knowledge gained about Russia in class, what were the conditions (the specific people or events, not just a restatement of the general conditions asked for in question 11) that promoted a populist movement with Boris Yeltsin? (Sestanovich)
13. If the people and the other is the core dichotomy of populism, who are they in Yeltsin’s Russia? (Sestanovich)

14. What is a Demagogue?

15. Why did Yeltsin fail as a populist leader? (Sestanovich)

16. How does Yeltsin’s failure set the stage for Vladimir Putin? (Sestanovich)

17. How might Ukraine be following Yeltsin’s populism model? (Sestanovich)

18. Why do the new populist (called illiberal by Sestanovich) turn on the newly empowered populist and how do the old populist (liberal, using Sestanovich words) lose the support of the people?

19. What does Professor Dawisha mean by saying Russia needs to be seen as an authoritarian system in the process of succeeding? (“Putin’s Way”)
20. Considering Putin’s self-produced documentary, how does this fit within the concept of Demagoguery? Also consider the internet definition of the term sockpuppet (do an internet search for: *Sockpuppet (Internet)*)

21. How does the *Frontline* video Putin’s Way undermine Sestanovich’s premise of Putin’s rise to power as a reaction to Yeltsin’s fall from power?

22. How does the attack on Chechnya aid Putin’s (*Frontline, Putin’s Way*) rise to power and how does this Russia versus Chechnya dichotomy aid a populist construction (Deiwiks)?

23. Consider the conditions thought to be needed for populist movements, specifically opaqueness of political institutions (Deiwiks), what are the characteristics of Vladimir Putin’s government? (*Putin’s Way*)

24. Who is Gerhard Schröder and how does he fit into this story about Vladimir Putin? (*Putin’s Way*)

25. As a former KGB agent, how was Putin trained to relate to other people? (*Putin’s Way*)
26. Why did the Arab Spring worry Vladimir Putin? (Putin’s Way)

27. When Vladimir Putin was nearing legal limits on his term in office and he announced (in 2011) that he would run for another term as president, what was the popular reaction? (Putin’s Way and Boghani)

28. As a lawyer and leader of the state, how did Putin discourage protests? (Boghani)

29. Considering the wealth of an average Russian (mentioned in Putin’s Way), how does Putin shut-down spontaneous protests? (Boghani)

30. Putin also targeted NGOs. How does this fit into the rubric of populism? (Boghani and Deiwiks)

31. Why is calling NGOs “foreign agents” an effective way to slander an NGO in Russian? (Boghani)
32. In terms of controlling people and motivating populist movements to support the state, how does the media in Russia feed into this support? (Boghani)

33. What is the meaning behind the line that Putin is the master and prisoner of the Kremlin and what could this imply for future governance and transfer of powers in Russia (Putin’s Way)

34. Consider the contrast between Sestanovich’s description and the Frontline video’s description of the transition of power from Yeltsin to Putin. With, Russia described as “basically a corrupt, backward country,” what is a potential fear of populism that Putin might have?

35. What are the potential economic problems mentioned that Russia faces? (Putin’s Way)

36. How does Putin redirect any potential dissatisfaction the Russian people may have with his governance? (Putin’s Way)

37. What became of the anti-Putin populism in 2011 after Putin’s confrontation with Ukraine? (Putin’s Way)
38. What does the flight MH17 do to Russia’s international position? (Putin’s Way)

39. Why is Putin’s story of a cornered rat instructive? Although not mentioned in the video, with continued economic troubles in Russia, who else could be seen as the cornered rat? (Putin’s Way)


40. What is Donbass?

41. Notice the old, black and white, framed photo at 2:41 and later at 11:36. Who is this person and why might the Night Wolves glorify him?

42. How does God, nostalgia, and patriotism fit into the Night Wolves worldview?
43. How is Putin viewed by the Night Wolves?

44. How is the West/America viewed by the Night Wolves?

45. Putting all the information together about Russia, populism, and Putin, why might Putin support the policies he does towards the West and Ukraine?

46. Why might Russian populist follow Putin instead of denounce him?

47. How might this information inform the West’s policies toward Russia?

48. What might be the long-term results for Putin and Russia?
Seminar Grading Sheet. Communications (C1) Ability

Name: ______________________________  Date: _________________  Topic: ____________________

Positive Seminar Behaviors:

Introduced substantive points:
- Addressed assigned questions (2) .................................................................
- Answered assigned questions (4) ..............................................................
- Pointed to important passages or evidence in text (6) ................................

Deepened the discussion:
- Identified essential issues or questions the text was discussing (5) ...........
- Asked clarifying questions (4) ..............................................................
- Connected ideas; summarized (2) .............................................................
- Challenged ideas or offered alternative explanation (3) ........................
- Linked seminar topic to other course readings/topics (4) ......................

Facilitated group exploration:
- Encouraged non-participants (4) ..............................................................
- Supported others by responding to their ideas (1) ...................................
- Focused group back to text (3) ..............................................................
- Brought closure to one point and made transition to a new one (2) ........

Negative Seminar Behaviors:
- Jumped to interpretation too soon (-1) ..................................................
- Distracted group by holding sidebar conversations (-5) ......................
- Dominated discussion by talking too much (-2) .................................
- Discussing topics unrelated to seminar subject (-2) ..............................

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<th>6</th>
<th>fair (2)</th>
<th>13</th>
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| 0  | poor (1)  | 6  | fair (2)  | 13 | good (3)  | 29 | 30  | proficient (4) | 35 |

With his hand resting atop a copy of Russia’s constitution as he was sworn in for a third term as president, Vladimir Putin promised to “respect and protect human and civil rights and freedoms.” But in the two years since, the Russian president has overseen an accelerated crackdown on dissent and opposition. A series of recently enacted laws have made it harder for Russians to assemble, to publish criticism on the Internet, and to carry out political or human rights advocacy, according to analysts and human rights groups. “He’s a lawyer,” Leon Aron, a Russia scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, explained to *Frontline.* “So he generally tends to avoid these crude, typically authoritarian, thuggish methods where people come in, break equipment and beat people up. He tries to do it as a slow strangulation — but very fatal — through a series of laws.”

**A Costly Protest**

December 2011 saw widespread mass protests in Moscow and other Russian cities, sparked by Putin’s announcement earlier that fall that he intended to run for a third term as Russia’s president, as well as by allegations of rigged parliamentary elections. Tens of thousands of Russians of all political persuasions gathered in the capital chanting “Putin is a thief” and “Russia without Putin.” “The Kremlin, and Putin personally, were quite frightened by the public protests of late 2011 and early 2012,” Tanya Lokshina, the Russia program director at Human Rights Watch, told *Frontline.* “As soon as Putin returned to the Kremlin he tried to do his utmost to make sure people were strongly discouraged from taking part in such protests.” Less than a month after Putin’s inauguration, Russia’s parliament passed a bill raising the fines and penalties for taking part in unauthorized protests to 300,000 rubles (more than $9,000 at the time). Organizers of unsanctioned rallies could be fined up to a million rubles.

