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# The End of Politics as Usual? Populism in Western Europe and North America

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## Abstract:

Across both ends of the Atlantic, the permissive consensus that had for long acted as a safety net for the liberal democratic practice is being challenged by a plebiscitary trend. This new breed of populist politics threatens not only to disassociate liberalism from democracy— by creating zones of deliberation above the polity— but also consciously attempts to reconfigure the very ontology of politics. In this article we pick four episodes from Western Europe and North America, which we think are representative of the global shift in political order towards the mainstreaming of populism: Le Front National in France; the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany; Movimento 5 Stelle in Italy; and Donald Trump in the United States. Ultimately, this piece argues that the populist far right has managed to become mainstream in Western politics; consequently, for liberal democracy to survive, populism should be managed, not dismissed. In other words, engaging with illiberal populist actors as legitimate contenders is not a concession to extremism but a commitment to political inclusion.

***Chargui Bachagha**

## Introduction:

Nearly eighty years after the defeat of national socialism (Nazism) and the erection of the liberal democratic apparatus, polities across the West are waking up to a grim reality: the rise of the populist far right. The permissive consensus about the immunity of liberal democracy to political extremism has suddenly been cast into doubt. A new breed of political contenders characterized by an acute disdain for liberal democracy, especially its procedural aspect, are making significant gains in their respective countries. Brexit, as the last major battle between the mainstream and the far right, delivered a decisive statement about a changing political order in the West. As a result, the traditional left-centre-right cleavage is being replaced by a Schmittian "moral" antagonism that transcends politics as usual.

The reaction of the establishment to the populist resurgence has largely been marked by inconsistency and mostly lacking in substance and strategy. While some established parties chose to resort to the politics of *attentisme*, that is, choosing inaction toward a populist-owned issue in the hope of losing saliency with time, others decided either to confront populists or to ignore them altogether. As we shall see neither of these tactics have shown significant capacity to outvote populists in the exit polls.

This article proposes another venue: accommodation. Rather than falling into the populist trap of making exclusionary gestures towards populists, mainstream politicians would do better by starting to talk to populists, instead of talking like populists. As this cross-examination shall reveal, dialogue does not necessitate legitimizing. On the contrary, by fact-checking far-right populists the establishment may be able to hold those who claim to speak in the name of the people accountable to their own claims. Failing to do so, we argue, will further reaffirm populists' stance that the establishment is not only condescending but also beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen.

The aforementioned premises beg a twofold question: (1) ***is there a populist zeitgeist? And if yes,*** (2) ***how can the mainstream elaborate remedies that do not backfire?***

## 1 Case Study and Method

According to Stanley, "There is no Populist International; no canon of key populist texts or calendar of significant moments; and the icons of populism are of local rather than universal appeal" (Stanley, 2008, p. 100). Hence, in order for this study to register a global populist trend, we selected four political

manifestations of populism across Western Europe and North America. The case study includes three political parties from Western Europe and a prominent political contender from the United States. Hence our case study includes Le Front National (FN) in France; the *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany; *Movimento 5 Stelle* in Italy; and Donald Trump in the Unites States. The electoral threshold for selecting these cases was solely based on these parties obtaining at least 1% of national electoral vote.

As with other democratization studies, cross-national comparisons are often utilized to gather quantifiable as well as qualitative data on the conditions under which democracies emerge, survive, or fail. A well-documented precedent using this method was Samuel Huntington's *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* in 1991. Our study adopts a similar approach, but rather remains aware of the existing differing key variables that must be declared to steer clear off biased selection. For example, all of the selected cases here share similar independent variable, that is parliamentary democracy with the exception of the United States and its presidential system. As for the dependent variable which is election performance, we chose national representative elections for Western Europe and the presidential election for the case of Donald Trump as indicators of populist prominence.

