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**DIFFERENT APPROACHES ON POPULISM**

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**Abstract**

Populism has gained significant attention, as it became a pervasive global phenomenon, posing complex challenges for liberal democracies. As it's a phenomenon of complex nature, this dissertation investigates the various approaches made towards the understanding of populism, but focuses primarily on the distinction between the inclusionary and exclusionary forms. Through a comparative analysis, the study examines Latin American populism, characterized as inclusionary, and Western populism, noted for its exclusionary tendencies. Latin American populism, often left-wing, emerged in response to socio-economic crises and foreign intervention, evolving through classical, neoliberal, and radical phases. In contrast, Western populism, particularly in Europe and North America, tends to be right-wing, driven by nativism and anti-immigrant sentiments. This comparative analysis demonstrates how populist movements adapt to various socio-political environments, especially by examining the social media, a factor of major importance, as it shaping political preferences and fostering the rise of populist parties and figures worldwide, as explored through the lens of technopopulism. Ultimately, the dissertation aims to offer a nuanced understanding of populism's multifaceted nature and its impact on the contemporary political landscapes.

**Key Words:** populism, nationalist – populism, technopopulism, inclusionary, exclusionary, far-right, Latin America, Europe, USA.

## Introduction

Literature on populism is extended. However, it is evident that scholars seem to not have concluded yet on a strict, absolute term of what populism is. Reading a plethora of essays, one can understand that populism is vague, something that can be seen in variant occasions and even in political parties or figures that are not necessarily populist. Although there isn't a strict terminology on populism, there are some factors that contribute to its identification and thus its definition as such. From these defining factors emerge different approaches on populism: few of which are: populism as a thin ideology (in other words – a set of ideas) (Aalberg, et al. 2016: 10) – which is the most commonly used definition (Cervi, Tejedor, & Marín Lladó, 2021: 270), populism as a political communication style (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), as a discourse practice, meaning a mental map “through which individuals comprehend and analyze political reality” (Aalberg, et al. 2016: 10), as a political strategy (Rueda, 2021) etc.

Commonly in the western world, according to Papagaryfallou (2002), as well as in Pappas (2022) the term “populist” is frequently used as an insult of a political opponent and hence is used in order to minimize one's political influence or appeal on the people. Here lies another distinction of populism depending on its use both in the vernacular and in academia. In the vernacular, especially in the western sphere of advanced liberal democracies, populism is a negative concept that people reproduce mainly as an insult towards ideas, which they consider as fascist. In other words, it is tightly linked with far-right ideas and attitudes and therefore is overtly understood with a negative connotation.

In academia, populism as a term, according to Chrysogelos, is broad and vague – it describes a plethora of things, so retrospectively, it ends up being meaningless. It has proved to be quite difficult for researchers and scholars to narrow it down to meaning exclusively one thing. Demertzis states that: “it could be analyzed combined with other things as racism, nationalism, fascism, revolution etc, as political speech, as a movement, as a party, as a political ideology, as political practice or even as a stance of the political culture” (Pappas, 2022). Panizza argues that: “populism is the political discourse when ordinary politics disappears. It's a mode of identification, characteristic of times of turmoil and displacement, involving the radical redrawing of social boundaries along the different lines that have hitherto structured society” (Roberts, 2013).

For Müller populism is “the exclusion in the name of a people that is defined by homogeneity” (Jacob & Schapkow, 2022). Müller also supports that: “populism is a kind of fictional moralistic imagination of politics, a political perception that sets the pure and united people against the elites.” (Kristiansen, 2020: 40). Huber and Schimpf (2017) have a minimal definition of populism, based on three elements: an appeal to the people, a denunciation of the elite, and the idea that politics should be an expression of the “general will” (Bergh, Kärnä, 2021). De la Torre (2014) argues that populism is a strategy in order to get to power and to govern based on the democratizing demand to return power to its original owners: “the people”. For Margaret Canovan as cited in de la Torre (2007): “populism constitutes the redemptive face of democracy. Populist discursive glorification of the people, its critique of elites, and its emotional style aimed at ordinary people draws unmotivated and previously excluded people into the political arena.” Kurt Weyland sees populism as “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Torre, de la C., 2014), whereas Alan Ware argues that populism is “a political strategy deployed by a wide range of politicians” (Rueda, 2021: 168).

Scholars have also managed to define populism by examining the causes or the context from which it emerges. For example, Traverso stated that there is a presumption that neoliberalism is the norm and therefore anything that opposes it [neoliberalism], is instantly perceived as populism (Pappas, 2022). There is also a perception that the traditional left – right axis, ceased to exist, thus being a meaningless division and so, according to neoliberals any attempt of preservation of the right and the left is *passé* and those who refuse to conform to this “*iron reality*” are populists (Pappas, 2022). Inglehart and Norris use the ‘left – right spectrum’ to measure populist parties that are pro-free market, and those who are pro-state intervention. To the above approaches Mouffe adds that neoliberalism is not necessarily excluded from populism (Konakçı, 2022), suggesting that even neoliberals could be populists.

Despite that there is not a single definition of populism, scholars define populism based on some fixed criteria. One of the definitions that derive from this method is the distinction of inclusionary and exclusionary populism. Mudde and Kaltwasser, (2013: 148) argue that populism is in fact both of those types – populism is simultaneously both inclusive and exclusive. However, inclusive populism, also known as left-wing, is mostly encountered in Latin America, whereas

exclusive populism, also known as right-wing, is predominant in the western sphere – meaning USA and Europe (Caiani, Graziano, 2022). There was a theory introduced by Filc, according to which populism can be defined either as inclusive or exclusive, based on three parameters: material, political and symbolical. The material aspect focuses on welfare and beneficiary policies, answering the question of: “who is benefited by such policies?”. The political aspect is about people’s participation – “who has the right to vote and who is excluded from any democratic process, or who lacks representation?”. As of last, symbolical aspect’s main focus is on discourse – the construction of the “us and them” dipole – in which simultaneously, when one pole is created, the other is formed *ex negativo* (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013: 158 – 167).

Since the mid-19th century, populism has been used to describe: “the will of a homogenous people opposing the elites in a variety of areas”, but primarily in the area of the economy (Jacob & Schapkow, 2022). Contemporary populism of the 21st century is linked with nationalism, especially in the western sphere. A rise of nationalist populist leaders is observed in Europe as well as in the USA (for example: the Trump’s case). Nationalist populism according to Jacob and Schapkow (2022): “is a rhetoric related to a nationalism that is rather secessionist and wants to create a new and independent nation state based on the demand of the cleaved nation. Or it’s a rhetoric that dislikes the idea of multiculturalism and intends to homogenize the people who share a nation.” So naturally, nationalist populism falls undoubtedly into exclusive populism, as nationalism is exclusive by nature with its tendency to be more violent towards minorities (either ethnic, sexual, religious etc.), in contrast with inclusive populism. Unlike exclusive, inclusive populism has achieved something unique – it’s given ‘voice’ to the previously socially and politically excluded and that is the main reason of why populism is considered by some scholars more as a democratizing force (Torre, de la C., 2007), than a threat to democracy.

When one hears about nationalist populism, they might think of authoritarian regimes, or even fascism. It is important to note that populism is a distinct phenomenon from both authoritarianism and fascism. However, more commonly exclusive populism (right-wing populism) does share a very small amount of characteristics with fascism. It is true, that in both cases, there is a ‘charismatic’ leader that claims to be the vocal of his people, yet the main difference lies in the factor of the use of violence. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century fascism, we had the glorification of violence, while in the 21<sup>st</sup> century populism, violence is neither glorified, nor



encouraged by the populists, as it is a phenomenon not widely accepted, due to the great progress made in defending human rights (Jacob & Schapkow, 2022) and maintaining peace. In this context populism – wherever it appears – can be considered as an index of the democratic setbacks and dysfunctionalities of liberal democracies – the same dysfunctionalities that had previously led to fascism and the dictatorships of the 20th century (Pappas, 2022).

