Populism and the securitization of identities: A review of the debates.

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Abstract

This article reviews a large array of multidisciplinary literature to map out the current points of contention in the study of populism. It first analyzes the evolution of the various definitions of the contested concept. The first section compares and contrasts the various waves of populism and different understandings of the term that arose from these waves. It then discusses various theories pertaining to the causes and reasons behind populist movements. This section highlights similarities and differences in these different understandings of populism. Lastly, this article discusses populism along the political spectrum. In doing so, it highlights another concept central to the study of populism: the securitization of identities. As such, this article agues for the necessity to incorporate the notion of securitization to differentiate between left and right populism.

Keywords: Populism, identity, securitization theory, ideational approach, political theory agonistic, antagonistic.

1. Introduction

Commonly associated with "an emotional, simplistic, and manipulative discourse directed at the 'gut feelings' of the people" (Krastev 2007), populist movements are usually conceived as anti-pluralistic and illiberal (Müller 2017, p. 3). Populist movements, it is often argued, are averse to the idea of representation, and base their discourse on Manichean rhetoric predicated on the antagonistic relationship that pits a virtuous 'people' against a corrupt 'elite' (Müller 2017, p. 3; Bonokowski & Gidron 2016, p. 1593; Taguieff 1997, p. 19).

Exploding in popularity since the late 1990s, current research has been dominated by four focal points: searching for "breakthrough" definitions applicable to a wide range of contexts; broadening the range of instances the concept can be applied to; placing greater emphasis on quantitative analysis; and, more recently, the introduction of normative discussions regarding liberalism's deterioration and the deconsolidation of democracies around the world (Pappas 2019, p. 20). Despite the growing body of literature, the concept of populism is still contentious. While some scholars insist that populism represents an illiberal threat to liberal

democracies across the world, others maintain that populism rejuvenates the liberal and democratic order by broadening the scope of inclusivity in political matters.

The majority of scholars have focused on conceptualizing populism (Moffit and Tormey 2014; Schulz *et al.* 2018; Deegan-Krause & Haughton, 2009), populist ideologies (Aslanidis 2016b; Elchardus & Spruyt 2016; Podobnik *et al*. 2019; Stanley 2008), populist rhetoric (Danaj *et al*. 2018; Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Rooduijn 2014), the effect of populism on democratic norms (Canovan 1999; Comaroff 2011; Urbinati 2019a), as well as the societal developments that presumably led to the rise of populism across the world (Knight 1998; Stavrakis *et al.* 2017; Taggart 2000; de la Torre 2000; Spruyt *et al.* 2016; Melendez & Rovira Kaltwasser 2019). Others have focused on the many strands of populism along the political spectrum (Ivaldi *et al*. 2017; Font *et al*. 2019; March 2017),or developed metrics to assess the "degrees" of populism of various parties (Caiani & Graziano 2016; De Raadt *et al*. 2004). Likewise, many studies have focused on the discursive construction of "the people" and anti-elite rhetoric in populist discourses (i.e. Oliver & Rahn 2016; Hirvonen & Pennanen 2019; de Vreese *et al*. 2018). Indeed, some emphasize that the study of discourse is key to understand populism (Aslanidis 2016b; Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Laclau 2005; Moffitt 2016; Pauwels 2011; Rooduijn *et al*. 2014). Finally, in more recent years, there has been a reinvigorated academic interest in the link between securitization theory and populists discourses (Wojczewski 2020, Sahin 2021, Dumitrescu 2016).

Despite the abundance of new theories and studies on the subject, the concept of populism continues to be contested. This article examines the current literature on three major aspects pertaining to the study of populism and provides a critical summary of recent research. The first section examines the various attempts to define this notoriously ambiguous term. The second section delves into the many reasons of populism that have been proposed by various experts. Finally, the third segment examines comparative studies on populism and the concept's continuity throughout the political spectrum. This critical summary highlights some of the most prominent issues of contention and contradictions within the study of populism. Likewise, it discusses innovative ideas and concepts that seek to critically engage with the literature and its shortcomings. In particular, the notion of securitization of identities and its relationship with various strands of populism is explored as an answer to some of these theoretical pain points.

2. A brief review of the term 'Populism'

It might be a given, but despite being a vague concept, all populist movements must have something in common. For Brubaker (2017b, p. 359) they all claim to speak on behalf of the ordinary "people", in opposition to the control of various "elites". As Panizza (2005, p. 3) points out, populist discourses are centred on hostility between the rulers and the governed. Populist discourses prey on hegemonic relationships between the political "self" - the "people" – and the social "other" – frequently, but not always, the "elite" (Holliday 2016, p. 920). The key point here is that populism strives on social division. Populism requires society to be divided in two camps, the "people" and those usurping its power.