## 2 Populism: Defining the Undefinable

The concept of populism is of a "mercurial nature", and any general categorization would be defeated by countless counterargumentations. Arter notices that "There is a general agreement in the comparative literature that populism is confrontational, chameleonic, culture-bound and context-dependent, varying from polity to polity and 'taking on the hue of the environment in which it occurs'" (Arter, 2010, p. 490) Indeed, populism appears across time, space, ideological cleavages, and distinct political contexts. The influence populists exert on mainstream politics in contemporary liberal democracies is also illusive and still cannot be fully explained by a single theory.

No wonder, then, that Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, in their introduction to an edited volume on populism in 1969, described populism as a "spectre" haunting global politics. The concept of "spectrality" resembles a ubiquitous and ambiguous state of being such as that of the ghost "which is neither present nor absent, neither dead nor alive" (Davis, 2005, p. 373). Furthermore, populist mobilization does not have a standard form: it can take the structural figure of a charismatic leader, a political party, or a social movement.

The lack of a core ideological "morphology" enables populism to be flexible and parasitic on other established ideologies, and thus could reside on both poles of the political spectrum (Freeden, 2004). Globally, populism may be associated with right-wing (Fidesz in Hungary, the FPÖ in Austria and the Tea Party in the United States) and left-wing political parties and social movements (Syriza in Greece, PSUV in Venezuela, and the Five Star movement in Italy). However, there is no standard or static populist ideological reference, as the latter changes strategically and opportunistically to cope with particular political and socio-economic contexts.

Mény and Surel (2002) notice that "the same [populist] party can be pro-European or anti-EU within a very limited period according to its interests. It can be pro- or anti-globalisation according to the changing mood of its leader" (p. 17). Populist parties can be vociferous and extreme in opposition and more moderate and compromise-oriented when in power. Furthermore, the troublesome and contradictory relationship between populism and liberal democracy, as shall examined in this study, further deepens the ambiguity surrounding the former's nature and function in today's established as well as developing democracies.

In light of the "conceptual messiness" surrounding populism, Cas Mudde, a political scientist and an expert on populism and radical right-wing parties in Europe, has elaborated a minimal definition of populism that regards it first and foremost as an ideology. Mudde (2004) conceives populism as a "*thin-centred 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 général *(general will) of the people" (p. 543).* This definition comes in line with the work of other scholars using the ideational approach which analyses populism as a bundle of ideas (Müller, 2017; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013; Hawkins & Littvay, 2019) However, whereas other ideational definitions of populism tend to put much of an emphasis on only one side of populism, that is either the demand or the supply side, Mudde's definition of populism as an ideology "travels well, and permits us to identify the 'lowest common denominator' present in all expressions of populism" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 153).

## 3 Populism Gone Mainstream: A Case Study

During the last thirty years, populism has established a stronghold in many democracies across the globe. Despite going through a fair share of periodical electoral disappointments and even in some cases disintegration, the long-term success of populism in world politics today is undeniable. The intercontinental presence of populist parties has also reached a certain level of maturity where they have become power-oriented after breaking out of their old protest or single-issue character. Worldwide, populists have been elected in local, national, and regional

assemblies; parliaments, premierships, and presidencies. This remarkable breakthrough of what not so long ago, had been residing on the outskirts of politics has led many to speak of a populist resurgence.

In *The Populist Zeitgeist,* Mudde offers a new insight into populism as a mainstream feature in most Western democracies. Instead of conceiving populism as a "normal pathology" in liberal democracy, Mudde suggests a perception of populism as a "pathological normalcy." He argues that since the early 1990s established mainstream parties have used elements of populist rhetoric in their encounter with opposition parties as well as populist parties; therefore, populism should no longer be considered nor studied as a glitch within liberal democracy (Mudde, 2010).

### 3.1 The National Front in France

During the 1990s, the FN repackaged its soft racism into a passable wrapping. The new identity politics the FN chanted shifted from the discourse of "rootedness versus *déracinement*" to speak in terms of nationalism versus *mondialisme*; specifically, on how cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism threaten to erode national identities (Swank & Betz, 2003). According to Betz, this superficial rhetoric helped push the FN's political fortunes to unprecedented heights, emerging as a party with the status of a power-contestant force in French politics despite a severe haemorrhage it went through in 1998 (Betz, 2018).However, not only did the party survived disintegration, but also managed to reach the second round of the presidential election in 2002 after le Pen had defeated socialist Lionel Jospin in the first round.