Putin’s own human rights adviser reportedly asked the president to veto the bill, but Putin signed it into law days before a planned protest, justifying it as a bulwark against radicalism. The number of public protests dropped by half in the following year, according to a report by Amnesty International, which noted that “Spontaneous protest has been virtually outlawed.” In July 2014, Putin signed a new law that raised the fines for protesters caught participating in unauthorized demonstrations multiple times a year to between 600,000 and 1 million rubles ($17,124-$28,540 at the time) — a cost that rights groups said was prohibitively high for the average Russian citizen to pay. Protesters could also be held criminally accountable and face up to five years of forced labor or prison.

**Cracking Down on NGOs**

Putin began tightening conditions on non-governmental organizations (NGOs) during his second term as president. In 2007, he described NGOs that received grants from foreign governments as “jackals.” In 2011,
he compared election monitors who received foreign funding to Judas. In 2012, Putin signed what would become known as the “foreign agent law,” which requires NGOs that received funding from outside Russia to register as “foreign agents” and be subject to mandatory audits. Failure to register could result in a maximum fine of 300,000 rubles for individuals and 500,000 rubles for organizations.

The law also required NGOs to submit reports on their funds and resources on a quarterly basis, and reports on their activities and personnel every six months. Failure to submit such reports or providing “incomplete” information could result in fines of 30,000 rubles for individuals and 10 times that amount for legal entities. Individuals and organizations could also be fined 300,000 and 500,000 rubles respectively if they published or distributed materials without noting that they had been published by a “foreign agent.” The Kremlin cast the law as a way to prevent “foreign meddling” in Russia’s domestic politics and increase transparency. “Any direct or indirect interference in our internal affairs — any form of pressure on Russia, our allies and partners — is unacceptable,” Putin said in a February 2013 speech to the Federal Security Service (FSB), the successor agency to the KGB.

But Russia observers say the law was intended to marginalize and demonize NGOs in the eyes of Russians. “In the Russian language, in the Russian context, foreign agent means foreign spy, there is no other interpretation,” Lokshina said. “The intent was to create a sense of fear and kind of warn off any kind of civil society,” said Aron, who described the law as one of the most damaging passed in recent years. As many as 2,000 NGOs were raided by government authorities in the spring of 2013. Putin said the inspections were to check “whether the groups’ activities conform with their declared goals.” Among the groups targeted was Golos, an election watchdog that tracked instances of fraud during the 2011 elections. In April 2013, it was fined for failing to declare itself a foreign agent. The offices of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were also raided, along with Memorial, one of Russia’s oldest human rights organizations. Within a year of the law being enacted, at least 10 NGOs had been taken to court for failure to register. In May 2014, the law was amended to give the Ministry of Justice the power to label NGOs “foreign agents” if they didn’t register themselves. Twenty-eight of the 30 NGOs currently listed as foreign agents were added by the ministry.

A Shrinking Independent Media

During his first two terms, Putin worked to increase state control over the media, bringing the television empires of two of Russia’s biggest media tycoons — Vladimir Gusinsky and Boris Berezovsky — under the Kremlin’s control. By early 2014, several Russian media outlets saw an editorial change of guard to more Kremlin-friendly leaders, and only one independent television station remained, Dozhd (Rain) TV. The channel’s editor-in-chief won a Committee to Protect Journalists award last November, but in Russia, the channel is a pariah, with its studio now located in a tiny apartment in Moscow.
Adding to Dozhd’s troubles is a law that bans advertising on private cable and satellite channels. It was passed by the Russian parliament last July and takes effect this year. The heads of several channels wrote a letter to the government, explaining that “excluding the advertising model will place about 150 [out of 270 cable and satellite channels] on the brink of survival,” according to The Moscow Times. During a news conference in December, Putin said the law’s purpose was to even the playing field between the cable and satellite channels, and federal free-to-air stations.

In October, Putin signed another law that would limit foreign ownership in media companies to 20 percent by the end of 2016. It also prohibited international organizations, foreign citizens or Russians with dual citizenship from owning mass media outlets. The law will most likely impact the two biggest independent media outlets in Russia: Forbes’ Russian edition and Vedomosti, a joint publication of the Financial Times and The Wall Street Journal. “We understand very well that those who own information own the world,” Vadim Dengin, the lawmaker who wrote the bill, said during debate before the law’s approval. “When foreigners come here to make money and then actively influence the media market and use it for their own benefit, at this moment, I want to say that I am ready to close down Russia and ensure its security.” Vedomosti’s editor in chief, Tatiana Lysova, said, “We do not report to the Russian authorities, so that is why we are a potential danger in their mind, a potential enemy.”

**Regulating an “Island of Freedom”**

Before 2012, Russia saw almost no Internet censorship, according to Eva Galperin, global policy analyst at the Electronic Frontier Foundation. The Internet “was a place where people debated politics with great vigor, and there was a very well-developed civil society,” she told Frontline. Lokshina described it as an “island of freedom” in Russia’s media landscape. In the months leading up to Putin’s re-election, opposition forces used websites and blogs to organize protests and expose alleged corruption. The Russian government went on the attack, with Sergei Smirnov, the deputy director of the FSB, blaming western security services for creating “new technologies” to “create and maintain constant tension.” “Society must defend itself,” Smirnov said in an April 2012 speech. “If the enemy uses ‘dirty’ technology, we need to purge the space from such activity in some way.” Within months, Putin signed the “Law on the Protection of Children from Information Detrimental to Their Health and Development.” It called for the creation of a registry — or blacklist — of sites containing information deemed harmful to children.

Reporters Without Borders criticized the legislation, saying the procedure that could lead to a website being blocked was “extremely vague.” Russia’s telecom minister, Nikolai Nikiforov, tried to reassure critics, saying the government didn’t intend to “enforce censorship.” Websites would “be blocked only if they refuse to follow Russian laws, which is unlikely, in my opinion,” he said. The registry is maintained by a federal agency,
Roskomnadzor. “Roskomnadzor actually has no method of appeal, and no real oversight,” Galperin said. “So really, they can block what they want, for whatever reason they want.” In December 2013, Putin signed another law that would allow Roskomnadzor to block sites that carry “extremist” content or promote mass rioting within 24 hours and without a court order. It came into effect last February.

A month later, three opposition media sites and a blog maintained by opposition leader Alexei Navalny were blocked in accordance with the law for encouraging “illegal activities and participation in public events held in violation of the established order.” “They’ve taken down a number of Russian political sites, particularly sites belonging to members of the political opposition and independent news sites, especially when the news features points of view that aren’t in keeping with the Putin regime,” Galperin said. In May, Putin signed another law that would require bloggers with more than 3,000 daily visitors to register with Roskomnadzor. They would also have to reveal their identities, and verify the accuracy of the information they published.

The law has already compelled some tech companies in Russia to change their policies in order to comply. The most recent example was Intel, which shut down its Russian-language developer forums, redirecting users to third-party sites or Intel’s English-language forums. The company explicitly said the changes were a result of “new laws in Russia.” The cumulative effect of all these laws, according to experts, has been to create an environment hostile for activists, critics of the government and independent journalists. But some, such as Human Rights Watch’s Lokshina, say that the government’s moves may end up being counter-productive. “While the number of people who are ready to speak to criticize the Kremlin at this time has gone down … it’s very much like a pot,” she told Frontline. “It might just bubble over, it might just explode at any given moment.”
This article reviews a selection of works on populism. Theoretical contributions concerning definitional and conceptual aspects of populism are discussed, as well as the conditions under which populism is likely. The focus is mainly on the relationship between populism and representative democracy. The overview of the theoretical literature shows that while in the 1960s there was no consensus on the meaning of populism, in the more recent literature there is agreement on at least two characteristics that are central to populism: a strong focus by populist leaders on the ‘people’, and an implicit or explicit reference to an ‘anti-group’, often the political elite, against which the ‘people’ is positioned. The usefulness of such a minimal definition is shown by looking at cases of populism in Russia, the United States, Western Europe and Latin America.