Apart from the above, the very core of populism, based on the *pueblo*<sup>1</sup> variant, lies in the us – them cleavage. Populism has a rather Manichaeic approach to reality. Manichaeism according to Britannica (2019): “held that the world was a fusion of spirit and matter, the original principles of good and evil, and that the fallen soul was trapped in the evil material world and could reach the transcendent world only by way of the spirit”. Utilizing the Manichaeic dogma, populism conveys the notion of evil and soul imprisonment to the oligarchs (elites) and therefore the people are the ‘soul’ that needs to be transcended and free of the corrupt and ill ‘bodies’ (i.e.: the current status quo of corruption and abuse of the people by the treacherous elites) by the way of the spirit, which is populism. So, following the core of the populist narrative, there is a dipole that moves along the us – them cleavage where:

- us: the people, the working class who are simple, virtuous and deceived, strapped of their true power, distinguished from
- them: the oligarchy, a venal, self-interested elite, who control the levers of socio-political power and therefore manipulate the people in a way that preserves their power over them. In this side of the cleavage a deviant underclass is also included, who is depicted as ‘parasites’ or ‘spongers’ (Singh, 2021).

An interesting note is the argument that elitism on the other hand, is based on Manichaeic beliefs as well, but inverted. Elitism sees the people as vile, immoral, pretentious and of low quality, which in retrospect makes the elites entities, as a whole, superior to *el pueblo*. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013: 152)

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<sup>1</sup> *El pueblo* is a Spanish word that signifies four things: a) the Indian villages, b) a communal structure used by the Indians of the Southeastern North America, c) a village or a town, and finally d) the people. (Dictionary, n.d.). It seems that *el pueblo* is closely linked with the Indians, however in this dissertation the word is used according to the fourth defining term, to indicate the people.

In exclusionary – nationalist populism, the key element is nativism (Konakçı, 2022.). Based on Anderson, nation is in fact an ‘imagined community’ since nation can be any group that claims its right to be perceived as such. For Eley and Sunny both nations and states claim land (Hague, Harrop and McCormik, 2020) so, a nation has or seeks sovereign control of a historic homeland and thus nationalism is an aspiration for and/or allegiance to such a national political community (Singh, 2021). For Ernest Renan nation is:

“a soul, a spiritual principle,” based on a shared past and the consensus of the people in the present. “[t]he nation, like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice, and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are” (Jacob, 2022).

Nativism is the qualitative distinction between nation and ethnic groups or races, for only nation is directly tied to a specific part of land (Hague, Harrop and McCormik, 2020). According to Singh (2021):

“The outgroup for nations is, by definition, other nations because the nation, especially in its present Westphalian marriage with the state, is a territorial identity, the out-group takes on a literal meaning”. “Similarly, nationalism’s boundary separates not only those associated with other nations, but also the so-called “insider outsiders.” As “second-class citizens,” nationalism’s “insider outsiders” are placed in an unequal hierarchical position to “true,” prototypical citizens.” (Singh, 2021)

This was the core of Trump’s narrative during the 2016 US Presidential elections, that targeted especially the Hispanics, making them appear as a threat for USA’s welfare at the time. Hence by introducing nativism, right-wing populist define as ‘them’ [the us – them dipole] not only those who hold power and control the institutions, but also entire ethnic or other social groups according to nationalistic criteria.

Additionally, according to post-structuralism, the term: ‘the people’ is fundamentally vague and elastic. According to Laclau: “as operating in populist discourses [the people] is never a primary datum but a construct—populist discourse does not simply express some kind of original popular identity; it actually constitutes the latter.” (Torre, de la C., 2017). Based on Laclau’s

argument, which also is in agreement with the post-structuralist ideology, it is quite evident that both us – them categories are a pure construct of people and don't constitute a *de facto* basis upon which reality takes place.

In the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the link between populism and nationalism has strengthened (Jacob & Schapkow, 2022), but one of the key differences between them is that in populism 'us' is represented by a strong leader, whereas in the nationalist ideology the leader is weaker – it's not a so person-centered ideology as populism (Singh, 2021). Strong leadership is another key element of populism, strongly proven in Latin America, where populism was expressed by strong leaders, such as Chávez, Morales, Fujimori, Correa, Perón and Ortega. Maybe that's part of the reason why according to Singh (2021), Stavrakakis et al. argue that based on their definition Europe's anti-immigrant parties are fundamentally nationalist and not really populist. In contrast to this claim, Müller suggests that leaders such as Orbán, Modi, and Trump are not nationalists, but rather 'populist *poseurs*.' (Singh, 2021).

Drawing from the above, it seems that academia's interest in populism progressively becomes even more frequent, as populism is a steadily growing and spreading phenomenon globally, due to the consecutive crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that make populism to be perceived mostly as a threat to liberal democracies. This is the main reason why populism became the subject of this dissertation, as an attempt to gather various academic sources and to provide an essay for any new scholar that would like to be introduced into this evolving phenomenon. However, for the sake of time and space this dissertation will not delve into all the forms of populism, but it will focus more in the distinction between inclusionary and exclusionary, examining both Latin America and Western populism respectively. The following analysis is not temporally, but spatially defined, as the objective is to pinpoint the important features and parameters of both inclusionary and exclusionary populism, as presented by the academia, starting off with Latin America and then moving forward to the Western populism. To do so, I will use various study cases, both for Latin American and Western populism, with the latter mostly focused on Europe, in order to provide a more well-established context, to better comprehend the similarities and differences of both forms.

Therefore, the dissertation's main part is divided in two chapters and the structure is as follows: The 1<sup>st</sup> chapter is going to present the inclusionary populism using the case of Latin America, mentioning all populist phases, as presented by the academia. The 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter will

present the exclusionary populism, which takes place in Europe and Northern America [hereinafter: USA], delving deeper into the terminology of the nation, as it is the primary term, from which nativism – the backbone of exclusionary populism – derives. In the second chapter there is also a brief mention to the Jagers and Walgrave's (2006) approach on populism – populism as a political communication style, as it examines the impact of social media on contemporary politics and how it relates to populism in the advanced liberal democracies. This interaction between politics and social media is the concluding point of the main part, presenting Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti's (2021), work on *technopopulism*, which is more of an approach towards the new political reality in advanced democracies, rather than an approach on populism *per se*.

## Latin American Populism

Latin America is characterized by its inclusionary left-wing populism. However, according to de la Torre (2017) there are subtypes of populism in the case of Latin America. He distinguishes: classical, neoliberal, and radical populism as three different phases that took place in the post-colonial continent. Although he argues that the classical populism era took place in the 1930s to 1950s, it is believed that populism first appeared during the pre-classical populism era, roughly around Bolívar's era [in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century] under the name: *caudillos*<sup>2</sup>. Bolívar<sup>3</sup> was in favor of the unification of all Hispanic America, but his vision fell apart, as the short-lived Gran Colombia<sup>4</sup> dissolved with Bolívar's departure in the 1830 and the rise of *caudillos* to power, signifying the start of *caudillismo* era, which lasted till the early 20th century. *Caudillos* emerged from the civil wars and the socioeconomic problems these countries went through. They were authoritarian, populist and charismatic leaders connected to the military (Saylor Academy, n.d.).

*Caudillismo* is not unfamiliar with anarchism nor authoritarianism, due to their separatist nature (Saylor Academy, n.d.), but also due to the emphasis given to the militarization of politics as a corollary of the wars of independence, as well as their insistence on monarchical tradition. All in all, *caudillismo* indicates a dictatorship, as in both cases there is a paternalistic relationship between the leader and the subordinates (De Riz, 2015). In the early independence era, according to Heywood (2007: 351) nationalism was trending, as it happened likewise to emerging post-colonial regimes in Africa and Asia, Latin America's countries adopted nationalism (naturally, as it proved to be a necessary tool for the assertion of independence) but nationalism was accompanied by a socialist ideology. Heywood highlights that there was a tendency towards anarchy in the nation-making phase, which however gradually ceased and was succeeded by authoritarianism (Heywood, 2007: 341).