Although it could not enter government, the FN continued to affirm its presence in French politics through its capacity to break political taboos regarding issues of immigration, security, and national identity, which it claims have been overlooked by mainstream parties. The saliency of these issues became particularly apparent during the 2007 presidential election, in which the UMP's presidential candidate Nicholas Sarkozy appropriated much of the FN's identitarian rhetoric in an attempt to slice from the FN's extreme electorate. Although this tactic helped Sarkozy secure a decent victory, it, nevertheless, gave a great deal of legitimacy to the FN's radical brand of identity politics (Mondon, 2016). In response to Sarkozy's "copyright infringement", J.M. le Pen said that by stealing his message, his rivals validated the FN's message of "France for the French" (Sciolino, 2007). This episode in French politics also confirms Van Spanje's research findings that anti-immigration parties have the potential of influencing the policy output of their political systems without necessarily being in government (Van Spanje, 2010).

In 2011, Marine Le Pen succeeded her father as the leader of the FN. Upon taking control, le Pen embarked on a rigorous campaign of *dédiabolisation* (de-

demonization) to rid the party of her father's tarnished history of racism and xenophobia (Sayare, 2017). In the ensuing years, le Pen's policy of rebranding the FN started gaining steam, as the party achieved remarkable electoral success, making significant electoral breakthroughs in local, national, and European elections (finishing first with a remarkable 25 per cent of the popular vote). However, after a series of deadly attacks launched by the Islamic State in France in 2015, in response to the latter's intervention in Syria and Iraq, le Pen was quick to invest in the state of emergency the country was witnessing. Le Pen, sliding back to her father's strategy, fought her 2017 presidential campaign predominantly on issues of immigration and security, linking them both to the state of insecurity and the absence of border control without laying down the policy to confront both issues (Amrani, 2017).

This FN 2.0 needed a charismatic figure to articulate, if not incarnate, and fully display the increasing momentum of the populist surge across the West. Marine le Pen certainly knew about the value of showmanship as a means of enticing the media. The only problem was that le Pen was a female seeking to assume political leadership, a position which has stereotypically been associated with masculinity. To overcome this barrier, le Pen constructed a political persona that projected professionalism and commitment, both of which were reflected in media coverage. As Snipes and Mudde (2019) observe, prominent newspapers from France and the US, including *Le Figaro*, *le Monde*, and The New York Times, were more focused on aspects of the populist radical right than le Pen's gender or physical traits. This allowed le pen to devote media-time slots to transmit a focused and charged signature discourse across various media platforms.

Having made it to the second-round of 2017 presidential election, the FN continues to be a major political actor in French politics. Unless immutable mainstream parties in France address the legitimate concerns and anxieties of a large portion of the electorate, who turn to the FN to voice their frustration and alienation, the FN, now known as *Rassemblement National (National Rally),* would carry on the role of the mouthpiece that articulates much of what many French people are thinking.

### 3.2 The Alternative for Germany in Germany

On the eve of Germany's federal election of 2017, exit polls unveiled a shocking political upset. For the first time since the Second World War an openly racist, far-right party, the Alternative for Germany (AfD), enters the *Bundestag* as the third largest party with an astonishing 12.6 per cent of valid votes. Founded in 2013 as a Eurosceptic party, the AfD not only became the largest opposition in Germany but also managed to break a postwar status quo by placing itself on the right of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) (Will, 2019).

Hansen and Olson (2019) argue that although the AfD started as a single-issue party (EU-scepticism), it, nevertheless, incorporated anti-immigration and anti-Islamism themes into the party's top prioritized issues after the European refugee crisis. On the other hand, Angela Merkel's controversial *Willkommenskultur* (culture of welcoming), which has allowed 1.5 million migrants into Germany since 2015, has been fuelling the AfD's anti-immigration rhetoric (Will, 2019). Unlike other populist experiences in the continent, such as in Greece, Germany's populist radical right seems to reflect a genuine problem of identity rather than a reaction to an episode of economic distress. Figures from the Federal Statistical Office show that one in four children born in Germany in 2016 had an immigrant mother, which led many Germans to doubt the future of ethnic composition in their nation (Bartsch et al., 2018). It is upon such uncertainty among the German electorate the far right is now establishing a foothold in Germany's party politics.