A contested concept of populism?

If one wanted to sketch the development of populism as a field in political analysis, one could start with Ionescu and Gellner (1969), whose comprehensive edition counts as “the definite collection on populism” according to Taggart (2000, 15, italics in original). Ionescu and Gellner (1969) address the question of whether populism is a unitary concept by asking, first, whether populism is an ideology, a “recurring mentality appearing in different historical and geographic contexts as the result of a special social situation faced by societies in which the middle social factors were either missing or too weak” (p.3), whether populism can be defined in terms of political psychology or as an anti-phenomenon, if populism is a people-worshipping phenomenon, or finally, if populism can be subsumed under nationalism, socialism, and peasantism.

This laundry list of characteristics of populism illustrates the confusion that can occur when dealing with populism. Ionescu and Gellner never settled on a definition of populism (Taggart 2000), which remained a contested concept. However, more recently authors such as for instance Panizza (2005) have suggested that there is a significant scholarly agreement on the analytical core of populism. In particular, populism is understood as an anti-phenomenon and as a people-worshipping phenomenon.

This article gives an overview and interpretation of the literature on populism with the goal of structuring the various definitions and historical accounts. While this overview must remain incomplete, I try to include the main theoretical approaches as well as historical and contemporary accounts and analyses of specific manifestations of populism in various countries, regions and eras.1

Of these two types of literature, the second is much larger than the first. There are far more contributions, especially in scientific journals, about specific cases of populism than theoretical discussions of the concept itself. This observation is confirmed by Taggart (2000), who finds it “surprising how little attention populism has received as a concept” (p.10). The reason for this bias might be the result as well as the expression of the difficulty in finding a smallest common denominator that holds for each empirical case. However, theoretical analyses of the concept of populism are at the core of the scientific interest. While case studies of different populist parties and leaders may serve to illustrate theoretical aspects, the focus of a systematic analysis should be on the theoretical approaches rather than on the myriad of manifestations of populism.

First, I will give an overview of the theoretical works on the definition(s) of populism and related aspects commonly discussed. Second, I turn to the conditions under which populism is likely. For instance, socioeconomic conditions, crises of various kinds and charismatic leaders often accompany and even promote the occurrence of populism. Indeed, representative democracy itself constitutes a setting in which populism often flourishes. In the last section of this article, I describe how populism in Russia, the United States, Western Europe and Latin America has been observed and analyzed, and how a minimal definition of populism can be a useful guide for the literature on these cases.

Definitions

Strikingly, even some of the works on populism regarded as ground-breaking and substantial like Ionescu and Gellner (1969) fail to state explicitly what they mean by the term. Likewise, Margaret Canovan’s Populism (1981) comes up with a typology of populism which basically consist of two categories, namely agrarian populism and political populism. They are further subdivided into a total of seven different kinds of populism – yet, what they have in common is left to the reader to ponder. Even though Taggart calls Canovan’s work the “most ambitious attempt to get to grips with populism” (Taggart 2000, 18), he also points to the fact that it does not suggest any common core to the phenomenon of populism on the basis of the wide range of phenomena covered in it. Lutz (1982) also voices the criticism that the book includes cases of populism rather uncritically.

Similarly, the definition by Wiles (1969), which lists twenty-four characteristics of populism, is not really helpful for identifying cases of populism because of its limited empirical applicability.

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1 Ionescu and Gellner (1969a) call these the two meanings of populism.
Berlin et al. (1968) show somewhat more restraint by providing a definition consisting of six features, including the importance of the people (Gemeinschaft) and the rejection of politics, i.e., the return to the natural condition of society before the introduction of any political system. These authors also suggest that modernization generates populism. Yet, these multifaceted contributions are little help when it comes to analyzing the phenomenon of populism. They can give us an intuition of what populism is all about, but do not provide a systematic understanding of its essence.

A better approach is that of Mény and Surel (2000; 2002). They reduce the number of populism’s core characteristics to those three they claim to be its essential aspects. First, the ‘people’ is of paramount importance. Here, a feeling of community is stressed, and horizontal cleavages (such as left-right) are played down while vertical ones are played up for the purpose of excluding particular groups, e.g. elites and immigrants. Second, populists claim that the ‘people’ has been betrayed by the elites through their abuse of power, corruption etc. Third, populists demand that the “primacy of the people” (p. 13) has to be restored. In short: the current elites would have to be replaced and in their place the new leaders (the populists) would act for the good of the ‘people’.

Taggart (2000; 2002) agrees with two of these three points. He agrees with the importance of the ‘people’, since populists tend to identify with a heartland that represents an idealized conception of the community to which they belong. This imagined entity is the ‘people.’ Second, antagonism towards a constructed ‘other’ is central, which is also highlighted by Panizza (2005), who refers to the anti-status quo dimension of populism. For Taggart, moreover, a key feature of populism is its hostility towards representative politics, which is viewed as a way of stealing power from the ‘people.’ Additionally, Taggart points to the necessity of a “sense of extreme crisis” (Taggart 2002, 69f) for populism to emerge.2

Finally, Mudde (2004) provides, in my opinion, the most to-the-point definition by limiting himself to the ‘people’ and its antagonistic ‘other.’ He conceives of populism as an 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.

(p.543)

To sum up, these definitions show us that the core aspects of populism are, first, the focus on the ‘people’ - whatever this term may refer to – and its sovereignty, and second, the antagonism between this ‘people’ and its ‘other’ – whatever this ‘other’ may be, the elite in a representative democracy, foreigner, or others.3 Nevertheless, it seems that at least concerning these two definitional points, there is evidence in favor of an academic consensus, so I will use Mudde’s definition as a working definition of populism for the time being, discuss it in more detail below and refer to it in the section on historical accounts of populism.

The ‘People’

Who is the ‘people’? In populist political communication, the term has a fundamental ambiguity (Mény and Surel 2002). ‘People’ can refer to the whole population of a country but also to a fraction of it. It may refer to only those individuals with a particular nationality or culture (excluding all other population groups) as is especially the case in right-wing populism, also called neo-populism (Betz and Immerfall 1998). For example, for the Lega Nord, the ‘people’ is the ‘People of the North’ in contrast to people from Southern Italy, which means that the ‘people’ is defined with reference to regions, the latter having alleged cultural connotations. When ‘people’ refers to a community of blood, culture and race, populism easily turns into racism (Mény and Surel 2002). Similarly, populism in much of Asia and Africa as well as in the Middle East operates on the basis of ethnicity and religion, and integrates “landowners, merchants, bureaucrats, clergy, armed forces” (Di Tella 1997, 193), in other words members of different classes, into one coherent group.