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<sup>2</sup> *Caudillos* based on the Oxford Reference, derives from the Latin word *capitellum*, which means head and therefore it means: "a boss, or a leader of a politically distinctive territory". Therefore, it is a reference to the political personas, usually of military background, that surfaced after the Independence Wars of Latin America in the 1810 (González, n.d.) A *caudillo* is basically a dictator.

<sup>3</sup> Venezuelan military and political leader and major revolutionary figure of the independence wars of Latin America, after the dissolution of the Spanish Empire in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Masur, G. Straussmann, 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Founded in 1819 by the Congress of Angostura, Gran Colombia included Venezuela, Panama and Ecuador and governed by Bolívar. After its fall Gran Colombia, under Bolívar's instructions was divided into four jurisdictions, ruled by Venezuelan officials with both military and civil power (Britannica, 2020)

*Caudillos* share a fair amount of characteristics with populist leaders, notwithstanding the political framework from which they emerged. However, given their accessibility to weaponry, as well as their military “*motif*” they are more akin to dictators than populist leaders, as academia defines populists as men (primarily) who surface in times of turbulence in a democratic domain. Undoubtedly so, *caudillos* seemed to be the first regime that took place in the Latin American region, hence introducing Latin American people to the – at the time – newly established nation-state.

Juan Perón in Argentina is an example of *caudillos*’ legacy and falls into de la Torre’s (2017) era of classical populism. Perón was a military general before his involvement in politics (McGann, 2023) and he became one of the most effective populist leaders in the continent, although some classify him more as a dictator than a populist. The above lies with the fact that Perónism stood for a more conservative and authoritarian agenda, which stressed matters such as [civil] order and national unity. Despite his conservative views and politics, and despite the fact that one often can come across Perón as a dictator, he was undoubtedly characterized as a populist leader, due to the way he succeeded in assuming power.

Perón came into power in 1946 and ruled consecutively until 1955 (Heywood, 2007: 169) after a mass protest of thousands of people (1945) demanding his return, as he had previously been forced to leave the political scene. This movement became known as *los descamisados*, due to the extreme hot weather that forced numerous people to take off their shirts during the day of the protest. *Los descamisados* in Argentina, alike other committed followers of a political figure elsewhere, played a major role in the political course of Latin American countries that were under the leadership and influence of a populist leader (O’ Neil, 2018). That is the main reason why Perón is considered as a populist leader, because he rose to power after a strong popular demand. Another reason lies in the fact that Peronism served the people and he followed a political practice, which stemmed from people’s will for economic development and general progress along with their opposition to the ‘Yankees’<sup>5</sup> (Zanatta, 2006). As found in Heywood (2007) this political practice did everything but weaken the conservative elites of Argentina with a simultaneous

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<sup>5</sup> Yankees is a reference primarily to the natives or citizens of North America or more precisely to the citizens or natives of the New England States of the US: Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut, as it is a term appointed to Federal and Northern soldiers, by the Southerners, during the American Civil War (1861 – 65). It is used to indicate a person of shrewdness, thrift, ingenuity, and conservative traits (Britannica, 2024)

promotion of a conservative nationalism. All in all, Perónism sometimes is considered closer to fascism, than to conservatism and that can be explained by the populist regimes, which have their fair share of common characteristics with fascism or other forms of authoritarian regimes, yet populist regimes are different from them.

According to Marzetti and Spruk (2022) Perón's regime caused Argentina a major backsliding, in regards to economy, due to extensive centralization model with a limitation of entrepreneurship, that gradually led the country to transition from one of the most economically developed countries in the World – especially prior to WW I – to the group of underdeveloped countries. It is true that after independence and until 1910 Argentina was one of the most powerful (economically speaking) countries and a big antagonist of the US. This was a result of the constitutional model, which Argentina adopted in 1853 and was modeled after the US one – meaning that it foresaw constitutions, checks and balances, rule of law and economic freedom (Marzetti and Spruk, 2022). Especially in the years between 1914 – 1945 there was rapid industrialization across the continent, the working class doubled and society failed to adapt to the rapid changes (O' Neil, 2018). That gap created a crisis, which was the green light for the emergence of populist leaders. Perón's policies aimed to benefit the working class with wage increases as well as with social benefits. He followed a strictly centralized model, by nationalizing railroads and other utilities while funding large scale public infrastructure. His regime ended with his death in 1974 and finally collapsed in 1975, when another coup took place installing another military junta (McGann, 2023).

During the Cold War Era, Latin America had been a continent plagued by dictatorships. These dictatorships were imposed on Latin American countries by N. America, with the first change of regime taking place in 1954, when the CIA overthrew the democratically elected president of Guatemala and installed Carlos Castillo Armas instead, in order for the US to win the fight against communism, despite the fact that they previously supported Batista's regime in Cuba. In 1963, the democratically elected president of the Dominican Republic was overthrown by the military junta. In 1978 the Somoza family, a U.S. backed-political dynasty in Nicaragua that ruled from 1936 – 1976 assassinated Pedro Joaquin Chamorro who strongly opposed the Somoza regime. In 1979 Somoza regime was ousted by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (KCET, 2018). Through these regimes N. America's involvement grew, but finally collapsed progressively

around the 1980s, when Latin American countries fought for their autonomy once more (Blanton Museum of Art, n.d.).

In the 1980s Latin America entered the third democratization movement, by the gradual dissolution of the previously established dictatorships (Hague, Harrop, McCormik, 2020), which [democratization] was followed by recession and subsequently paved the way for neoliberal populism. Populists surfaced after the 1980s crisis which was characterized by economic stagnation, followed by austerity measures imposed by western neo-liberal organizations like the IMF and the World Bank (Roberts, 2013). This is a crucial era for the populist movement in Latin America. These imposed measures were ‘translated’ to the public as the foe, the oligarchy who came from abroad and was in cooperation with the domestic elite, who in their turn proceeded in actions of oppression, against peoples’ interests. This march towards globalization – through global neo-liberal institutions and with United Kingdom and the US as the leading forces (Coronil, n.d.) – could be an event that triggers the collective memory by referring to the colonial era, therefore easily communicated by the populists as an attempt of neo-colonization. It was easy for any leader to point the finger at these institutions and impute to them the character of evil, especially at times when people's discontent and frustration due to the drop of living standards, is on the rise.

According to de la Torre (2017) neoliberal populism rises after the crisis. Fujimori is an instance of the second wave, along with Abdalá Bucaram, Fernando Collor de Mello and Carlos Menem. The rise of the second wave of populist leaders is similar to the first, regarding the framework from which the second wave emerged. Similarly, to the first wave the second one emerged too in a time when people's discontent was on the rise due to socioeconomic problems, although there was a significant difference – these leaders were not linked to the military, as was the case in the first populist wave. Another important factor was that in comparison to the first wave, Latin America had just restored its democracies after a long period of dictatorships and officially managed to enter its democratization era.

Fujimori did not implement any redistributive policies and did not significantly improve the level of poverty, as there was no material integration of the lower strata, as was the case in Venezuela for example in the radical wave. However, Fujimori used the revenues from privatizations, which had arisen in the previous period, increasing public benefits, under clientelism, and as a result managed to restore growth by stopping hyperinflation (Levitsky,



Loxton, 2013). Fernando Collor's economic agenda encompassed several measures aimed at transforming the economy, but he didn't wish for a centralized economic model. He followed a more liberal, neo-liberal agenda, with minimum state intervention. As of that, the measures he proposed involved initiating economic liberalization, privatizing industries, implementing fiscal reforms, dismantling entrenched cartels and public corporation monopolies, and undertaking extensive administrative reform (Valença, 2002).

Both Fujimori and Abdalá Bucaram of Ecuador served as strong symbols of people's disapproval towards the white oligarchy (Torre, de la C., 2017), as they both were not of 'white' race. In the case of Fujimori, he was an outsider who didn't have any political ties – a marginalized Peruvian, as a second-generation migrant, similarly to the case of Bucaram, who was of an immigrant family originated from Lebanon (Tikkanen, 2024). Despite the fact that both cases did not benefit the Peruvians nor Ecuadorians economically – as the wave of neoliberal populism failed to provide a solution to any economic problem and most importantly to significantly improve people's living standards – their personal traits, regarding their origins served as a great symbolism of rejection of the traditional elites and political parties, as *de facto* they could not identify as the established – white – elites.