The Afd is not the only extreme right-wing party Germany has witnessed since the end of the war. In 1969, the short-lived National Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) gained 4.3% of the national vote, and the *Republikaner* (REP) achieved modest success in several local elections in the 1980s; however, neither party was able to win a single seat in the *Bundestag* during their entire political lifecycle (Berbuir et al., 2015). Moreover, Germany, as a key EU member, has been a major player in three consecutive crises, each of which has contributed to the AfD's political gains: the European Debt Crisis, the Refugee Crisis, and the terror attacks in 2016. These incidents have provided fertile ground for the radical right to disperse a highly charged message of hatred and self-enclosure. However, unlike in other countries, the AfD's exclusionary rhetoric about "culturally alien peoples like Arabs, Sinti, and Roma" seems to find a significantly receptive audience among the German electorates regardless of their economic, educational, or generational differences (Benner, 2017).

The rise of the AfD in Germany also remains for the most part closely related to Merkel's "open door" policy; however, the potential of having it morph into an "FN-lite" that is constantly attempting to change the country's political culture should not be underestimated. In a country that experienced the ramifications of political extremism first-hand, the chances of another drift toward a politics of paranoia remain viable. Mark Twain is reputed to have said that "history does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes." This does not mean by any way that Nazism has any chance in resurrecting itself in one of the most secure democracies in Europe. Despite the AfD's occupation of 94 out of 709 seats in the *Reichstag*; other parties have treated it as a rude guest at the dinner table (Witte & Beck, 2018). Nevertheless, in the words of Horst Seehofer, then Minister of the Interior and member of the Christian Social Union (CSU), the AfD's behaviour remains "highly dangerous for the country" (Mischke, 2019).

Unlike in France, German media sought to maintain a *cordon sanitair* or *Brandmauer* (firewall) around the AfD. This strategy aimed at sucking the oxygen out of the extremist party by restricting its engagement with mainstream actors; hence, controlling its access to public discourse. Nevertheless, as the party expanded to new electoral territories, polished its image to suit public sensibilities, and leveraged digital social media platforms over traditional journalism, it relatively weakened or at least circumvented the gatekeepers (Völker, 2026).

### 3.3 The Five Star Movement in Italy

After the defeat of the overconfident constitutional referendum of 2016 in Italy, Matteo Renzi's risky bet cost him not only his premiership but also helped tilt the political arena in Italy to the advantage of populists, who wasted no time bashing the gates of Rome. In a scenario similar to that of the Brexit referendum, Renzi's miscalculated move of calling for a constitutional referendum, which had been regarded by opponents as tampering with the balance of power, has had drastic ramifications on Italy's politics. The main reason behind this "political crash" was a matter of misdiagnosis on the part of Renzi's government. At an estimated 113% of GDP, Italy has the second-highest debt load in the EU. The financial system as a whole has been described as terminally ill with stagnating growth during the past 15 years (Goodman, 2016). Renzi, however, thought that reversing these predicaments would be attainable through institutional reforms, including the diminishing of the power of the Senate in an attempt to streamline the costly and largish lawmaking process.

The day after December 4, 2016, the referendum voting date, the light at the end of the tunnel transpired to be an oncoming wrecking train, which has severely deformed Italian politics. Two populist forces have dominated post-Renzi Italy: the unexperienced, recently founded Five Star Movement (FSM) and the long-established far-right League. Once residing on the fringes of Italian politics, both parties have now become the mainstream after winning almost half the vote in the 2018 general election. The FSM obtained 32% of valid votes, while the right-wing coalition (the League and Forza Italia) secured 37% of valid votes (BBC News, 2018).