In contrast, the ‘people’ may indeed refer to a certain class or social base, which tends to be the case in left-wing populism. Peronists in Latin America defined the ‘people’ as the working class as opposed to the industrialists. Other examples include peasants in Russia or the ‘petit-bourgeois’ of the Poujadist movement in France. Developments in the recent past, however, made clear that not only left-wing but also right-wing populism draws on distinct social bases. For example, workers are overrepresented in the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) and the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), even though workers facing employment competition from abroad would be expected to opt for more protectionist state intervention and, hence, support parties on the left (Oesch 2008). Likewise, the Front National – as an example of the new radical right – was so successful in generating support from the working class that this has been termed left Lepenism (Surel 2002). One can see clearly that the meaning of the term ‘people’ changes depending on the context. This is a reason why it is hard to define populism and it probably contributes to the difficulty in pinpointing commonalities between different instances of populism.

As indicated above, Taggart (2002) explains the meaning of populism with reference to a heartland. What this term, however, actually refers to remains fuzzy in his elaborations; he states that it “represents an idealized conception of the community” and “[retrospective] construction of an ideal world” (p. 67). Similar to Canovan (Canovan 1984), he argues that the term ‘people’ should not be used to define populism because of its ambiguity and instead the reference to a heartland should be the defining criterion. However, it is difficult to see how this terminological shift helps in any way since what the heartland refers to is as variable as the term ‘people.’

Populists referring to the ‘people’ have two complementary objectives. First, they attempt to create a homogeneous, essentially undifferentiated community which deliberately excludes those not belonging, the ‘other’. The ‘people’s’ purported homogeneity as well as that of the rejected group nevertheless stand in great contrast to the reality of more or less heterogeneous groups in society. In a pluralistic democracy,
government is essentially government by minorities, which may refer to many diverse groups such as ethnic groups, business organizations, trade unions, students or women’s collectives (Held 2006); Dahl (1956) termed this ‘polyarchy’, characterized by open competition and compromises between different groups, a system which prevents a tyranny of the majority. Populism involves a denial of the real complexity of different societal groups and it also entails a reduction of all differences between in-group and out-group to one all-encompassing difference. Other societal group features are at least implicitly declared to be non-existing, or at least not important, compromises with or concessions to such groups are consequently unnecessary. The tyranny of the majority becomes a real danger.

**Populism as anti-phenomenon**

The second core aspect of populism in the literature concerns the ‘people’s’ posture towards a perceived ‘other.’ This ‘other’ can be individual government representatives or the whole political elite, high finance and big business as well as immigrant workers from poor countries, etc. Sometimes the ‘other’ serves as reference point for the constitution of the ‘people’; the latter is then defined primarily in terms of what it is not. The playing up of the contrast between the ‘people’ and its ‘other’ is at the very core of populism. Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979) spells out why this is important: associating oneself with one group and distancing oneself from another group is a prerequisite for creating one’s own personal identity. The identity is strengthened by stressing the positive features of one’s own group and highlighting negative features of the other group (Jonas, Stroebe, and Hewstone 2007), which, however, often leads to discrimination and conflict. As early as in the 1960s, Worsley (1969) pointed out that populism often occurs when there is a conflict between the society (the ‘people’) and the external world (the ‘other’). In this vein, Canovan (1984, 59) states that “the notion of ‘the people’ as distinct from a collection of individuals or groups is one of those collective ideas that make sense only through an implied contrast with something else” (italics not in original). This is a phenomenon which Knight (1998) elegantly terms “the dichotomization of ‘people’…” (p.229). Likewise, Panizza stresses, referring to Laclau (2005), that “populism depends not only on a sense of internal homogeneity but also on a constitutive outside – a threatening heterogeneity against which the identity is formed” (Panizza 2005, 17).

The close relationship between the ‘people’ and its ‘other’ is apparent in Laclau’s (1979) classification of populism as either ideology or a movement. For the reasons elaborated on above, this decision is not easily made. On the one hand, populism as movement stresses the actors involved. Who mobilizes? Who is the ‘people’? Since Laclau’s analysis focuses on Latin America, social classes play a central role in his conception of populism. On the other hand, populism as ideology puts the stress on the objectives of populism. What do populists and their followers try to achieve? What do they oppose? As indicated, the distinction between populism as ideology and populism as movement is not as clear cut as it may seem, since there is considerable correlation between who the ‘people’ is and what its objectives are. The fact that three of the four approaches to populism listed by Laclau consider populism as both ideology and movement, rather than either or, illustrates the difficulty in distinguishing analytically between movement and ideology.

The demarcation between the ‘people’ and the ‘other’ expresses itself as resentment. Ressentiments are instances of popular frustration. Panizza (2005) speaks of them as “unmet demands” and notes that populists operate in a realm “where people do not know how to name what they are lacking” (p.10). A variety of entities may be the target of ressentiments; right-wing populists probably target an immigrant community or any minority group that is perceived to enjoy unwarranted preferential treatment; left-wing populists’ ressentiments may concern international corporations and capitalists generally. Ressentiments usually involve the attribution of blame and the demand for compensation of some kind and play a particularly significant role in the initial mobilization phase of populist movements (Beitz 2002).

As Taggart (2000) states, populism’s stress on the community juxtaposes it to (individualist) liberalism. However, the observation that in Latin America populism and neo-liberalism seem to go together well - populists there used drastic market reforms to gather support (Weyland 1999) - contradicts this view. Likewise, Kitschelt and McGann (1995) speak of west European right-wing populists’ winning formula, a combination of cultural protectionism and economic neo-liberalism.

**Conditions promoting the emergence of populism**

In the literature, there are many conditions said to promote the emergence of populism. I will discuss three aspects; first, poor socioeconomic conditions or other crises, which are recurring themes, especially concerning Latin America. Second, the opaqueness of political institutions is thought to be related to or even cause the emergence of populism. Third, charismatic leaders adopting a certain style and rhetoric seem to be characteristic for populist movements.

**Socioeconomic conditions and crises**

According to Taggart (2000, 12), “it has been an underlying continuity in many definitions of populism, that it is a reaction to modernity or to a particular feature of the modern world.” Globalization, unfavorable economic development and other structural conditions that produce cleavages and disadvantage certain groups are seen as necessary factors leading to populist politics. Di Tella (1965), too, suggests that populism is a function of economic development. But is this really the case? Evidence against this comes, for example, from Panizza (2005). He points to the following as conditions for the emergence of populism: first, the breakdown of social order and the loss of confidence in the political system’s ability to restore it. Typical for situations such as these are economic crises leading to social disruptions. However, civil wars, natural catastrophes, or political misbehavior and a corrupt or self-serving elite can be triggers, too. Rather than modernity, it is a situation of general upheaval and change that is typical for the emergence of populism. The crisis can be real, but also constructed – a situation can be framed as a crisis in order that ‘solutions’ may be offered. Candidates for those who may seek to play this role can be found in classes or class fractions, whose ideological dominance is endangered (Laclau 1979, 197).

Relatedly, Weyland (1999; 2001), who predominantly investigates cases of populism in Latin America, confirms that during the 1980s and 1990s, populist politics reemerged in very different socioeconomic settings as we will see later on in this
article, which has to do with the varying notions of the ‘people.’ Hence, neither deteriorating political nor economic conditions necessarily lead to populism, although populism might be the reaction to a (sense of) crisis - the reasons for the crisis itself can nevertheless be manifold. A consequence is that populism is short-lived and episodic – it surges only during the crisis. Yet, a crisis may not even be necessary for populism to occur; populism may also be rooted in the very way democracy works. This view will be examined in the next paragraph.