The term "people" has at least three separate connotations (Brubaker 2017b, p. 359; Holliday 2016, p. 920). It can refer to the common, ordinary people - the lower and middle class, or the sovereign people - the people as *demos* (Brubaker 2017b, p. 359). The people could also refer to a group that is religiously, racially, or culturally diverse (Brubaker 2017b, p. 359). As a result, the creation of the "people" generates antagonisms both vertically – the rulers versus the ruled – and horizontally – the "people" versus outsider groups (Brubaker 2017b, p. 362). Speaking "in the name of the people" could therefore signify a re-democratization of the political sphere or a return to socio-cultural nationalist politics (Brubaker 2017b, p. 359). While much of populist discourse is illiberal and undermines individual liberties, it is also deeply democratic in that it seeks to recover the people's sovereignty over more liberal but less democratic political institutions (Mounk 2018, p. 8-13). Given the vague meaning of 'the people', it should come as no surprise that there is no commonly-agreed-upon definition of populism.

Earlier academic interest in populism was primarily centred on Latin American examples. Ionescu and Gellner's (1969) edited volume "*Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics,*" was the first deliberate effort to clarify the concept. In this volume, MacRae (1969, p. 162) characterizes populism as an apolitical ideology rooted in a desire to recreate a pristine past or enact an agrarian utopia. In contrast, Stewart (1969, p. 180) considers populism as "the product of a certain type or types of social situation." Populist movements, according to Stewart (1969, p. 183), tend to emerge when social groupings feel that they are being economically and politically marginalized. Populism was a response to 'the people's' concerns during periods of economic change, such as rapid industrial development. These movements

were seen as trying to reconcile the need for industrialization with the basic values of traditional cultures (Stewart 1969, p. 187).

Most of the nations afflicted by populism in the 1960s and 1970s were pre-modern, non-democratic and pre-capitalist, leading most experts to identify populism "everywhere, but in numerous and conflicting shapes" (Ionescu & Gellner 1969, p. 1). The few first populism studies failed to produce a unified definition, resulting in a great degree of conceptual stretching and ambiguity (Pappas 2019, p. 16). However, it is interesting to note that these pioneers linked the rise of populism to rapid socio-economic transformation and the resulting uncertainty for most of the common people. Indeed, both MacRae (1969) and Stewart (1969) believed that the rise of populism was, in a way or another, a consequence of the economic transformation that had left behind a large section of society. While the language of security did not appear in their studies, they clearly articulated that populist actors tend to emerge when important socio-economic changes take place.

In the late 1970s, Latin American researchers reinvigorated populism scholarship, identifying it as “a phenomenon primarily related to the socioeconomic determinants of mass political movements” (Pappas 2019, p. 17-8). These scholars sought to understand the circumstances in which populist movements channelled the political participation of the lower classes (Germani 1978, p. 95). In this context, populism was "a fundamental democratizing force that marked the entrance of the common people into the political community" (de la Torre 2000, p. xiii). For Germani (1978), populism grew popular among autocratic leaders who called for the inclusion of the masses in politics. Moreover, suffrage was extended to women and uneducated individuals during this period. According to this view, many considered populism beneficial for democracy, as populists leaders were seen as the champions of the common people, giving them a voice in the democratic process.

During the 1980s and 1990s, a new breed of Latin American populist politicians emerged. These leaders were elected by blaming the economic elite for the economic crisis that the continent was experiencing (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, p. 29). In Argentina, Carlos Menem pursued a fiscally conservative, market-oriented economic policy. Alberto Fujimori reduced government subsidies and the number of public servants in Peru while implementing free-market policies such as tariff simplification and the repeal of currency controls. “The rise of personalist leaders with broad support, who follow neoliberal prescriptions for economic austerity and market-oriented structural adjustments” was, according to Roberts (1995, p. 82),

a perplexing antinomy. A renewed interest in charismatic leadership arose from this dichotomy (i.e. Weyland 2001; Hawkins 2003). Similarly, it bolstered the argument that populism should be examined as a political tool dependent on political leadership and symbolic politics (Pappas 2019, p. 20).

The study of populism has since taken two major routes. The first attempts to achieve a minimalist theory that is as inclusive as possible of all experiences of populism (Urbinati 2019, p. 116). Sometimes referred to as *ideological* or *stylistic*, this approach to populism allows us to recognize instances of populism across a variety of political contexts, but does not say much about the peculiar link between populism and the institutional and procedural characteristics of democracy within which populism emerges. The ideational approach comes with some rough theoretical arguments about the importance of ideas for causal analysis. It emphasizes the idea that populism should be defined by a certain set of beliefs rather than by a particular economic policy or leadership style. According to the ideational approach, populism has a cosmology, or an understanding of how the political world works. Populism is a Manichaean worldview; it sees politics as a conflict between forces of good and evil. Populism also has an ontology, or a belief in the naturally existing collection of political actors, the level of agency connected with each entity, and the motives of these players. Populism focuses on the reified will of the common people, who make up the majority of the population, and who are considered the embodiment of democracy's virtues. An equally reified elite group is seen as attempting to subvert the will of the people for their own selfish reasons. In order to convey the will of the people as quickly as possible, populists disregard democratic institutions in favour of an "anything goes" approach. The resulting search for a definition centred on the traits deemed to be important to populism: leadership, ideology, language and symbolic patterns, mass mobilization capacity, and style.