This result was well predicted, since until March 5th there had been a deep sense of dissatisfaction and distrust among Italian voters towards parliament, which became a cesspool of corruption and scandals, the economy, and the "anti-solutionist" tendency of previous governments (Pew Research Center, 2018). As in Germany, France, and Spain, the Italian centre-left, dominated by the Democratic Party of Matteo Renzi, was severely punished in the ballots, scoring a shy 19% of votes, which is a free fall from the result of 2013 in which it secured 27% of the votes (Momigliano, 2018). Part of the explanation of the centre-left

was its inability to compete with the far right on the dominating issues of a deteriorating economy and immigration.

Understanding the politics of today's Italy is quite puzzling, since after the formation of the all-populist coalition government of the league and the FSM in 2018, the traditional left-right distinction seems inapt. Some political scientists, such as Jan-Werner Muller, argue that Italy has become a perfect "laboratory of modern politics," in which "*les extrêmes se touchent.*" (Müller, 2018), Italy is known as the land of contradiction and controversy: it has witnessed the emergence of the most radical ideology, which is fascism. Scandals of corruption and indecorous behaviour among politicians have often disrupted post-war Italian politics. Since 2010: four prime ministers were not even able to finish their terms (Silvio Berlusconi, Mario Monti, Enrico Letta, and Matteo Renzi). In his usual satirical tone, Beppe Grillo, the founder of the FSM, confirms, "in Italy, everything is in the opposite of everything. We invented the mafia; we invented fascism; we invented banking; universities..." Had Grillo been certain of his 2018 election victory, he would have also added that Italy would introduce Western Europe's first populist government.

The coalition government combines both left-wing and right-wing varieties of populism, represented respectively by the FSM and the League. Founded by Beppe Grillo in early 2013, the FSM has since been able to establish a stronghold in Italian politics. The party has made remarkable steady gains in all local, regional and general elections. Low economic growth coupled with high unemployment rates, especially in the south, were key issues that had motivated almost half of the electorate to vote for the FSM (The New York Times, 2018). Fully understanding the politics of the FSM also can be opaque. According to Diamanti, the FSM is both "complicated and alluring," because as a political party (although Grillo insists that it is a non-party movement) it keeps on adapting to the developing socio-political reality, making it difficult to relate it to a specific policy or ideology (Diamanti, 2014). Although this might be an obstacle for researchers, it nevertheless provides an advantage for the FSM. The state of undecidedness, Diamanti argues, makes the FSM "a political catch-all party," which could navigate between right-wing hardliners without upsetting its left-wing electoral (Diamanti, 2014).

Unlike their long-established partner, the League, the FSM could be defined as a party in the making, experimenting with electoral, economic, and state-affair policies, Grillo declares, "I experiment, I put together misfits, because the world will belong to misfits" (YouTube, 2016). Campaigning mainly as an anti-establishment movement, which wants to rid the country of "anti-solutionism", the FSM's objective seems not to stop at a renewal of the stalling political machinery but goes further to offer a new model of populist democracy. This model can be noticed in Grillo's successful attempt to bypass mainstream

media through the open space of social media, which has offered his movement a lucrative "disintermediated" outlet, enabling him to directly communicate with his supporters. Bobba and Legnante claim that the FSM took advantage of social media (often referred to as the Web 2.0) in order to create an independent space beyond the regulations of political institutions and mainstream press as well as to create a new direct channel between the citizens and the state; thus, putting forward the idea of unmediated democracy (Bobba & Legnante, 2017).