The inclusion of a large proportion of the masses lies within the fact that, Fujimori himself, as a Japanese migrant was closer to the people and especially the working class. The Peruvian working class was constituted by *cholos*<sup>6</sup> and despite the fact that he was anywhere near dark skin, he managed to be close to their heart. His government consisted of San Román – who was *mestizo*<sup>7</sup> και τον García who is partially of African descent. As a result, Fujimori became chairman of a scheme: *Chinos, Cholos, Negros*, which distanced his government from the white elite. This scheme served Fujimori in the symbolic instance of Filc's criteria as well, because he too was based on a Manichaeic rhetoric which separated the *blanquitos* (white – elite) of the working class of the *cholos* (Levitsky, Loxton, 2013).

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<sup>6</sup> Dark skinned working class, lower strata. Used as an insult towards individuals of mixed race, Indigenous descent. Inca Garcilaso De la Vega writes (in Spanish) "*The child of a Black male and an Indian female, or of an Indian male and Black female, they call mulato and mulata. The children of these they call cholos.*" (1609, p. 504) [translated]. Available at: <http://shemer.mslib.huji.ac.il/lib/W/ebooks/001531300.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> One of mixed race, of Spanish and Indigenous descent. (Inca Garcilaso De la Vega, 1609, p. 505).

Radical populism emerged right after the neoliberal wreck of the 90s. Amidst battered societies, populist leaders revived socialism with a revolting fist and a spirit of struggle. The socialist model they suggested was not identical to the Soviet one, but it was the third – way to ‘success’ (Torre, de la C., 2016). The core of their proposal lies in distributional policies, which are the aim of a social democracy, to guarantee a fair and equal distribution of the produced wealth (Heywood, 2007: 263). Redistributive policies were vital in a growing polarized society with *el pueblo* on one hand, and the corrupt oligarchy on the other. For the radical populism era, I will draw my examples from Hugo Chávez of Venezuela and Rafael Correa of Ecuador.

Chávez is one of the most influential populist leaders globally and considered to be the successor of Perón (Roberts, 2013). His first acquaintance with the Venezuelan public occurred after the failed coup he attempted against the Pérez government in the early 1990s (Nelson, 2019), who later stepped down as he was found guilty with corruption. As of that, he remained in prison until 1994, when under Caldera’s government he was released. He organized himself more strategically, building the party MVR in order to run for the 1999 presidential elections. He took over the presidency of Venezuela in February 1999 (Nelson, 2019), having secured an astounding 56.2% of the votes (Roberts, 2013). Between 1999 – 2012 Venezuelans came to vote 16 times and during voting there was no sign of electoral corruption or any violent outbursts (Torre, de la C., 2016). Chávez secured his presidential position until his death in 2013. There was only a small instance of Chávez not being in power, which happened in April 2002, when he was overthrown by a coup against him (CFR, 2022), but he resumed to his presidential duties 3 days later – in April, 14, 2002 (Nelson, 2019).

In Roberts (2013), austerity measures led to enfeebling of historical working movements, plus it perpetuated political exclusion of the lower class. Chávez implemented a system of redistributive policies and developed the welfare system to benefit the afflicted lower classes. According to CFR (2022) in 2003 for example he launched the “*Bolivarian Missions*” through which he carried out a series of projects to aid the poor, such as building houses for low-income families, providing education to reduce adult illiteracy, improving the health system etc. In order to fund his redistributive policies, Chávez implemented the centralized economy model by additionally nationalizing big industries, such as oil and steel. By doing so, he opposed business holders by seizing their properties, while rhetorically, he disparaged them as ‘Yankees’. This move

was of significant importance due to the rhetoric that grew to justify it, as nationalization was immediately linked to ‘national patrimony’ which marked the emancipation of the country from any form of colonial sovereignty over Venezuela (Singh, 2021). The attempted coup in the 11<sup>th</sup> of April 2002 (Nelson, 2019) against him took place due to his agenda on nationalizing oil affecting the state-owned company PDVSA (CFR, 2022).

Through redistributive policies the lower class was given a chance to gain access to political procedures with a coeval life status improvement. By evidently improving the quality-of-life Chávez secured the support of the masses and was given a ‘free pass’ to rule till the end of his days. In *Chávismo*, the essence of popular sovereignty lies in the inclusion of the neglected and excluded in the political processes. De la Torre (2007) argues that: “Latin American populists have privileged notions of democracy based on the aesthetic and liturgical incorporation of common people in mass rallies more than the institutionalization of popular participation through the rule of law”. This understanding of the political participation of the masses was the scapegoat for the policy that followed regarding the establishment of institutions of a representative democratic regime (Roberts, 2013). Politically he attempted to reinvent political institutions in order to shape a new political, social and cultural environment (Torre, de la C., 2016). For Chávez the advancement of democracy relied on replacing perceived unresponsive institutions of liberal democracy with novel models of direct and participatory democracy, which stemmed from this privileged notion of democracy (Torre, de la C., 2017).

Ecuador moved in tandem with Venezuela. Both created social movements following a top-down structure. In Ecuador there was a top-down technocratic populism scheme, while in Venezuela there was a top-down participatory populism. Ecuador was severely hit by the crisis of 1980s – 1990s, which led to giving up their currency and adopting the US dollar instead (Torre, de la C., 2016). In the years previous to Correa’s election in 2006, there was a chronic turbulence in Ecuador, which started in 1997. Correa founded the socialist Alianza PAÍS party (Higgins, 2021) and was elected with an agenda against neoliberalism and with a promise to restore the state’s sovereignty (Torre, de la C., 2017). He ruled for ten years (2007 – 2017) making a difference to the Ecuadorean scene, according to a plethora of reports on Ecuador, such as Beittel’s (2023) report for the Congressional Research Service.

As mentioned above Venezuela and Ecuador had a lot in common, with the first commonality being the authoritarian nature of Chávez and Correa's rule. Similarly, to Venezuela and Bolivia, Correa's government established institutions which determined that the country's political system would be based on elections, but at the same time concentrated power in the hands of the President (Torre de la, C., 2016). Correa applied a post-neo-liberal agenda, which was based off an indigenous concept – *sumak kawsay (Buen Vivir)* (Sánchez and Polga-Hecimovich, 2019) – and he supported that: “Markets should be subject to societies, not the other way around,” (Britannica, 2019). He was pro-state intervention, so he established a bureaucratic system to ensure the implementation of policies that were centrally planned (Sánchez and Polga-Hecimovich, 2019). Based on this idea he nationalized some companies, as well as he took some media outlets under his control, he boosted public health and education improving the overall quality of life (Britannica, 2019), as the annual *per capita* growth reached 1.5%, showing an increase – between 2006 – 2016 of 0.9% compared to the previous 26 years, when per capita growth was 0.6% (Center for Economic Policy and Research, 2017). He notably reduced poverty in Ecuador, during his decade long presidential term, but in a progressively, authoritarian manner (Beittel, 2023), especially after the austerity measures, he imposed in 2010 (Britannica 2019).

A second commonality is their involvement in the media, affecting free speech. Both Correa and Chávez built their personas through media, which were under state control in order to secure their alignment with the government. As all populists, they opposed and suppressed privately owned media. In order to assert control over the media landscape they produced legislation to regulate the published content of private media outlets, something that naturally increased the levels of censorship. Furthermore, they imposed penalties on journalists and media owners for any perceived violations, leading to a decline in the level of quality of information and the gradual closure of private media venues (Torre, de la C., 2017). Through their state-owned media, they established a communication with the mass on a weekly basis, mainly informing the people about the upcoming governmental plans, maintaining their informal, straightforward style, to uphold their alignment with the rhetoric they espouse: “I am the people, not a person, or a leader” (Torre, de la C., 2017).