Mudde (2007, p. 23) provided the most thorough and commonly-used minimalist definition of populism as a "thin-centred ideology" that "considers society to be ultimately divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite." For Mudde (2010), one of the main characteristics of populism is its proclivity to frame sociocultural problems in cultural terms, which often results in the radicalization of mainstream values and the securitization of sociocultural issues. In a similar way, Dumitrescu (2019, p. 85) suggests that European populists frame all social problems in cultural terms, and tend to present the outsiders as the cause of all ill. Populists assert that their legitimacy in society derives from

speaking and acting on behalf of "the people". Essential to the populist discourse is a normative distinction between the common virtuous people and the evil elites (Mudde 2004). By establishing a moral division and situating itself in the realm of right and common sense, populism may claim moral supremacy and the ability to provide citizens with 'direction' (Bonansinga 2018, p. 5). Consequently, as an inherently moralistic ideology, it may not only be able to make authoritative assertions, but may also be able to justify doing so. This is important, since, as Williams (2003: 514) asserts, to be socially effective, the process of securitization requires securitizing actors to make authoritative claims about threats.

The ideational strategy has proved to be especially useful for empirical studies. On the one hand, by presuming that populism is a set of beliefs that may be paired with other ideological qualities, new research has been able to identify different subtypes of populist movements around the world (de la Torre 2013; Mudde 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014; Hawkins & Kaltwasser 2017). On the other hand, a number of academics have used textual analysis and survey research approaches to measure populist concepts and attitudes (Armony & Armony 2005; Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove 2014; Jagers & Walgrave 2007; Hawkins 2009; Rooduijn & Pauwels 2011). These works are beginning to look into the sources and effects of populism, as well as the impact it has on policy and democratic institutions (Hawkins 2010; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2012; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017). One of the shortcomings of these studies is that they tend to be focused on a single country. Jagers & Walgrave (2007), for example, analyzed the discourse of the Vlaams Blocks in Belgium in 1999-2001, while Armory & Armory (2005) focused on the discourse of Argentinian parties in 2001-2002. Similarly, Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslov (2013), compared the populist attitudes of voters in the Dutch context. While these studies have been helpful in creating tools to empirically study the effect of populism on voters, political institutions, and societal interactions at large, they often lack comparability in the sense that they are country-specific.

The second route, pioneered by Laclau (2002; 2005), seeks to devise a maximal theory with effectual validity. At its core, the maximal theory of populism provides a concrete set of guidelines for the formation of populist movements and regimes (Urbinati 2019, p. 117). This theory's driving force is an explicit link between populism and democracy, as it provides not just a conceptual framework but also a practical pattern for the formation of populist movements and governments. Populism, according to Laclau (2002), is a discursive logic that

creates a ‘people' by articulating equivalential linkages between a succession of unfulfilled demands, resulting in the formation of a collective identity for individuals whose demands are not met. In other words, populists build a popular subject – ‘the people’ - through a series of politico-discursive practices (Laclau 2005, p. 43). Building a popular subject requires “the building of an internal frontier dividing the social space into two camps” (Laclau 2005, p. 43). The “people's” collective identity is formed in opposition to the ruling “elite,” who do not rule in the people's interests. Under this view, populism is democratic since the will of the people is produced through direct mobilization and consent by the people themselves. Moreover, as noted by Scott-Bauman (2020, p. 130), Laclau and Mouffe’s concept of ‘chain of equivalence’ highlights the populists’ willingness to forge horizontal alliances between different groups who share a common goal. For Gandesha (2018, p. 51), however, Laclau’s theory struggle to come with terms with the populism of the Right while Mudde’s conception and the scholarship built on it is inadequate to account for the populism of the Left.

Mudde’s minimalist conception and Laclau’s maximalist theory have been challenged by a variety of alternative theories. Ostiguy (2020), for example, argues that populism is not a thin "ideology", but a way to be and act in politics. As a concrete mode of authority, populism embodies in language and praxis the culturally popular and "from here," in an opposition to its opposite (Ostiguy 2020). Ostiguy (2020) suggests that societies often create within their nation “unpresentable others” that are neglected by society, then exploited by populist entrepreneurs. Populists argue that this “unpresentable other” is nothing but the nation's true self, its authentic ‘people’, which is neglected by the political establishment. Populism praises the national pleb "as is" and pledges the nation to reconcile itself by bringing justice to the people.

Deploring the lack of attention to cultural elements, Aslanidis (2020) suggests researching grass-roots social movements as the primary environment in which culture interacts with populist mobilization. Aslanidis (2020) defines populism as “a type of collective action frame, that is, *an action-oriented interpretation of reality that frames popular grievances as the outcome of an unjust erosion of popular sovereignty perpetrated by manipulating elites”*(emphasis added) (Aslanidis 2016a; 2016b; 2018). Aslanidis (2020) developed a cultural analysis framework through -?? collective action framework theory based on an understanding of populism as a discursive mode of political identification.