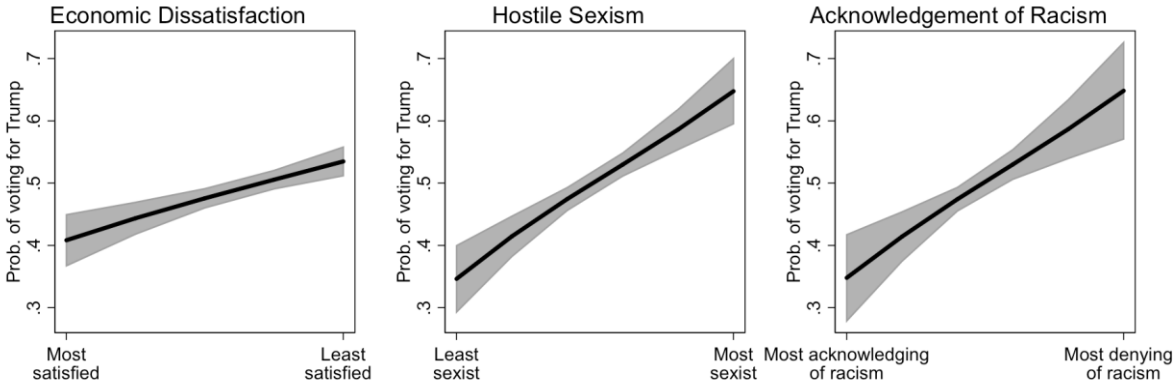
### 3.4 Trumping Populism in the US

It is not difficult for one accustomed to the history of American politics to fathom the electoral outcome of the 2016 American presidential election, in which Donald Trump pulled off the biggest upset in U.S. history. As it has been introduced earlier in this examination, populism has deep historical roots in the United States. From the People's Party to Trump, populism has persistently been present in American politics, and politicians have used its polarizing vocabulary to articulate dissimilar brands of populism. Inglehart and Norris argue that authoritarian populism existed before Trump, but while this brand of populism has been present since the Second World War as "a fringe phenomenon," today, it has become the official doctrine of the world's superpower (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

Inglehart and Norris understand the success of populism in the U.S. as a direct outcome of a "Silent Revolution in Reverse." According to the authors, Postmaterialist values of tolerance toward foreigners, and openness toward sexual orientations and gender identities, which the Civil Rights Movement simulated during the 1960s, marked an "intergenerational shift" from materialist values to Postmaterialist values. However, as the authors note, the long-term "period effect" of economic stagnation, recession, or even depression has been proven to produce a condition of economic insecurity. These cycles have the potential to reverse the progressive tide back to Materialist values, especially among the older strata of society, who are more likely to support populist parties (Norris & Inglehart, 2019).

These findings indicate that economic factors alone do not directly predict electoral behaviour towards populist parties, but they show a correlation between economic dissatisfaction and the cultural backlash sweeping Western politics today. Schaffner et al. (2018) empirically argue that although economic distress may explain the change of attitude towards issues of identity, it does not, however, always predict electoral behaviour towards populist parties. As shown in Figure 1, sexist and racist attitudes have a strong correlative relationship as determinant variables that can, to a higher extent than economic dissatisfaction, predict support for Trump in the 2016 presidential election:

**Figure 1**. Predicted probability of voting for Trump based on values of economic dissatisfaction, racism, and sexism.




**Source:** Schaffner, B. F., M. MacWilliams, and T. Nteta. "Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism." Political Science Quarterly 133 (2018): 9-34. https://doi.org/10.1002/polq.12737.

McElwee and McDaniel (2017) also agree that economic anxiety alone does not predict voter support for Trump, whereas racist attitudes towards blacks and immigrants are strong predictors for Trump support among white voters. Their study found that there is a 60% chance among white voters with high levels of anti-black attitudes to support Trump, while there is only a 10% chance of a voter with low anti-black resentment to support Trump.

From the onset of his presidential campaign, Trump has been feeding these attitudes through a display of a typical far-right combination of populism, authoritarianism, and nationalism. As Bonikowski (2019) notes,

> Trump appealed to ethnically, racially, and culturally exclusionary understandings of American identity widespread in US society, by representing Mexican immigrants as criminals, publicly battling the parents of a fallen American soldier of Muslim faith, questioning the impartiality of a Mexican-American judge, and, for years prior to the election, fanning the flames of Islamophobic and racist conspiracy theories concerning President Obama's place of birth. In short, the Trump campaign regularly intermixed, and eventually fused, populist, authoritarian, and nationalist political frames, which resonated deeply with supporters' anti-elite, illiberal, and exclusionary sentiments (p. 113).