Populism and representative democracy

The democratic paradox

The idea presented directly above, that populism is necessarily related to crises, is contradicted – or sometimes complemented – by Canovan (Canovan 1999, 2), who states that the “sources of populism lie not only in the social context that supplies the grievances of any particular movement, but are to be found in tensions at the heart of democracy.” More precisely, they lie at the heart of representative democracy. Canovan (2002) elaborates on the relationship between representative democracy and populism by describing how the inclusion of an increasing amount of people in the decision-making process leads to an increase in the level of opaqueness as to who rules whom, and how. The growing gap between the voters and their representatives results in populist leaders claiming to close that gap by ‘putting the power back’ into the ‘people’s’ hand. In Mair’s (2002) view, voters lose trust in the problem-solving capacity of the constitutional system, which becomes less and less attractive for the electorate. Under such circumstances, populism might fulfill the task of linking “an increasingly undifferentiated and depoliticized electorate with a largely neutral and non-partisan system of governance” (p.84).

However, what populists overlook is the way democracy inherently works, which can at times be difficult to understand. This hints at what Canovan (2002) calls the democratic paradox. The more power is distributed among an increasing number of people, the less localizable it becomes, which means that policies are the result not of a clear act of will, but of interactions and adjustments between many actors. In a democracy, power must necessarily be dispersed and diffuse rather than concentrated. Constitutionalism and the ‘visibility’ of the political decision-making process may be antipodes by their very nature (Papadopoulos 2002).

Through this lens, populism is the almost inevitable product of the interplay between the ‘two faces of democracy’, the ‘redemptive’ and the ‘pragmatic’ faces (Canovan 1999). These two concepts are based on Oakeshott’s ‘politics of faith’ and ‘politics of scepticism’ (as cited by Canovan). The pragmatic face relates to the institutions of a democracy (“multi-party system, free elections, pressure groups, lobbying and the rest of the elaborate battery of institutions and practices by which we distinguish democratic from other modern polities” (p.11)), whereas the redemptive face stresses “the promise of a better world through action by the sovereign people. […] Power to the people; we, the people, are to take charge of our lives and to decide our own future” (p.11).

Between these two faces of democracy many tensions exist, tensions which can give rise to populism. First, if the redemptive face’s promise of a better and more just world cannot be kept, populism emerges and the populists will purport to be able to keep that promise. Second, if the will of the ‘people’ is not or cannot be implemented, populists seek to replace current elites (and at the same time they create the opportunity for other populists to step in if they themselves cannot keep their promises). Third, characteristic for the redemptive face is a dislike of institutions that come between the ‘people’ and the expression of their will, which should be unmediated. These contradictions between the redemptive and pragmatic faces of democracy open up room for populism.

Populism and the party system

If populism is a phenomenon that occurs in response to characteristics of the representative system, it can be seen as a force that favors or pushes for direct democracy. Max Weber, in his famous ‘Politics as a Vocation’ (1919), uses England’s political party system in the late 19th century to demonstrate how charismatic leaders systematically exploit or bypass the party system to influence the masses – a phenomenon that can arguably be called populism. While his view on political leadership is a rather negative one – the members of the parliament “are normally nothing better than well-disciplined ‘yes’ men”, and this ‘machine’ is kept in check by the leaders. The result according to him is a plebiscitarian democracy.

Mair (2000) describes a development in Britain at the end of the 20th century, which has similar characteristics: Tony Blair, Labour Party leader and eventually Prime Minister, seems to have wanted to “take the party itself out of the equation” (p.26) by promoting an ‘un partito, una voce’ approach. In this way, Mair argues, key characteristics of a populist democracy were introduced: party and parliament were increasingly neutralized or side-lined, and plebiscitarian techniques introduced. The spotlight was increasingly on the party leader, who – oftentimes a charismatic character – cast himself in the role of the true voice of the ‘people’.

Populism - a pathology of democracy?

While Canovan suggests that populist ideology is almost inevitable in representative democracies, populism has also been termed a pathology and a corruption of democracy (Mény and Surel 2002), since many populists seem to be seducers rather than educators and sometimes rely heavily on their personal charisma, propaganda and audience manipulation to gather followers and to achieve their goals. These are some of reasons why the term populism has a negative connotation; usually, movements or leaders reject the term as a description of themselves or their strategies (Panizza 2005), and populism is often used as disqualifying label.

From another perspective, however, populism may also be interpreted in a positive sense, as a “fever warning” (Mény and Surel 2002, 15) it may serve as a signal to the elite, highlighting the defects of a representative political system. In this sense, Taggart (2000) suggests that populism is a health indicator in representative political systems since it draws attention to any occasional malfunctioning that might befall the political system. Elites might thus become aware that they need to take politics to themselves or their strategies (Panizza 2005) similarly refers to populism as a mirror of democracy in the sense that it reflects the nature of democracy and so renders problems visible. Since through checks and balances as well as through the aggregation of diverging preferences and limitation through for instance the rule of law, the will of the ‘people’ is not and cannot be a pure, unadulterated force.

The institutional paradox of populism
Another aspect of populism addressed by several authors is its institutional dilemma or paradox (Mény and Surel 2002; Papadopoulos 2002; Taggart 2000, 2002). While appearing to entail an entirely negative attitude towards institutions, populism is actually highly ambiguous in this respect. Populists usually reject party systems and all representational structures, but at the same time they claim to be better representatives of the ‘people’ than the establishment, and populists use the representative system to express themselves and to win support. Surel (2002) calls this the dual hybridization of populism: on the one hand, populists challenge the system’s shortcomings, on the other hand they must remain part of the system.

Mair (2002), who distinguishes between the notion of populist protest movements with anti-establishment sentiments and the notion of a mainstream populist democracy as the “two senses of populism” (p.88), claims that the anti-establishment conception is not sustainable, and cannot be so because “maintaining an anti-establishment rhetoric whilst dominating the key positions within the governing elite will eventually seem implausible” (p.93). Yet, this reasoning has not prevented politicians like Blair or Jacques Chirac from succeeding in doing exactly that. The institutional paradox of populism entails that populists may have to rely on the very institutional means and structures that they criticize. Still, populists try to avoid this institutional dilemma by relying on direct democracy since this means direct contact with the population and by - theoretically, at least - bypassing the party system (Taggart 2000).

A related aspect is that once a populist party (or movement, or leader) has taken over power, it must necessarily become part of the constitutional system, in order to survive and to be able to actually rule. In the process, it may lose its appeal in the eyes of its voters, who supported it because of its critique of the representative system. This phenomenon is most neatly summed up by “success in opposition – failure in government” (Heinisch 2003, 91) and could, for example, be observed during the rise of the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs in the 1990s and its decline or “implosion” (Luther 2003, 136) in 2002 after having seized power in 2000. A counterexample is provided by New Labour in Britain, which has displayed populist elements before and after taking power in 1997 (Mair 2002).