Müller (2016, p. 2) maintains that we have “no well-articulated theory of populism, and we lack clearly articulated standards for assessing when political actors show populist traits”.

Müller goes on to single out three axiomatic aspects of populism as a "political logic": (1) it is monist, believing that only one group of citizens should be involved in making decisions; (2) it is moralistic, because it proclaims the moral superiority of this group over everyone else; and (3) it is anti-pluralist, since it strives to prevent competing interests from finding representation in liberal institutions. Müller (2016, p. 4) claims that "populists" are capable of governing as "populists", for example, by showing disdain for constitutional regulations, engaging in the intimidation of political opponents, disregarding for basic rules of decency, and constantly using moralistic rhetoric. Müller (2016, p. 20) concludes that the "the core claim of populism is thus a moralized form of anti-pluralism". While useful, Müller's axiomatic definition excludes a significant group of movements that are often described as populist. For example, Stavrakakis and Jäger (2018, p. 550) argue that Müller's definition excludes the whole egalitarian populist tradition such as Bernie Sanders and Podemos. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) embarked in a methodical description of significant populist movements in the United States, Latin America, Europe, and elsewhere around the world. In contrast to Müller, Mudde and Kaltwasser are remarkably cautious in assessing the volatile relationship between populism and democracy. "Populism," they claim, "is both a friend and a foe of (liberal) democracy, depending on the stage of the process of democratization" (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, p. 20).

For Warren (2020, p. 21-22), two opposite conceptions of populism exist. The first is anti-pluralist, appealing to tribal and xenophobic instincts in violation of liberal democratic principles. The other, often based on historical records, describes populism as "a kind of economic democracy rooted in a critique of inequality and concentrations of economic and political power" (Warren 2020, p. 22). For example, Lasch (1996, p. 105) concluded his historical analysis of twentieth-century political movements by describing populism as an "authentic voice of democracy." He claims that populism provided an alternative to middle-class nationalism, which "provided a common ground, common standards, a common frame of reference without which society dissolves into nothing more than contending factions" (Lasch 1996, p. 43). The true threat to democracy, according to Lasch (1996), is the formation of new elites who have little sympathy for patriotism and a reorientation of values that stress the individual above society. Lasch (1996) blames the language of socialist elites, who, he claims, have acquired the belief that the majority is irrational and unfit to govern public affairs.

Since the 2020s, some scholars have started to look at the discourse of populist parties through the lens of securitization theory. Sahin (2021 p. 7), for example, undertook a close study of the

Turkish AKP's discourse during November 2015. For Sahin (2021, p. 10), populist movements draw on people's need for ontological security. He argues that, by triggering ontological insecurities of the Turkish people, notably through the securitization of the Kurdish question, the AKP was able to increase its support by 8.6% and win the elections. In a similar way, Wojczewski (2020) examined how populists portray 'the people' as a referent object that is threatened and mobilize the people by propagating the politics of fear. His argument, mostly based on a close analysis of the securitization moves in the populist discourse of Trump, ultimately concludes that populist securitization has three main features: "1) dramatization and fear-mongering, 2) simplification and scapegoating by designating a particular actor as the single cause of a security problem and 'the people' as collective victim, 3) propagation of a state of emergency, requiring a suspension of normal politics and the endorsement of the populist actor as the only one who can secure 'the people'." One of the big shortcomings of these studies analyzing populism through the lens of security studies is that they focus almost exclusively on right wing populism and their attitude towards migration. As such, they appear to be ill-equipped to deal with left-wing populism.

Recognising this weakness, Gilles de Pelichy (2022) undertakes a cross-country comparison of European populist parties from across the political board. Embracing the ideational approach and its reliance on Manichean dichotomy while taking Muller's axiomatic approach a step further, Gilles de Pelichy (2022) proposes a polar typology of populism based on the type of relationship existing between the political self and the social other. Gilles de Pelichy (2022) develops a typology of populism based on the securitization of identities as a sharp analytical tool to clarify theoretical discussion on populism. He thus distinguishes between antagonistic and agonistic populism. Both agonistic and antagonistic populism see the social world as divided in two spaces: the people and their opposite. Antagonistic populists have a minimal scope of inclusivity and often reduce the 'people' to the ethno-national community. Likewise, they make ample use of securitizing strategies – that is, framing societal issues as security threats, thereby justifying illiberal solutions. In contrast, agonistic populists recognize the existence of competing groups, but do not frame these groups as enemies. Their scope of inclusivity is more universalist, and not reduced to the ethno-national community. Since the social other is not perceived as a threat, agonistic populists do not rely on securitization strategies. Gilles de Pelichy's (2022) agonistic/antagonistic distinction contributes to the study of populism since it acknowledges that populist parties can be either inclusive or exclusive,

liberal or illiberal, and democratic or anti-democratic, depending on a few factors such as the scope of inclusivity and the type of relationship they have with the social other.