The state propaganda is crucial for any kind of political system, as it regularly places the people within some notional boundaries, that constitute the norm in which the current political

establishment is. The Media are the means for a government to ensure the discipline of the masses towards their leadership in question, whilst cultivating a sense of contentment with the system. For example, under Perón's rule in Argentina, Perón mobilized the entire media industry to his benefit, by making his wife Eva, an important public figure. Chávez and Correa's practices on political communication, with their weekly televisional appearances, enhanced their closeness to their people, while empowered them significantly as political personas. All these practices were followed in order for their claim of being 'the people' to be more substantiated, as they projected themselves to be close to the base, the masses, that they did not distinguish themselves as some elite. These practices are the reasons why Latin American populists are widely considered as media innovators. (Torre, de la C., 2017: 12). The same practices are observed even in the advanced democracies of the western world – growing especially through social media platforms, with more and more leaders embracing the populist political style of communication and discourse.

Populist discourse is characterized by simplicity, which not only serves adherence to the rhetoric of populism, but in this case, it also enhances its spread. Populist discourse is the backbone of the influence of populist leaders. Through the use of simple, direct and vivid speech, a leader can win the sympathy of a large part of the population, as he shakes off complex and stylized speeches, having greater appeal both to younger generations, who are now taking their first steps towards their democratic obligations, and to older ones, who prefer simplicity. It is also important to note that up to the current era, all over the world – and in this case in Latin America – older generations have higher illiteracy rates than newer ones. For example, in 2001 Ecuador had a total of 9% of the general population was recorded as illiterate (World Bank, n.d.), of which 37.2% belonged to the age group 65 and above (UNESCO, 2016).

## Western Populism

Europe's course towards populism was carried out in waves, as was the case of Latin America. Mudde (2020) divides populism into four phases: first wave starts in the interwar period, namely with the rise of Hitler in Germany, which led to the Second World War. Second wave came after the war in 1955 and lasted up 'till 1980s, when the third wave came through (1980s – 2000). The fourth and final wave that Mudde distinguishes starts in 2000 and is ongoing. As mentioned in the introduction, Europe's populism is linked with nationalism, even though in Latin America we observe that nationalism was instrumentalized as well, in order for populist leaders to prevail and implement their political vision. A crucial distinction is the fact that Latin America's nationalism was complementary to economic practices (e.g.: nationalization of hydrocarbon extraction companies), which aimed at further integration of people into the political life. On the contrary, nationalist populism of the western world is exclusionary, as it is tied with nativism which establishes the right of only one race to reside in a particular geographical location, by virtue of being descended from it (Hague, Harrop and McCormic, 2020).

Nationalism stems etymologically from the latin word *natus*, which translates in English as born, made. From the same word derives the term nativism, as well as the term nation. Nation is interwoven with the notion of self-determination, the exercise of sovereignty within the geographical boundaries in which it exists (Hague, Harrop, McCormik, 2020). On contrary, in Jacob (2022), based on Ernest Renan's definition of nation, it is argued that a nation:

“[...]is not static but is, in contrast, redefined by every new generation of people who agree to find a consensus about their own coexistence as members of a shared nation [...] A nation therefore is a set of values that are supposedly shared by the majority of people that belong to this community”.

As mentioned in the introduction, nationalism according to Jacob and Schapkow (2022): “[...] it's a rhetoric that dislikes the idea of multiculturalism and intends to homogenize the people who share a nation”. This persistence with homogenization is explained in Hague, Harrop and McCormik (2020), where they cite that: “a group becomes a nation, once it gains control over its own fate, through independence and sovereignty”.

These definitions of nation can provide the necessary context, to better understand the backbone of nationalist populism: nativism. According to Bergmann (2020), nationalist populism can be observed as a rising phenomenon after a major crisis – something that applies with the European Nationalist populist parties such as Le Pen's *Front National* (est. 1972), in France that came dynamically to the fore expressing anti-immigration attitudes and opposing to multiculturalism (Bergmann, 2020), as the aftermath of the 1973's Oil Crisis. However, there was a case in the western populism, where populist movements, that emerged after a crisis – the 2008 economic crisis in particular – were not exclusively right-wing and nationalism was utilized in a similar way to that of Latin America's.

In 2008 there was an upward trend of populist parties, particularly in the most heavily affected countries by the economic crisis. Taking as an example Spain and Greece, the populist parties that emerged (Podemos – Spain, Syriza – Greece) were left-wing and by following the Latin American populism, they objected the austerity measures imposed by the IMF and they swore to battle both the elites and corruption (Podemos, n.d.; Castaignet, 2017), utilizing the us – them populist rhetoric. Syriza was an already established political party, but it managed to rise to power in 2015 and rule until 2019, becoming the first far-left wing populist party to rule in the EU (Mason, 2015), in contrast to Podemos, which was a newly established political party in Spain and only managed to rule as a coalition government of Sánchez II – the first coalition government in Spain (Giardiello, 2023; Kassam, 2015), in 2020. The two parties expressed a kind of 'fraternal' solidarity during the elections of 2015, as an attempt to foster unity, optimism and change among the citizens of their countries respectively, while right-wing populist parties were on the rise throughout Europe.

Despite the few political examples of left-wing populism in Europe, the predominant and the most long-lasting type is the right-wing nationalist populism. Since the beginning of the New Millennium, an upward trend was observed regarding the participation of populist parties in government, starting with Slovakia and Switzerland. Over a 20-year span populist parties in governments increased to 10 cases. Such cases are: Hungary (Fidesz), Poland (Law and Justice – PiS), Italy (Five Star Movement) and Czech Republic (Ano). As junior coalition partners, in early 2021 populist parties were present in Italy (Lega), Spain (Podemos) and Switzerland (Swiss People's Party). Lastly, in Denmark, the Danish People's Party, despite not being a member of

cabinet, provided external parliamentary support to the government until 2019, and populist parties held government posts during the previous decade or so in Austria (Freedom Party of Austria – FPÖ), Greece (SYRIZA and ANEL), Norway (Progress Party) and Finland (True Finns and Blue Reform) (Caiani & Graziano, 2022). However, populism is not a new phenomenon. Le Pen's *Front National* in France is an example of the longevity of far-right populism, as it's rooted back to 1953 under the name *Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans* (UDCA) – a right-wing populist party with a fascist slant, founded by Pierre Poujade. A lot of the populist parties in the period, subsequent to the second world war, were under the fascist influence. However, in time they proved to be weak and thus were forced to move towards a more moderate right-wing status, enhancing their ability to adapt and survive within a forever changing system (Mudde, 2020).

One of the principal contemporary cases of nationalist populism in Europe is Poland. The Kaczyński twins, who founded the long ruling party – *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* – PiS (Law and Justice) in 2001 (Hartliński, 2019), surfaced on the political scene with a strong agenda against corruption and a strong support for the establishment of a law-and-order society, which is the main feature of the party (Bale, Szczerbiak., 2006: 19). In order to materialize this 'law and order' society the Kaczyńskis supported a traditional, Catholic Poland (Amann, 2005) something that according to Bale and Szczerbiak (2006) brings the PiS close to a Christian Democrat party. It's interesting that in fact, while its quite similar to this type of parties, it doesn't identify as such and while Poland is a 'solid' Catholic country – with 95% of the population being Catholic Christians – yet there wasn't any sign of a Christian Democrat party at the time, as was the case for example in Germany with the CDU.