To summarize, the relationship between populism and representative democracy is highly paradoxical. On the one hand, it is characterized by antagonism, noticeable in populists’ stance against parties and institutions. On the other hand, populism is inevitably connected with representative democracy: populism only works in opposition to the ‘other’; with regard to representative democracy, populists claim to, and sometimes in fact also do, uncover political ills and instances of system malfunctioning. And, as we have seen, populism may even be an inevitable product of the democratic process.

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4 Populism as protest movement is in his view a mobilization of popular support against established elites and institutions, stressing substance. Populism as ideology focuses on the processes and linkages in populist democracies, characterized by an unmediated relationship between government and the people in a party-free environment.

Charismatic leaders and populist style

If political institutions like parties can be portrayed as impediments to direct, popular sovereignty, it is tempting for charismatic, populist leaders to try to exploit the purported gap between the ‘people’ and the mainstream political establishment. Contemporary examples like Silvio Berlusconi, Jean-Marie LePen or Jörg Haider suggest that often one single person is the driving force of a populist movement, and populist parties usually remain small. Personalistic leaders make sure that the traditional linkage involving parties or parliament is removed; no mediation is tolerated between the leader and the ‘people.’ According to Eatwell (2003), charismatic leaders are often held responsible for the rise of populism, right-wing populism in particular, due to the leader’s direct appeal to voters. Yet, some disagree that charismatic leaders are the actual cause of emergent populism. Quite possibly the attribution of charisma occurs only once the leader had some success at the polls (Van Der Brug and Mughan 2007).

These politicians nevertheless stand out due to their characteristic populist style and rhetorics. Tarchi (2002) points to the populist style adopted by Berlusconi, who claimed to be ‘one of you,’ the ‘people’ - similar to LePen (‘I am one of you’). Chirac did the same by repeatedly positioning himself apart from the elite and turning towards the ‘people’ (Chirac 1994). In Latin American examples of populism a particular populist style and rhetoric could be identified in the speeches of the populists Getúlio Vargas and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, both of whom stressed the bond between themselves and the ‘people’ (Knight 1998). Populist messages tend to be simplistic and straightforward in order to appeal to the common sense of the ordinary people (Betz 2002). Proposed solutions to political problems are necessarily transparent and easily understandable, otherwise they do not pass muster with populists. If any kind of experts are involved or a public policy has any degree of complexity, then populists smell “a self-serving racket perpetuated by professional politicians” (Canovan 1999, 6). This, of course, is exactly one of the reasons why populism has such a negative connotation – complex issues like (un)employment, health or economic prosperity are unlikely to have simple solutions, hence populists are often said to oversimplify problems.

With this background, it makes more sense to ask to what degree a movement or a campaign is populist rather than asking whether or not it is populist (Laclau 2005). For example, concerning Berlusconi, opinions are divided as to the degree to which he can be considered a genuine populist. While he did use certain rhetoric to associate himself with the ‘people,’ he did not hide his affluence and sumptuous life style, which certainly distinguishes him from the common man. Hence, it may be incorrect or insufficient to depict him as an authentic populist, and more adequate to include the “material constitution of his project” (Ginsborg 2004, 122) in his characterization.

The case of Berlusconi perfectly illustrates that due to the increase in media use, the opportunities for populist leaders to market themselves and their scope of influence have increased, and the political stage has moved to television and radio, a phenomenon termed the “mediatization of politics” (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Mazzoleni, Stewart, and Horsfield 2003). Panizza (2005) moreover observes that populism is underpinned by new forms of political representation such as TV or radio, both of which are increasingly used to make appeals to the ‘people’. The media provides opportunities for charismatic
personalities to gather the masses around them, and this presentation of leadership may be essential for the success of a populist party, as already mentioned. This development may be one of the reasons why populism has entered mainstream politics: at least since the early 1990s, populism has become a regular feature of politics in Western democracies (Mudde 2004). Yet, this might not only have to do with the actual shortcomings of mainstream, representative politics or the actual workings of representative democracy, but also with the way the media represents these things. Negative and sensationalist angles are likely to receive particular coverage, which normally plays into the hands of populists.

**Historical accounts**

As stated at the outset of this article, the literature on populism mainly deals with specific accounts of certain countries or regions where populism – however defined – is deemed to have emerged. In this section, I will give a broad-brush overview of the most important contributions regarding Russia, the United States, Europe and Argentina, and wherever applicable link them to the theoretical points discussed in previous sections of this article.

**Populism in Russia**

It has been said that “russian populism is, if viewed carefully, a powerful illuminator of universal elements of populism” (Taggart 2000, 54). The truth of this statement is nevertheless not so clear. Russian populism is inextricably linked to the notions of narodnichestvo, the ‘populist ideology’, and narodniki, its adherents. Narodnichestvo refers to the spirit that led Russian intellectuals in the 1870s to go from the cities to the countryside to attempt to generate a peasant rebellion against the Tsarist regime (Taggart 2000). However, the peasantry showed a considerable lack of revolutionary energy and even turned against the intellectuals, who then opposed the regime directly (Canovan 1981).

What were the characteristics and goals of this instance of populism? First of all, there is disagreement on whether or not we are really dealing with a populist movement here. Walicki (1969) and Taggart (2000) suggest that we do not, and that it is instead a case of populist ideology; the revolt ended in a debacle since the peasants could simply not be mobilized. Nevertheless, Canovan (1981) suggests that it was indeed a movement although she admits that it was a movement not primarily of the ‘people’ (the peasantry), but of a group of intellectuals who had faith - however misplaced - in the revolutionary potential of the peasantry. In any case, the anti-establishment aspect is apparent in the emphasized contrast between the populist ideology of the intellectuals and the Tsarist regime.

Concerning goals and ideologies, Walicki (1969) stresses the two meanings of narodnichestvo, the first one being a theory “advocating the hegemony of the masses over the educated elite” (p.63), stressing the peasants’ ‘real’ needs instead of Western socialist ideals. The second meaning is the rather Marxist idea of fostering a non-capitalist development of Russia. While Walicki suggests that the latter meaning of narodnichestvo was the more appropriate one in this context, Canovan maintains that Russian populists had “faith in the power of dedicated and high-minded individuals to change the course of history” (p.83), and so favors the first meaning. Another disagreement between these two authors concerns the origin of the ideology; while Walicki states that it was an anti-capitalist expression of the ‘small producers’, i.e. the peasantry, Canovan again points out that the peasants did not want to have anything to do with the revolution.

Does the narodniki phenomenon qualify as populism, as defined by Mudde? There was obviously quite a distance between the populists and the ‘people’, the narod, whose way of life was romanticized and simplified, and this might be an argument against speaking of populism here. However, the intellectuals were explicitly referring to the people’s demands and were striving to further its interests, be it land reform or liberty from landowners and the state. To conclude, in the case of Russian populism we find core aspects of populism – the focus on the ‘people’ as well as the distinction between the ‘people’ (the peasants) and the ‘other’, the Tsarist regime. But since the narodniki’s attitude was rather anti-political - social goals appeared to be more important than political goals (Canovan 1981)- the narodniki phenomenon seems to be a highly unique case very different from populism elsewhere.