Combining Mudde's (2004) ideology-centred and Hawkin's (2010) discourse-centred understanding of populism, De Vreese *et al.* (2018) prefer to conceptualize populism as a communication phenomenon. Conceiving of populism as an ideology that political actors and media players articulate discursively bridges the existing political science and communication science literature. From this communication-centred perspective, emphasis is placed on populist messages as an independent "phenomenon" and no longer on one party or political type. They describe populism "as content" to refer to a communication style with a set of key messages or frameworks articulating the core elements of populist ideology (such as people-centrism and anti-elitism). Likewise, they refer to populism "as a style" to express the fact that the messages expressing populist ideology often involve a characteristic set of elements of presentational style. In this perspective, populism is understood as series of features of political communication rather than a characteristic of the actor communicating.

As can be seen, the concept of populism continues to stimulate much intellectual discussion fuelled by both the contrasting political feelings it evokes and the difficulty of its definition. Fuentes (2020) explored the concept throughout its history, beginning with the first appearance of the noun in North American political life in the late nineteenth century and concluding with the most recent "populist moment" in the United States in the late twentieth century. He believes that there are certain elements of continuity that may be discovered via the examination of its changing meaning. The wide range of socio-economic situations and historical crises out of which populism has emerged may help to explain both the remarkable versatility of populism and the large array of movements that fall under the rubric of populism today. For Fuentes (2020), the problem of definition can be bypassed by understanding the reasons behind various "populist moments".

3. The Reasons behind "populist moments".

Much of the literature has focused on the conditions and factors facilitating the emergence of populism. Considering the rise of populism as a function of multiple crises, Caiani & Graziano (2019) argue that there are three sets of explanations for the popularity of populist parties.

The first set focuses on the shortcomings of representative democracy. Populist parties appear to oppose representative democracy, which is frequently articulated through calls for direct

democracy (Rydgren 2008, p. 176). Yet, according to Beetham (1992, p. 42), "democracy as a method of government is not whatever the people happen to decide at a given moment, but a set of arrangements for securing their control over the public decision-making process on an ongoing basis." In other words, democracy as a method of government is upheld by a set of democratic institutions that make popular power effective and lasting. However, this creates a conflict with institutions that stand between individuals and their acts and mediate their desires, compromising their democratic nature (Canovan 1999, p. 13).

There is a lot of disagreement in the literature (e.g., on party rivalry) over whether the growth of populist parties should be viewed as part of a larger realignment of party systems (e.g. Arzheimer 2009; Carter 2005; Golder 2003; 2016; Hobolt & Tilley 2016; Ivarsflaten 2008; Kitschelt 2007; Kriesi *et al*. 2008; Lubbers *et al*. 2002; Norris 2005; Rooduijn *et al.* 2017; van der Brug & Fennema 2007). Roberts (2017) argues that the European party system's long-term reorganization (de-alignment or re-alignment) has allowed new parties to mobilize around less structured political cleavages, such as economic insecurity and immigration (Guiso *et al*. 2017). Post-industrialization has resulted in a decrease in class voting and partisan identification, an increase in political alienation among certain parts of the population, and a decrease in faith in the political establishment (e.g. Betz 1994; Golder 2016). According to the functionalist crisis interpretation (Kriesi 2018; Mair 2013), mainstream political parties are increasingly unable to mobilize voters due to a decline in party membership and party identification, a decrease in voter turnout, an increase in volatility in the vote, and a decrease in the percentages of people who opt to support mainstream parties. Political crises tend to be more severe when there is a high degree of electoral instability, a low level of party membership, a lack of faith in parliament (and administration and political parties), and a dissatisfaction with democracy (e.g. see Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). The more sever the crisis, the more likely populist parties are to succeed.

The second set of explanations identified by Caiani & Graziano (2019) is concerned with economic crises (i.e. Hernandez & Kriesi 2016; Moffit 2015; Ramiro & Gomez 2017; Stavrakakis & Katzambekis 2014; Vasilopoulou *et al*. 2014). This approach is predicated on the widespread belief that the growth of populism is driven by economic uncertainty and social anxiety, particularly among those suffering economically. With regard to the extreme right, Arzheimer (2009) points out, 'in line with theory of ethnic competition, the extreme right will benefit from high levels of immigration and unemployment' (Arzheimer 2009, p. 273). As a

matter of fact, Guiso *et al*. (2017, p. 4) argue that economic hardships are the primary driver of populist sentiments. In turn, economic crises promote political discontent against representative institutions (Guiso *et al*. 2017, p. 4).

The third set of explanations identified by Caiani and Graziano (2019) is concerned with cultural crises and cultural backlashes. This approach asserts that the introduction of new values to society has led to a reaction among certain sections of the population. Spearheaded by Inglehart and Norris (2016), this approach sees the rise of populist parties as the result of rapid cultural shifts that weakened Western society's values and myths. Many studies have revealed a link between anti-immigrant sentiment and support for far-right populists (Ivarsflaten 2008; Lubbers & Scheepers 2002; Norris 2005; Rydgren 2008; van der Brug & Fennema 2007). As Ivarsflaten (2008) further notes, populist parties fare best when they mobilize over immigration grievances. What is interesting here is the close association between populism and times of crisis. Ultimately, what these three sets of explanations highlight is that populist leaders emerge in time of crises and feed on these crises to mobilize popular support.