When he took office, Trump put his radical ideology into practice. In 2017, the President ordered a travel ban on Muslim-majority countries of Libya, Iran, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, and Yemen. Since his inauguration, Trump also has insisted on living up to his campaign promise of building a wall along the southern border with Mexico to curb illegal immigration. These anti-immigration, "zero-tolerance" measures were often followed with an offensive rhetoric against immigrants from Africa and Latin America, describing them as "rapists, criminals, and animals" and their countries as "shithole countries."

About the media, Trump has adopted a confrontational stance against major liberal media outlets, such as CNN and The New York Times, whom he usually labels "fake news or the enemy of the people." His adversarial altercation with the press culminated in 2018 when the White House suspended the "hard pass" of CNN's reporter, Jim Acosta after the President took offence from a series of questions regarding immigrants from Latin America. However, other conservative news outlets, most notably Fox News, have been favoured by the White House, which has given it a number of 44 interviews with the President compared to zero interviews with CNN (Mayer, 2019). Fox, in particular, seems to have a special relationship with Trump whose favourite morning show "Fox and Friends" and its hosts have been described as Trump's "most trusted advisers" (YouTube, 2018). Like Ronald Reagan, Trump has also benefited from his long television career, giving him an advantage over his contenders. As Street notes, Trump could be described as a "celebrity politician" whose TV shows, such as Miss Universe, Miss USA pageant, and The Apprentice, have given him the fame and notoriety upon which he built his political career.

## 4 Stepping Outside the Echo Chamber

In his book "What is Populism?" Müller insists that excluding populists can be counterproductive and may even fuel their success. He suggests that rather than trying to suppress populist movements, mainstream politicians and parties should engage with their concerns and offer constructive alternatives that address the underlying issues. Müller acknowledges that populist movements can be divisive and may promote anti-democratic values. However, he argues that simply dismissing these movements as illegitimate or extremist risks further alienating their supporters and exacerbating social and political divisions. Instead, he suggests that politicians should engage in respectful dialogue with populists and attempt to address their concerns in a civil constructive way.

In 2016, during the U.S. presidential election, Hillary Clinton used the term "deplorables" to refer to some supporters of her opponent, Donald Trump. Specifically, she said, "you could put half of Trump's supporters into what I call the 'basket of deplorables' — they're racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic — you name it" (Reilly, 2021). Clinton's comment was widely

criticized as elitist and insulting, and it quickly became a major issue in the campaign. Many of Trump's supporters saw the remark as evidence of the political establishment's disdain for them and their concerns, and it became a rallying cry for his campaign. Some political analysts argue that Clinton's "deplorables" comment may have backfired and ultimately hurt her campaign. By dismissing a large segment of the electorate as bigoted and unworthy of respect, she may have reinforced the perception that she was out of touch with ordinary Americans and unwilling to listen to their concerns. Pathologizing political opponents can distract from the substance of their arguments and weaken efforts to critique and counter their ideas. When we engage in diagnosing populist contestants, we run the risk of dismissing their arguments as simply the products of their personality traits or mental health issues, rather than engaging with the substantive issues they raise. Applying diagnostic labels to political opponents can therefore be seen as a form of ad hominem attack, rather than a legitimate critique of their ideas or policies. Instead of focusing on the psychological characteristics of populist politicians and their supporters.

Many political commentators have suggested that brushing aside populists for their personality traits or maverick discursive style could be seen as repeating the same exclusionary gesture that they accuse their opponents of. Indeed, populists, as long as adhere to the rules of democratic practice, are not any less legitimate than their mainstream counterparts. On the contrary, inclusive engagement with populists may deprive them of their most effective tool of mobilization against politics. While some populists may engage in exclusionary or divisive tactics, it is possible to hold them accountable for these actions while still engaging with them on substantive issues. This may require a willingness to listen to and address the legitimate concerns of populist voters, while also working to build more inclusive and democratic societies that reflect the needs and aspirations of all citizens. Ultimately, communicating with populists in a constructive and democratic manner may consolidate political stability and social cohesion, while also upholding the principles of democratic governance.