**Populism in the United States**

Even before the 19th century, central populist themes such as anti-governmentalism, egalitarianism and anti-elitism have played a crucial role in American politics (Ware 2002). Yet, nineteenth-century populism in the United States seems to be a “paradigm case of populism for American scholars” (Canovan 1981, 10). As Ware argues, during nation-building after the Civil War, ‘American values’ became important, and those who did not respect or conform to these American values were not part of the ‘people’ (which in any case consisted of the white population only). In 1891, the People’s Party, a classical populist movement, came into being. Supported mostly by farmers, its goals concerned national ownership of railroads, reduced inflation, and the general enhancement and advancement of popular referendums as a political institution. The monetary system was a particular target of protest (Canovan 1981).

In Canovan’s view, the People’s Party was both an agrarian movement with a specific socioeconomic base and a political movement: it was directed against the elite (consisting of politicians and other, non-elected experts). On this view, the People’s Party classifies as a populist party according to Mudde’s definition: the ‘people’ were peasants, who opposed the elite. However, Hofstadter (1969, 9) objects that instead of a peasantry, the United States had a class of ambitious entrepreneurs exclusively recruited from farms. Either way, the People’s Party did not think of itself as a movement of rural or sectional interests, but as an uprising of all the working people with the goal of equal distribution of economic, political, and cultural power.

Yet, the People’s Party movement was rather short-lived since it soon merged with the Democratic Party. From then on, especially since the 1960s, populism has been a central theme in American politics. One reason for this was that when the presidential nomination process was transformed, the power to

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6 However, these were a rather “unexamined amalgam of values” (Foley 1991, 227-228 quoted in Ware 2002, 106).

7 Note how the ‘people’ is created with reference to the ‘other’, and how homogeneous both groups are perceived to be.
nominate candidates moved away from the party elites to the candidates themselves, and, hence, candidate-centered politics became important (Ware 2002). Populism in the United States is nowadays not considered to be the politics of outsiders, but as part of the political mainstream (Kazin 1995; Ware 2002). In other words, no single populist movement can be observed, instead both major parties employ populist rhetoric, with appeals to the ‘little taxpayer’ struggling against the government (Ware 2002). This phenomenon illustrates the core aspects of populism as defined above as well as populism’s institutional paradox: anti-elite rhetoric from within the government itself.

**Populism in Western Europe**

Contemporary populism in Western Europe is mainly associated with the radical right (Mudde 2004). Examples of right-wing populist parties include the already mentioned Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) with its late leader Haider, the Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP), the Lega Nord in Italy, the German Republikaner, Le Pen’s Front National in France, the Danish People’s Party’s, and Vlaams Blok in Flanders. All of them appeal to resentments in the population. In Switzerland, nationalism is an important populist theme. In Italy, there are resentments towards the political class in Rome and Southern Italy. In Austria, the target of populism has been clientelism as a way of ‘doing (political) business’ as well as the Jewish community. In Denmark, the concern was primarily immigration and refugees. In Germany, the Republikaner were able to drum up resentments associated with confronting the (Naz) past (Betz 2002). Not surprisingly, these parties have been associated with neo-fascism and racism (Taggart 1996).

While there are many common elements to these parties, they can be further divided into those that belong to the new radical right and those that are anti-statist (Kitschelt 2002). Differences between these two categories concern the parties’ main commitment. In the case of the new radical right, the winning formula is a combination of neo-liberal market policies (as opposed to welfare state policies) and a “socially and politically authoritarian and xenophobic agenda” (Kitschelt 2002, 180). Typically, as indicated above, their voters tend to be blue-collar, examples of that include the Swiss SVP and the French Front National. In contrast, anti-statist parties are also concerned with political economy but primarily concern themselves with alleged cronyism between corrupt politicians and business. Here, neo-liberal market policies are pursued in order to undercut rent-seeking, whereas the anti-immigrant stance is essentially coincidental (1969). In contrast to the new radical right, one can find more highly educated people among the supporters for anti-statist parties, such as the FPÖ and Lega Nord.

New radical right and anti-statist parties illustrate the two core aspects of populism as defined above by Mudde. In the first case, the ‘people’ is equivalent to the indigenous population of a country and is construed in contrast to immigrants as well as the wealthier portion of the population. With respect to anti-statist parties, one can see how the population is dichotomized into the apparently deceived electorate on the one hand, and on the other hand a fraudulent elite whose linkages to business and interest groups are the alleged reason for general economic decline.

Currently, left-wing populist parties do not feature as prominently on the political stage in Western Europe as right-wing ones. Left-wing populists usually define the ‘people’ as consisting of the working class, the ‘other’ being capitalism and capitalists, along with their side-kicks in government. Mudde (2004) lists two examples: in Britain, the already mentioned New Labour Party under Blair “presents itself as the champion of the (true) English people against the privileges of the (upper class) elite” (Mudde 2004, 551). The main cleavage here is obviously class, with ‘people’ referring to the working class. In Flanders, the Flemish Socialist Party leader Steve Stevaert appealed to the “wisdom of the people” and rejected authority (Mudde 2004, 551); the core characteristics of populism are clearly visible here. Die Linke, a left-wing populist party in Germany, rejects big business, privatization and capitalism in general, and stresses solidarity with the working class. Analogous to the Front National, die Linke was able to attract voters from the right by pointing to the apparent threat of immigrant workers.

**Populism in Latin America**

Most authors have discussed populism in Latin America using a cumulative definition, that is, one that encompasses various aspects from different domains. Weyland (2001) states that those traditional definitions assumed “a close connection between populist politics and its social roots, socioeconomic background conditions, and/or substantive policies, especially expansionary economic programs and generous distributive measures” (p. 5). Similar to modernization theory and dependency theory, this perspective stresses the underlying economic conditions and development as factors shaping politics, especially during the 1930s-1960s. Even though he shifts the focus towards the leadership aspect of populism as mentioned above, Weyland (1999) claims that even today, neo-liberal economics and populist politics are quite compatible in contemporary Latin America, as exemplified by Alberto Fujimori in Peru, Carlos Menem in Argentina, and Fernando Collor in Brazil.8

Moreover, populism in Latin America is seen as a multi-class movement with the working class at its core (Weyland 2001). The working class was particularly featured during the Peronist heydays, which is why I will present it here as possibly Latin America’s most famous manifestation of populism, to link theory and empirical evidence: Peronism has its roots in the expansion of the industrial economy after the recession in the 1930s, from which the working class, however, did not benefit - real wages were in decline (James 1998). Juan Perón, in 1943 Head of the Labor Department in Argentina, addressed some of the basic concerns of the emerging industrial labor force and was able to build on growing support until he was elected president of Argentina in 1946. When his government was ousted in 1955, he had to go into exile but even then he remained influential (Butler 1969). Why did Perón have such an effect on the people? What was the essence of Peronism?

There are different views on what made Peronism so successful. Gino Germani, as cited in James (1988, 2), believes that “passive, manipulated urban masses which result from an incomplete modernization process” were central to the triumph of Peronism. Kahl (1981) provides another description of Germani’s view on Peronism: “the particular quality of Peronism was linked to cultural habits of recent rural migrants to the city who needed a personalistic and charismatic leader to formulate their demands” (Kahl 1981, 188). Germani saw the workers as being used by the elites, and this was possible because the workers did not have a social and political identity...
of their own. James (1988) formulates the latter aspect in more positive terms. Peronism is, in his eyes, the redefinition of the notion of citizenship within a social context, which meant full political rights and political inclusion, but most importantly, these political aspects should not be separated from civil society, and especially not be implemented at the expense of the latter. Moreover, a more transcendental aspect of Peronism is the recognition of workers as a class and a distinct social force, not through parties and formal rights but through trade unions.