Inglehart and Norris (2016) tested the economic and cultural sets of explanation put forward by Caiani and Graziano (2019). After a careful analysis of the European Social Survey, Inglehart and Norris (2016) only found considerable support for the cultural backlash theory. In short, the cultural backlash theory holds that the rise of progressive and post-materialist values in the 1970s has also catalyzed a counter-movement amongst the more social conservative. As socially conservative authoritarian voters felt threatened by the rising tide of liberalism, they retreated towards parties and leaders exhibiting authoritarian values such as security, conventionism, and loyalty. In contrast, Algan *et al*. (2017) have shown that increased unemployment during the 2008 economic crisis had caused a surge in support for European populism. Similarly, Guiso *et al.* (2018) found that the voters' frustration with the way the European institutions managed the 2008 economic crisis caused an increase in support for populism. For Rodríguez-Pose (2020), the growth of the vote in anti-system parties is significantly more and linked to the long-term economic collapse of constituencies that have been neglected by politicians than to increasing inequality. She further argues that the best response to populism is targeted and sensitive policies that take into account the long-term economic trajectories of "the places that don't matter". Indeed, the concentration of wealth and political power has resulted in the rise of powerful political and economic elites whose authority is increasingly challenged by populist forces. Gilens and Page (2014, p. 575), for

example, have shown that "when the preferences of economic elites and the stands of organized interest groups are controlled for, the preferences of the average American appear to have only a minuscule, near-zero, statistically non-significant impact upon public policy". Populist leaders often claim that they will protect the interest of the common people against these rising elites. In a way, when populist leaders call for more inclusive political structures that take regular voters' preferences into account, they are calling for the democratization of a political space that has been monopolized by the political and economic elite.

The rise of Hugo Chavez, for example, occurred within the context of deep economic inequality and the marginalization of most Venezuelans. For Chua (2018, p. 120-1), Chavez's rise was "the product of democracy – democracy under conditions of inequality, deeply buried racial tensions, and a market-dominant minority." Chua (2018, p. 121) goes on to say that Chavez skilfully manipulated the "battle between Venezuela's dominant "white" minority and its long-degraded, poorer, less-educated, darker-skinned indigenous- and African-blooded masses." As a result, Chavez's rise to power was synonymous with the inclusion of those who had previously been excluded from political engagement by the elite. As Galston (2018, p. 127) explains, "although populist movements sometime erode or even overturn democratic regimes, they are not necessarily anti-democratic". The bulk of the problem, Galston (2018, p. 127) argues, is that populism is invariably anti-pluralist, and so offers a challenge to the liberal method of democratic administration, which stands for the safeguarding of pluralism.

Gidron and Hall (2020) undertook a comparative survey to assess whether support for populism is associated with feelings of social marginalization. Their study showed a clear link between social marginalization and political alienation and support for populist parties. Likewise, their study highlighted the correlation between recent economic and social transformation and feelings of social marginalization among people with lower incomes. Margalit (2019, p. 166) takes a more nuanced position and argues that economic change can be a cause of cultural hostility towards a particular ethnic group, but it can also be the source of cultural hostility towards economic issues. The dissatisfaction of citizens on issues such as immigration, trade, and rural-urban inequities is a powerful motivator for populist campaigns. For Salmela and von Scheve (2017), while the new radical right has a strong following among low- and medium-skilled workers, the insecurities of the middle class, who are worried about not being able to live up to their core social identities and the values they represent, may also be a factor in their support for this movement. Similarly, in a series of studies on the drivers of support for

populism, Marchlewska *et al*. (2018) found support for populism to be associated both with national collective narcissism—an unrealistic belief in the greatness of the national group – and perceived long-term in-group disadvantage. A major flaw with most of the studies focusing on the socio-economic causes of populism is that they tend to focus almost exclusively on what is feared by most academics: the rise of far-right populist parties in Western Europe and the United States. Relying on specific *small-n* case studies, they are often ill-equipped to account for the rise of the radical left. Likewise, they are tainted by assumptions on the supposed anti-democratic and anti-pluralist nature of populism guiding their research questions.

In a widely cited article, Blühdorn and Butzlaff (2019) explored the triangular relationship between modernity, democracy, and populism through the prism of democratic theory and modernization theory. Their findings suggests that, contrary to expectations, populism should not be conceptualized as anti-modernist or anti-democratic but instead as a characteristic feature of the political form peculiar to today's third modernity. These points can be developed further from a subject-theoretical perspective, revealing how the modernization of dominant notions of subjectivity and identity has fundamentally reshaped the emancipatory (and democratic) project.