PiS mainly ruled the country (2015 – 2023), when Jarosław came to power alone (as his brother died in 2010, in a plane crash, in Smolensk) and these theses started to materialize. Jarosław was characterized as more radical and even more right-winged than his brother, Lech, and during his governing term there was a fusion of right-wing populism ideas such as, opposition to migration, anti-EU populist rhetoric, with a real impact on policies, that came from the EU, such as anti LGBTQI+ laws (Crowcroft, 2020), or the infamous abortion ban in 2020 (Da Silva, 2022). Naturally, such progressive ideas oppose *de facto* the very nature of right-wing populism, where the top priority is the preservation of the nation and so, such ideas are perceived to be an 'invasion'. Due to the opposition towards the LGBTQI+ agenda and especially by setting in motion the



abortion ban, Poland consists a great example of how populists can also be against gender equality issues. The above can be reflected upon nativism – due to the fact that the nation is defined by values and beliefs that make one nation an individuality and therefore only a certain group of people who share these values and beliefs can reside within certain geographically defined boundaries. So, any ‘out-group’ idea that is not reflected upon the state’s *morale* (in this case the catholic, traditionalist doctrine), is automatically perceived as a threat, as the ‘other’ from whom the nation must defend itself.

Besides the agenda of gender equality, Poland is known for its infamous anti-migration policies and rhetoric. The latter, in the dawn of the Polish elections in 2023, intensified as means to gain the public’s support towards the party (Gall, 2023), and was even previously expressed within the European Parliament, by the Polish MEP Tarzycynski, who supported Poland’s migration policies against multiculturalism and any form of migration, claiming that Poland is an example state in regards to its migration policies, security and economic growth, while emphasizing xenophobic and anti-islamic sentiments, linking Islam with terrorism (AlJazeera, 2019; Video Parliament Ireland, 2023). This link between the two is the aftermath of the cultural protectionism, after 9/11, which is accompanied by a religious framework and opens up a broader debate of whether Islam is compatible or not with the Western liberal democracy (Mudde, 2012).

Based on this protectionist ‘regime’, a very important factor that contributes to the boost of the anti-migration agenda becomes apparent – fear’ which in order for xenophobic rhetoric to find resonance, but to also embed itself in society, the use of fear is necessary. When a crisis emerges a sense of panic manifests itself with almost absolute certainty, and is systematically diffused into the public. According to Müller (2022), fear is an instrument that is commonly used by populist leaders, as it generates both anger and hatred’ both a core element of nationalist populism, as necessities for the legalization of their exclusionary agenda. However, “[..] Populists in power don’t wish for societies to live in fear, something that is a characteristic of despotic governments. If they use excessive fear then they would betray their promises of being the better democrats”.

However, these feelings are not always based on actual events. For example, an important factor to the anti-migration sentiment is that it is based on the perceived and not the actual size of migration of any country given. Anti-migration sentiments occur, especially at individual level,

based on the perceived size of immigration in their countries, which affects their stance on any form of migration in general (Gorodzeisky, & Semyonov, 2020). Scholars have studied the racial prejudices of the western world against any out-group (e.g.: the ‘blacks’ in USA) and some of them like Blalok (1967) had concluded that discriminations (in the case of USA against ‘blacks’) stemmed from the fear of a change of the *status quo* – in other words, the fear that the dominant nation will lose control over its leadership and that this out-group will rise to power, even claiming resources that are perceived to belong to the nation in power (Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2015: 4). When this fear is generalized and applies to a bigger proportion of the society, then large-scale discrimination appears and can lead to violent outbursts (Pottie-Sherman & Wilkes, 2015: 5).

As an explanation on why these prejudices against migration grow within societies, data presented on Bergh & Kärnä, (2021) indicate a strong relation between populist tendencies and social welfare. They cite that in countries where spending in welfare was low, a positive relation with populism is observed, whereas in countries with high spending, the relation was negative. From this perspective, it seems that populism is like a mechanism that expresses the deficiencies of the economic system of any country given, as welfare is a key element for the affluence of a society, as it mitigates the effects of social inequality. As argued in Konakçı (2022: 140) Norris and Inglehart concluded that: “[...] losers of the modernization thesis have an immediate effect, and economic insecurities and grievances only fuel the cultural backlash, hence manifesting as anxieties against migration and the fear of failure of welfare systems due to influx of people”. In other words, resources are a backbone feature of all societies, thus an important asset becoming the core of protectionist policies, which are also expressed by the populist agenda regarding stricter policies on migration.

Populists quite frequently construct enemies within the social construct that are considered to be “*insiders-outsiders*” (i.e.: those who cannot be easily detected once inside society) and according to populism they might be an even more serious threat than the elites (Müller, 2022). As cited in Singh, (2021) a top example of “*insiders-outsiders*” – always in the context of anti-migration rhetoric – was Trump’s narrative, which targeted especially the Hispanics, who were considered a threat for USA’s welfare. In Europe this rhetoric varies, but is always focused on the migrants and refugees from Middle East, East and North Africa, who according to the nativist narrative enjoy privileges granted by the elites – privileges that belong to the dominant nation,

who feels neglected and betrayed by its political leadership. Usually, this phenomenon is strong in countries with a long tradition of migration and immigration flows, such as the Western European states, where multicultural policies are adopted, benefiting the immigrants, hence intensifying the distrust of nativists towards the governing elites (Kokkonen & Linde, 2022).

Populists by invoking a real fear (i.e.: the deprivation of resources that should normally be reserved for the natives, accompanied by a change of the status quo, with the 'out group' being the predominant power, culturally and politically) and therefore, are gaining more and more ground, especially now that both democracy and living standards are globally in decline. The annual Democracy Report published by V-Dem Institute (Nord et al. 2024), has shown that the population under autocracies has overgrown those who live under liberal democracies since 2009, with 71% living in autocratic regimes and 35% of the share of the global population live under autocratizing regimes (Nord et al., 2024: 7). Of course, as said in the Introduction, populism must not be directly related to an autocracy. However, the populist agenda (especially the nationalist populist) if implemented, then there will be severe human rights violations, particularly when it comes to migrants' rights, and the right to welfare, but also as we have seen with the Polish case, it could also extend to issues and agendas, such as the gender equality agenda.

So, it circles back to the identification of the nation – how the nation self-defines. Populist nationalists argued that the welcoming of people who represented a different culture would lead to the decline and fall of the Western World. (Jacob, 2022). This narrative is best expressed with the case of Victor Orbán in Hungary, who claims that by closing the borders to migrants and asylum seekers from the Middle East since 2015, he keeps Hungary safe from terrorism that affected Western European countries, such as France (Berman, 2021). What makes Orbán unique is that apart from him claiming to be the leader of his people, at the same time he poses as the ultimate defender of the Christian European identity, which is naturally reflected on both religion and race (Bolonyai & Campolong, 2017). So, similar to Poland's case, the migrants or asylum seekers are not compatible with the principles and values of Hungary and according to Orbán's narrative the European identity, and therefore – according to the populist narrative – are naturally excluded.

The above indicate that right-wing populism – and its leaders – face a question of identity, of who 'we are' as a nation, which they try to define, promote and protect. This question of identity

is reflected upon identity politics<sup>8</sup>. Besides Hungary with Orbán's politics, which are a clear example of identity politics, another example comes from the other side of the Atlantic, in the USA. Identity politics was the base ground for Donald Trump's electoral rally in 2016, expressing the alt-right movement, while moving in tandem with the 'us – them' rhetoric (Al Shabeb, n.d.). The United States have a long tradition of immigration and as Al Shabeb (n.d.) cites there's always been some confusion regarding the feeling, the sense of being (or being considered) a national, especially since dual nationals are a common phenomenon in the US. These dual nationals are the *insiders-outsiders* Trump targeted during his 2016 electoral campaign, with the case of the Hispanics (Singh, 2021). These dual nationals are the dilemma of whether their status as such, shows how successful, open and pro-integration the government policies are, or if these dual nationals pose a threat, as a successful example that paves way for further integration of even bigger masses of (im)migrants.

A key factor that amplifies the nationalist populist sentiment and helps with the promotion of xenophobic and anti-migration agenda is political communication. Populist political communication, is in fact one of the determinant explanations, that try to answer to the question of what populism is. As cited in Jagers and Walgrave (2007: 3) populism can be understood as:

“a political communication style of political actors that refers to the people [...] Populism, therefore, is a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people, and pretends to speak in their name. [...] More concretely, populism is a conspicuous exhibition of closeness to (ordinary) people.”