In terms of Muddle’s minimal definition of populism, the ‘people’ were the disadvantaged working class, who revolted against the old establishment and the industrialists exploiting the work force. Moreover, Peronism was essentially anti-party, being only weakly institutionalized. Perón himself stressed that “Peronism is a national movement committed to real democracy, not a political party preoccupied with formal democracy” (McGuire 1997, 1). These findings correspond to the two core aspects of populism as defined above. Finally, underlying and facilitating conditions, in this case industrial development and modernization, are a major characteristic of Peronism even though it is questionable whether they should be part of a definition of populism.

A short conclusion

On the basis of the short descriptions of populism in Russia, the United States, Western Europe and Latin America, the difficulties connected with developing a definition become visible. It hardly surprises that scholars struggle to settle on one definition. Yet, the analysis of the theoretical literature shows that the degree to which this concept is contested has declined. While Ionescu and Gellner could not agree on the core of populism in 1969, Mény and Surel (2000; 2002), Taggart (2000; 2002) and Muddé (2004), define populism in very similar terms. Hence, Panizza (2005) is not so far off the mark when he claims that there is an academic consensus.

Finding commonalities in the above cases of populism is obviously easier if one knows what to look for. Starting with a minimal definition of populism and trying to apply this definition to empirical cases facilitates determining whether one deals with populism or not. A minimal definition has the advantage that one gets a tight grip on what populism is, the theoretical discussion becomes less confusing because populism as a concept becomes distinguishable from other phenomena in politics. Worsley (1969) emphasizes the applicability and hence analytical usefulness of ideal types (Weber 1949), which synthesizes and unifies a multitude of empirical observations into a coherent construct.

Given the many instances of populism from all over the world throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, what are populism’s future prospects? At least two factors indicate that populist elements in politics will remain or even increase. First, representative democracy almost inevitably goes along with populism, due to the democratic paradox. Hence, opportunities for populists who want to restore the power of the ‘people’ are not likely to wane. Second, the mediatization of politics is not likely to abate either. This renders many opportunities for populists to gather support by conveying simplified messages and presenting themselves as charismatic leaders and true representatives of the ‘people.’ Hence, populism is likely to continue to be part of politics and of political analysis.

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References


Twenty-five years ago this week, a group of Politburo hard-liners launched a coup against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. The effort to depose him provoked a gigantic popular protest and collapsed in just three days. With the failure of the coup, the communist system itself began to unravel. “The 20th century” — so claimed Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev’s rival, rescuer and eventual successor — had “essentially ended.” People power had defeated the Soviet state. Today, an angry populism is again the driving force of politics in much of the world. We can better understand its sources, the problems it poses and, yes, its continuing promise, if we remember both how Yeltsin succeeded and why he finally failed.

Before the coup, many observers — Americans and Russians alike — saw Yeltsin as a crude demagogue making life difficult for the thoughtful, gradualist Gorbachev. His radical demands, they feared, would only mobilize conservatives and divide reformers. Too-rapid pressure for democracy would activate ethnic passion (“suicidal nationalism,” President George H.W. Bush called it). Yeltsin was a demagogue, but this label missed his real achievement. He had become the leader of an opposition that energized nationwide resistance to the coup. Two months earlier, Yeltsin had won a landslide victory to become president of the Russian Federation. He was the only Soviet politician with a true democratic mandate, and coup plotters hesitated to arrest him. He made himself into a popular hero. Official Washington, of course, saw Gorbachev as the driver of reform, but it was Yeltsin who kept the pressure on him. He gave advocates of change somewhere to turn whenever Gorbachev retreated from radical ideas (which was often). During the coup, Yeltsin also provided its opponents with a physical rallying point. That famous tank he climbed onto was, with its friendly crew, parked right outside his office. Perhaps most important, Yeltsin’s strong anti-communist rhetoric turned out to moderate ethnic passions rather than inflame them.

Throughout Eastern Europe and the (soon to be dissolved) Soviet Union, nationalist conflict was marginalized wherever popular mobilization revolved around anti-communist ideas. Nothing demonstrated this connection more clearly than the violent break-up of Yugoslavia. Because the Yugoslav regime had long since drifted away from Marxism-Leninism, socialist ideology and anti-communism were equally irrelevant. Ethnic grievances — pushed by demagogues such as Slobodan Milosevic in Serbia and Franjo Tudjman in Croatia — took center stage. Yet if Western governments underestimated the value of Yeltsin’s populism in his challenge to Gorbachev, they also failed to see what would happen if Yeltsin could not make good on his populism after he took power. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 — and in eight years as president of the new Russia — Yeltsin regularly sought refuge in anticommunist rhetoric. But it did him less good as time went on. A demagogue who attains power has to show he can deliver, and Yeltsin did not. Beyond the material hardship his policies produced, critics charged that he let new scoundrels replace the old ones. The populist who railed against insider privilege in the Soviet system allowed gross abuses of power on his watch. Ordinary citizens who backed Yeltsin’s call to tear down old institutions gradually came to favor their revival. Yeltsin didn’t just pick Vladimir Putin as his successor;
he made it easy for Putin to become popular. As the new president, Putin took on the enemies that he claimed were pushing Russia around — corrupt oligarchs, Chechen separatists, foreigners (and especially Americans). Having failed to act like a populist president, Yeltsin gave Putin the chance to play the role. The coup against Gorbachev and its aftermath have their echoes today.

The 1991 populist overthrow of Soviet communism was not so different from the 2014 populist overthrow of the Yanukovych regime in Ukraine. Each was a national uprising against a system seen as corrupt and undemocratic; each offered new leaders a mandate for root-and-branch transformation. Despite some real progress, however, Ukraine’s new government has the same flaw as Yeltsin’s — too little reformist follow-through. If Ukraine’s experiment founders, U.S. policymakers are likely to feel the same retrospective remorse that they feel about post-Soviet Russia. Too often, Western governments have made excuses for backsliding. They have treated “populism” as their enemy, not seeing that — as a force for fundamental change — it can be their friend.

European politics today shows how much has changed since the liberal populism of the late 1980s and early ’90s. Populism is now almost everywhere illiberal — thriving on ethnic hostility and exclusion. East European movements and leaders used to denounce a corrupt elite that they said blocked integration into a broad democratic Western community. Today they say real democracy is impossible unless that integration is reversed. In the view of 21st-century populists, only the elite benefit from integration. It is hard to recall Yeltsin’s populism — anti-communist, liberal, tolerant, forward-looking — without feeling regret for what might have been. But 25 years after the coup, it is not too late to learn its lessons. The first is to recognize the positive mobilizing force of popular frustration. Real conviction and determination generate the kind of support that caution can rarely match. In hard times people trust a Yeltsin rather than a Gorbachev to understand their anger. The second lesson is not easy to act on but just as important. Over-promising and under-performing give life to populism of a far more dangerous type. Once people conclude that liberalism serves only the privileged, that popular grievances are never answered, that the usual reform simply produces new scoundrels, they take their anger elsewhere.

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