Dahl (1998) asserts that the democratic project is never complete and constantly renegotiated. This continuous redesign can be usefully conceptualized in terms of the 'democratic dilemma' that balances system efficiency with citizen effective participation, i.e. “the ability of citizens to exercize democratic control over the decisions of both the polity” and “the capacity of the system to respond satisfactorily to the collective preferences of its citizens” (Dahl 1994, p. 28). For Dahl (1998), democratic systems are always unbalanced because of these democratic dilemmas. Using the term ‘democratic dilemma’ differently, Kaltwasser (2014) considers populist movements as ‘responses’ to these "democratic dilemmas". He convincingly argues that these movements should be regarded as “something internal to democracy” instead of being something new and external or alien to democracy (Katlwasser 2014, p. 484; see also Kaltwasser 2012, p. 196–7). As Kaltwasser argues (2014, p. 483), “populism itself isn't either democratic or anti-democratic” (2014, p. 483). Following Canovan (1980), Arditi (1999; 2004), and many others, Kaltwasser (2014) conceptualizes these "responses," as a result of imbalances in conflicting democratic principles that populist movements can re-equalize (Kaltwasser 2012; Mudde & Kaltwasser 2013).

4. Populism along the spectrum

Academic debates on populism are frequently entangled with debates on nationalism and the growth of far-right parties across Europe (i.e. Doroshenko 2018; Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017; Stanley 2011; Traverso 2019). Indeed, the sovereignty of "the people" is central to both nationalism and populism. Stewart (1969, p. 183), for example, referred to populism as "a kind of nationalism," while Jagers and Walgrave (2007), Stewart (1969), and Taggart (2000) all considered nationalism as a component of populist politics. The link between populism and far-right nationalism is so prevalent that populism is often framed as a nationalist treat for Europe. Caiani and Della Porta (2010) looked at how populism and the far right interact in Italy and Germany. Their findings reveal that extreme right parties combine the basic populist frame (the people vs. the elite) with conventional extreme right frames like authoritarianism, ethno-nationalism, and nativism to form a coherent whole. They also point out that these parties frequently mentioned ‘the people' in their speeches, describing them as “suffering from the elite's transgressions, and in need of protection from the extreme right itself” (Caiani & Della Porta 2010: 197). They nonetheless mention "some conflicts in the conception of populism when applied to the extreme right" (Caiani & Della Porta 2010, p. 198). Interestingly, their research revealed that these parties were arguing for the return of power to an exclusive national elite rather than the people (Caiani & Della Porta 2010, p. 198). Similarly, di Tella (1997, p. 190) asserts that radical nationalist forces, which “are often branded populist, should [. . .] be put in a different category, because they are not aimed against the dominant groups but rather against the underprivileged ones they see as threatening.”

Among the vast literature on the impact of populism on democracy, few researchers have focused on whether populism is exclusive or inclusive. In Latin America, Collier and Collier (1991) and de la Torre (2010) highlighted the inclusive nature of populist movements, whereas in Europe, Berezin (2009), Betz (2001), and Rydgren (2005) highlighted populism's exclusionary aspect. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) conducted a comparative study of populism in contemporary Europe and Latin America, concluding that “exclusionary populism in Europe and inclusionary populism in Latin America” co-exist. It is worth noting that their research compared two radical-right populist parties, the Austrian Freedom Party (FPO) and the French National Front (FN), with two radical-left populist parties, the Movement for Socialism (MAS) and the United Socialist Party of Venezuela (PSUV). They argue that the two radical-right parties are primarily concerned with the exclusion of non-native groups such as illegal aliens, refugees, migrants, and citizens of foreign descent, which is somewhat predictable (Mudde &

Kaltwasser 2013, p. 166). The MAS and PSUV, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with redistribution of wealth and improving the quality of life of low-income people. They came to the conclusion that Latin American populism has “a discourse that emphasizes anti-imperialism and supposes a fraternal identity between the inhabitants of Latin America,” whereas European populism is “a xenophobic version of nationalism, according to which the state should be inhabited only by members of the native group, and non-native (alien) people and values are perceived as threatening to the nation state” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013, p. 168).

The assumption that European populism is “a xenophobic version of nationalism”, however, has since been heavily contested. Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014), for example, employed a discursive technique to evaluate two common assumptions about the Greek political formation SYRIZA: 1) that it is a populist movement, and 2) that, given populism's near-exclusive link with far-right groups, it must represent a threat to Europe. SYRIZA's ideology did present a different articulation of left-wing populism, but that did not mean the political formation was a nationalist threat to Europe, according to their study. Following this, De Cleen and Stavrakakis (2017) proposed a conceptual distinction between nationalism and populism based on how they discursively build "the people." While nationalism constructs people on the basis of the nation on a horizontal, in/out axis, populism constructs people as "underdogs" in opposition to the elite on a down/up axis. Both ideologies include the establishment of antagonizing political identities – "us" and "them" – through the discursive production of "the people" through internal barriers. Because it strives to answer the question of "who belongs" to the political community, this process of discursive formation of "the people" is extremely important.