Regarding closeness, it proved to be a significant problem of contemporary politics, as supported in Cervi, Tejedor & Marín Lladó (2021), who argued that based on data, party and political commitment were in decline after the new Millennium, especially among the younger generations. However as cited, the younger generations are indeed dissatisfied with democracy, but they are not as dissociated as believed. In order to engage the youth, politicians and other political factors must

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<sup>8</sup> Identity politics based on the Stanford's Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Heyes, 2020) is: “a phrase that has come to signify a wide range of political activity and theorizing founded in the shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups. Rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context.”

adapt to the new – predominant – way of communication, popular especially among younger generations – the social media.

Social media users, as of 2024, are estimated to be around 5.17bln globally, with the youngest generations (that can also participate in the electoral system) being the most frequent users of the platforms (Shewale, 2024). In recent years they proved to be a valuable source of connectivity beyond borders, enabling social and political movements to spread in a broad audience beyond their national borders. People are able to be informed immediately about events and problems that emerge in different parts of the world, while in the same time, social media give the opportunity for movements (e.g.: BLM, environmental or equal rights movements) to form alliances and communities internationally (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020). Social media is also one of the main causes why populism is mainstreamed nowadays. As argued in Roitman, Bernal et al. (2023): “The rise of populist discourses in many countries in the last decades may have been due to changes in political communication.”. The way information can be spread more freely, thus giving the opportunity to an event to be presented, communicated to the mass, from any point of view, may work in favor of political personas (Roitman, Bernal et al., 2023), who decide to express their opinions in a plethora of current socio-political issues.

In many countries party members and party leaders emerge on the social media platforms, trying to be more appealing towards the youth. Such an example is Νέα Δημοκρατία (New Democracy) in Greece, with the Prime Minister (hereinafter: PM) Kyriakos Mitsotakis is being really active on Tik Tok, especially since he got office in 2019. His Tik Tok activities gained some popularity by the domestic media outlets, as he keeps on producing more and more videos, for the ‘bridging the gap’ between him and the citizens (iEfimerida, 2023). New Democracy is not a populist party and in the social media usage there is no anti-establishment stance expressed – as it happens in populism as a form of political communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), yet it serves perfectly as a good example of how social media are being used by politicians, who are not necessarily populist, but use a popular means of communication to create an illusion of closeness, by building rapport with the ‘ordinary’ people they serve.

This trend is also evident in various countries, such as Ireland, where the current Prime Minister (Irish term: *Taoiseach*) and head of the Fine Gael party – Simon Harris, not only is the youngest PM in the history of Ireland, but is also characterized as the first Tik Tok premier of the

country (Pogatchnik, 2024), as he rose to power thanks to the popularity he gained through the media. In Spain, where the majority of political parties are active on social media, the first among all of them, in terms of activity and followers, is Podemos, who together with Vox gather the majority of their supporters from younger generations (Cervi, Tejedor & Marín Lladó, 2021: 269), altogether strongly supporting the argument that social media play a more and more important role in the shaping of the contemporary political reality.

Despite the gains of new technologies, social media are also closely tied with the spread of post-truth politics as well as fake news (Flew & Iosifidis, 2020), something that can be attributed to the fact that news displayed do not come from the ‘real news’ outlets that are oftenly under governmental supervision. However, being under some kind of governmental supervision does not guarantee in any way the ‘realness’ of information and the not spreading of propaganda. Through this phenomenon, a new approach towards populism grows within academia, the so called *technopopulism*, which can be found in Deseriis (2017) who cites:

“Technopopulism is the belief that the “government of the people, by the people, for the people” (Lincoln 1953 [1863]) is achievable by means of information communications technology. The term belief denotes here an ideology, not in the Marxian sense of false consciousness, but in the Althusserian sense of a set of ideas that have a material existence (Althusser 1971).”.

It seems that this type of populism is based on *technoliberalism*, who expresses a blind faith of people to the technological advancement, in the free-market framework, accompanied by a strict bureaucratic system of authority (Deseriis, 2017).

Despite Althusser’s approach on technopopulism (Deseriis, 2017), in Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2021: 3 – 8), technopopulism is described as: “the new logic of political action based on the combination of populist and technocratic traits”, which is also a historically specific phenomenon. Bickerton and Accetti (2021: 5) observed a shift – in advanced democracies – from the classic division of left – right political ideologies, to a political competition that’s based on appeals to the people – on one hand – and appeals to expertise on the other’ in other words that the political competition transformed in a way that represents populism (appeal to the people) and technocracy (appeal to expertise). But, in comparison to the old dipole of left – right axis, populism

and technocratic traits are not necessarily opposed to one another, but on the contrary, they can be considered as complementary to one-another. Additionally, both those phenomena are applied to the existing left and right political ideologies, thus becoming more of a means that enhances the political appeal of any party given. To support their argument in their introduction, they supported that even Emmanuel Macron is a case that falls into this new approach of technopopulism, as they argue that he too used populist means, which boosted and secured his rise to power in 2016.

All in all, technopopulism for them is not focused so much with the social media, or the new technologies *per se*, rather than how the political and policy making factors (political parties, NGOs, or any social group) uses these instruments – technocracy and populism – to their benefit. One of the best examples to better understand technopopulism as they define it is the case of the M5S (Five Star Movement) party of Italy. The M5S was founded by Beppe Grillo and Gianroberto Casaleggio in 2009 and in within a ten-year span rose so much so they secured their place in coalition governments during 2018 – 2021. The suggesting trait that makes M5S undeniably populist can be located not only that they self-identify to be standing as ‘above and beyond’ the left-right axis (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021: 50), but mostly in the way they utilize their connection to the electorate through the use of the World Wide Web. By accessing the cyber-space, the M5S claims to have an unmediated relationship with the people, that grants the party the privilege to have access to the ‘collective intelligence’ – meaning the special competence or expertise of the ordinary citizen, who – in this way – works in favor for a policy making by the people and for the people (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021: 4-5). Conclusively, the M5S manifests a ‘technopopulism from below’, or a ‘technopopulism through the electoral base’, by introducing the concept of citizens-experts, enhancing the narrative of the true, unmediated democracy from and for the people (Bickerton & Accetti, 2021: 5; 51).

It would be plausible to say that the overall course of populism in the Western sphere indicates a great confusion, which is the result both of successive crises and of the new technologies that are altering the landscape ever more drastically. It is a possible hypothesis that this shift from the traditional political ideological debate (left-right axis) to the new logic of political action taken, which mainstreams populism, in tandem with a widespread access to information spread mainly through the internet (technocratic traits), is one of the reasons why, as cited in Kokkonen & Linde (2022) – in advanced democracies – nativists are not pleased with

electoral outcomes, even if they are on the winning side, electorally and therefore remain a steady 'force' within the society.



## Conclusions

As of the above, populism not only poses as a multifaceted phenomenon, but also seems to be more and more prevalent in contemporary politics. As presented, it is a phenomenon that despite the many attempts to approach the core of what populism is, it is still in process, growing and evolving, introducing new approaches on what it is. This dissertation examined two forms of populism the inclusionary – exclusionary type, providing with cases from both the broader Latin American and the western space, as a way to better comprehend the effect of populism in the contemporary era. Based on the research presented, it is safe to suggest that, while the two are examined as separate phenomena, it is observed that inclusionary populism – at its core – exhibits both diversities and similarities with exclusionary populism and vice-versa. Before moving on to the presentation of the similarities and the diversities, one thing must be stressed – that the common ground for both inclusive and exclusive populism to emerge and gradually take root – is crises.

Taking as example the Latin American case, crisis and inequality are key factors that in every wave (classic, neoliberal and radical) contributed to the rise of populist leaders. Similarly, so, and according to Bergman's theory, nationalist populism emerges as the aftermath of a major crisis, as the Oil Crisis of 1973, or the migration crisis of 2015. Crisis and inequalities highlight the importance of the living standards (i.e. the quality-of-life), as a common and vital factor, that contributes to the rise of both inclusionary and exclusionary populism. As proven by both cases, globalization was a shock that seemingly many countries could not 'digest' properly, either because they were on the 'losing end' of globalization, or because in time – and after subsequent crises – even in the 'winning end' the quality of life started to decline, significantly so, that a need for the construction of new enemies emerged, boosting populist figures even in well-established democracies.