On the European level, after Britain exited the EU, there were several expectations that other EU members could follow suit, such as the high possibility of a “Frexit”. Other scholars were less pessimistic and chose to point out a new direction in European politics towards “differentiated disintegration,” which refers to a scenario in which some EU member states choose to leave or reduce their participation in certain areas of EU integration while others remain committed to deeper integration (Schimmelfennig & Winzen, 2014). In countries, such as France, Italy, and Hungary, there have been growing concerns about the EU's ability to address the diverse needs and preferences of its member states, which has fuelled debates about the future direction of European integration. However, the idea of differentiated disintegration can, indeed, be the solution to

these challenges. This approach would allow for a more flexible and tailored approach to integration, enabling member states to participate in different areas of cooperation based on their specific needs and priorities. While there are risks associated with this approach, such as the potential for fragmentation and inequality among member states, proponents argue that it could help to maintain the EU's overall cohesion and prevent further exits and utter disintegration.

As for the time being, the populist far right will continue to disturb national and European politics for the foreseeable future as long as the conditions for its resurgence still exist. This includes a rapidly transforming economy that favours specialized expertise, mobility, and highly educated employees; a widening gap between the ordinary citizens and the overly complicated politics of delegation; and an acute sensitivity among a large segment of the public towards changing national cultures. Eventually, the generational shift would have reached its final stage of completely reshaping the political landscape, and it remains to be seen what kind of new political forces may emerge to replace or challenge the populist far-right.

In the short term, however, the conditions for the resurgence of populism in Western Europe are likely to persist, as many of the underlying economic and social trends are deeply entrenched. This suggests that mainstream political parties and institutions will need to adapt and evolve to effectively address the concerns of citizens and promote a more inclusive and equitable society. Populism in Western Europe "resembles a drunken guest at a dinner party: he's not respecting table manners, he is rude, he might even start flirting with the wives of other guests but he might also be blurting out truth about liberal democracy that has become forgetful of popular sovereignty" (Panizza, 2005, p. 78). At the same time, it is important to recognize that the future of populism is not predetermined and that many possible outcomes depend on the choices that are made by political leaders and citizens.

## Conclusion:

The new democratic order that was erected by the allies after the war sought to fix internal weaknesses of democracy through the creation of a system of checks and balances not only on the national level as well as the supranational level. A secured democracy is thought to be able to prevent the revival of demagogues who speak in the name of the people. Nevertheless, politics as such became complicated for the ordinary citizen, who has become increasingly detached. Moreover, irresponsive politics has also deepened those feelings of alienation among citizens and heightened feelings of resentment toward mainstream politicians. Amidst these circumstances, populism emerges to usher in a politics of immediacy that transcends the complexity of liberal democracy.

Populism as a phenomenon has deep historical roots in modern democracy. Since the early 20th century, it has been regenerating in different organizational forms with different attitudes to the political context it operates within. However, the post-war era witnessed a resurgence of a new form of populism that drew its ideology from fascist remnants. Hence, new populism tends to be racist, xenophobic, and authoritarian. On the other hand, the populist aspiration to establish a direct democracy that bypasses institutionalization and plurality makes the analogy between populism and fascism more valid.

Political instinct has led many politicians from both ends of the political spectrum to react in an exclusionary, dismissive manner to the rise of the populist far right. As this piece has advanced. This strategy had been backfiring in one election after the other. Worse, many politicians waited too long to respond to the populist threat, choosing rather to respond thermostatically. Again, this has also severely backfired as many disenchanted electorates who were once loyal to a mainstream party started defecting populists as the only way to register a protest vote against the establishment. Brexit was a prime example of such a fate.

To avoid the vicious cycle that has plagued liberal politics, a strategy that has been largely overlooked in Western political discourse—accommodation—may offer a solution. By accommodating, rather than merely containing, political opponents, including populists, liberal democracy can both uphold its commitment to inclusivity and demonstrate its relevance as an ideology capable of addressing the challenges of 21st-century societies.

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