Font *et al.* (2019) provided a comparative analysis based on the electoral manifestos of SYRIZA, Podemos, and the Five Star Movement (M5S). Their findings suggest that, to varying degrees, the inclusionary category can be applied to SYRIZA and Podemos. March (2017) showed that when comparing left- and right-wing populism in the United Kingdom, left-wing populist parties place a greater emphasis on socioeconomic issues, are more inclusive, and use less "populist" rhetoric than their right-wing counterparts. The theoretical distinction between left and right populism was clarified by Ostiguy and Casullo (2017). They maintained that, despite the literature's consensus that populists rant against the "establishment" or "elite," this is far from the only target of populism (Ostiguy & Casullo 2017, p. 6). Populists in many

industrialized countries often protest against immigrants, who are hardly part of the elite. As a result, Ostiguy and Casullo (2017, p. 6) conclude that the true target of populist rage is the "Social Other." The populist framework, they claim, frequently condemns a supposed partnership between the social other and the political establishment. They believe that both left and right populism are hostile to the political elite by definition, but the sociological *other* separates right from left populism (Ostiguy & Casuallo 2017, p. 6). The oligarchs and elites are the social other for populists on the left of the political spectrum, while the not-so-well-off but culturally diverse immigrants are the social *other* for populists on the right. To distinguish the various strands of populism on the left and right of the political spectrum, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013) coined the terms "inclusionary" and "exclusionary" populism. Ostiguy and Casuallo (2017, p. 7-8) feel that this difference is inappropriate, if not conceptually incorrect, because all populisms are, by definition, both exclusive and inclusive. Indeed, populists create ‘the people' through antagonism and opposition to a social other, but it is also necessarily inclusive in its construction of ‘the people'. The main distinction between left- and right-populism, according to Ostiguy and Casuallo (2017, p. 8), is the direction of antagonism, not the level of inclusivity. Ostiguy and Casuallo's (2017) conceptual distinction is akin to De Cleen and Stavrakakis' (2017) previously mentioned conceptual contrast between right-wing nationalism and populism and how they discursively construct "the people."

Otjes and Louwerse (2015, p. 75) analyzed the voting behaviour of left-wing and right-wing populist parties in the Dutch Parliament. They expected populist parties would vote in lockstep on issues central to populism, such as democratic reform and European integration. They did, however, come to the conclusion that these parties' voting patterns shared only one strong characteristic: their antipathy towards supranational organizations. This is unsurprising, given that nationalist and populist parties emphasize people's sovereignty and oppose technocratic rule. Migration was the subject on which the parties differed the most, prompting Otjes and Louwerse (2015, p. 75) to recommend that “negativity towards ‘others,' particularly immigrants,” be omitted from any definition of populism. This contrasts starkly with Gilles de Pelichy (2022), who suggests using negativity towards the other as a differentiating factors between agonistic and antagonistic populisms. For Gilles de Pelichy (2022), negativity towards the other can, in the case of antagonistic populism, serve as the justification to deploy securitizing strategies and mobilize the national community against what supposedly threatens it.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This brief literature review has shown that the study of populism still has to provide clarity on the concept. The study of populism took three broad avenues that led to three different yet not necessarily mutually exclusive approaches to the study of the phenomenon. The first approach understands populism as a response to crises of representation. According to this view, populism emerges where traditional democratic politics fail to uphold the interest of the common people. This approach is mostly concerned with the political causes of populism and its effects on political institutions such as democratic reforms and populists' calls for more direct forms of democracy. The second approach understands populism as a response to economic uncertainty. Under this view, populism emerges as a result of deep economic inequality and marginalization. This approach is mostly concerned with the economic roots of populism and, in a nutshell, claims that economic hardship is the main driver of support for populism. Economic hardship, in turn, reinforces the feeling that political institutions are not upholding the interests of the common people. The last approach understands populism as the result of cultural backlash. Under this view, populism emerges when socio-cultural groups feel marginalized and neglected because new values are introduced to society. This approach is mostly concerned with cultural transformation and the impact of migration on host societies.

While the three approaches focus on vastly different aspects of populism, they do have something in common. Populism discourses are directed at the 'gut feelings' of the people, and few feelings generate more emotion than our craving for belonging. Populists know that, and skilfully manipulate our feelings of belonging for political gains. One core characteristic of populist leaders is that they capitalize on group grievance and marginalization. Ultimately, all three approaches agrees that support for populism is contingent on feelings of socio-economic, political, or cultural marginalization. In certain cases, populist entrepreneurs capitalize on the low-hanging fruits of fears and threats, and base their discourse on the notion of security to mobilize the people against the social other. In other cases, populist entrepreneurs capitalize feelings of economic marginalization shared by a part of the population broader than what is considered its ethno-national community. Both approaches are directed at the 'gut feelings' of the people, but we should be careful not to equate them.

Another important point highlighted within this literature review is the close relationship between the perception of crisis and populist mobilization. The notion of ontological insecurity has always been an underlying aspect of the study of populism. In fact, since the publication

of Ionescu and Gellner's (1969) edited volume "*Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics,*" many scholars have empirically linked the emergence of populist movements with rapid socio-economic transformations and their resulting ontological insecurity. However, the notion of securitization has only recently entered the study of populism, mostly in relation with migration. This literature review therefore hopes to generate some scholarly interest in the study of securitizing moves by populist actors.

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