This tendency of constructing enemies in the exclusionary populism could be therefore, understood as a way of defusing socioeconomic oppression. On the contrary, in the case of inclusionary populism, the construction of enemies is more of a product of a century-long political culture, that had been cultivated throughout Latin America and by this I refer to the impact of the colonial past combined with the long era of dictatorships and turmoil that succeeded the colonial rule, as another key factor that completely shaped the region, similarly to the rest ex-colonies. Latin America was and still is characterized by weak democracies and as proven by academics,

mainly due to the fact that during the first phase of the nation-state making, *caudillos* ruled the region, making it harder for a liberal democracy to be established. On the contrary, the western countries are characterized by strong liberal democracies, so much so, that they pave way for the rest of the world to abide by the rules and norms that are the foundations of a liberal democratic system.

The latter is of major importance, as especially after the 1980s, the Anglo-Saxonic axis initiated a global system of ‘checks and balances’, with the introduction of IMF and the World Bank. Both those institutions were and still are targeted by populist leaders, especially in countries, that suffered the economic policies imposed by them – either located in countries of inclusionary or exclusionary populism. This negative socioeconomic effect generated by them triggers memories of the colonial past [in the case of Latin America], a memory that is being kept alive up to this day, especially by the hostility being fostered against the USA, who is perceived as the major foe in the area. However, this perception is not unsubstantiated as proven by the fact that especially during the Cold War Era, the US had an active role in the broader South American region, being responsible for the dictatorships that enhanced this ‘*privileged notion of democracy*’, while simultaneously plagued and worsened the democratic conditions and living standards of many countries in the area. The colonial past therefore, may be one of the most impactful factors that differentiates the inclusionary from the exclusionary populism.

Colonialism also works in favor of social inclusion. If we were to briefly examine populism under the prism of colonialism, we could justify why inclusionary populism was the predominant type of Latin America and not the case of Europe for example, as people of certain race and therefore economic status were excluded by the political life by not having access to political rights, which perpetuated bad living conditions for a large proportion of people. So, the inclusionary aimed to demolish and ultimately re-invent the political structure by integrating the people, who were previously left out, making inclusionary populism a means of democratization and equality. In the western space, populism is considered a secessionist instrument that tries to stripe people off of their political rights – people, who commonly are of a certain race and religion and do not fall into the ‘defined’ predominant nation that has the rights and privileges within the state.

This exclusionary trait is deeply rooted in the notion of the nation, and the self-identification highlighting the importance of nativism as a factor that cannot be overlooked. As studied by academics, there is a deep connection of exclusionary behavior with the attempt of preserving the *status quo* and more specifically the preservation of the social resources for the dominant nation of any country given. So based on that, exclusionary populism can be understood also as a kind of internal competition, which aims to secure that the social resources benefit the natives, who are by virtue the only "*legitimate*" inhabitants of the geographical area [country] in question. This persistence to the definition of a nation lies in the fact, that without this there are no states, and consequently there is no right of sovereignty over a territory, leading to leading to the collapse of the nation-state structure, creating an even greater crisis and confusion, as if this scenario were to materialise, it would mean that the world as we know it would disappear.

There lies the biggest difference of inclusionary and exclusionary populism as the latter has a strong fear of extinction, while in inclusionary populism such fear is not observed in the same way, as it's lacking nativism. Yet, there is a fear generated by populist personas, the fear of colonialism and foreign rule over the people. In order to handle fear, populists in both cases instrumentalize nationalism, which however has a differentiated scope. In the case of the exclusionary populism, due to the nature of nativism, nationalism is unavoidably utilized to boost the national sentiment, thus legitimizing any exclusive, far-right political positions it expresses, instrumentalizing the feeling of fear, which it systematically diffused into the masses. On the other hand of the equation, as proven not only in Latin America, but in the cases of left-wing populism in Europe, inclusionary populism also utilizes nationalism to its benefit, firstly by determining with an integrational style, who consists the nation, and secondly by boosting a feeling of national unity – as the people are by their nature a homogenized mass, a great whole, which has only one enemy: the corrupt elite [anyone who acts against the interests of the mass].

In both cases there is an appropriation of the mass, which is inevitably problematic – thus making populist leaders skillful deceivers, who take advantage of a usually big socioeconomic turmoil, that plagues society. Taking as an example the gradual decay of quality of life in the western space, such assumption is validated, taking as an example the rise of Trump and his really probable rise to power again, in the 2024 US Presidential Elections, scheduled to be conducted in November, or by the numerous cases that populist and far-right parties have risen in all across

European liberal democracies, during the last decade. Trump's case also serves as a prime example of identity politics by which, a group of people, who identify as a disadvantaged group and commonly populist leaders who emerge, aim to secure the political freedoms of such groups. In Trump's case this has gone hand in hand with the alt-right movement – meaning that a socially dominant group claims to be marginalized and battled from other social groups (e.g.: LGBTQI+, Muslims, blacks, Hispanics etc.).

The sense of social exclusion is very appealing and can be used as a catalyst for prolonged social unrest, especially when the economic conditions of a state do not improve, failing to provide better living conditions. Skepticism that challenges democracy is a subsequent of a such unrest and in many cases is in favor of populist political personas. This is very strongly supported by the findings of the latest Annual Democracy Report published by V-Dem Institute, that the biggest proportion of the world lives under an autocracy or an autocratizing regime and if we take the findings of V-Dem as an indicator, which reveals the trust or distrust of people in democracies and liberal acquis, it can also be related to the skepticism of the nativists in the western well-established democracies that support populists in politics. As argued, nativists are the ones, who are deeply skeptical about democracy, whether they are on the losing or winning side of an electoral procedure. Nevertheless, politicians seem to be eager to secure the support of another social group, that of the younger generations.

Younger generations seem to have sparked a lot of controversy and partially disappointment in academia, when it comes to the socio-political engagement of the youth and the participation to socio-political procedures and institutions. It seems that the younger generation is not as abstinent as it shows' in matter of fact, they seem to be engaged with politics just as much, yet through a strong engagement in social media. That's another commonality between inclusionary and exclusionary populism, as the mass media has been a strong ally of populists – as the fourth power – in both types. In Latin America there is strong evidence of the benefits of media control so much in the case of Peron in the 50s, as much so in the case of Chávez and Correa in the 2000s, who by building a strong communicative persona, they were able to penetrate deeper into the social and personal sphere of their people, thus securing their political victories for over a decade, justifying why Latin American populists were called media innovators.

Such trend seems to be openly growing in the western space, where many of the mass media seemingly are under some kind of governmental control. However, with the advancement of technology, the younger generation is almost exclusively engaged in the social media platforms and the web news. That's a brand-new challenge for politicians, who increasingly become more and more present in the cyberspace, trying to engage the younger voters. As proven by researches, such an effort is lucrative, as politicians, especially among populists, like Podemos and Vox secure the biggest proportion of the supporters from younger generations, who got to know their political positions through social media platforms. Another clear example is the case of Ireland, where the new PM rose to the chair of Fine Gael due to his TikTok popularity.

This new phenomenon, the correlation between populism and technology was described by a new approach, which is not an approach exclusively towards populism, as much as it is an approach to better understand the contemporary politics in advanced democracies. On one hand technopopulism seems to be related primarily to the approach of populism as a political communication style, then as a discourse. Surely, as proven by the rising numbers of political participation of populist parties in the national elections all across Europe, populism as a political communication style works in favor of the construction of a strong political persona. However, as mentioned above, populism – both inclusionary and exclusionary mustn't be directly linked to an autocracy as it differs from it, although it may lead to such a regime eventually, if it severely violates rule of law and human rights. The latter was proven in the case of Latin America, where populism although, in comparison to the western world is considered a democratizing force, it led to *quasi* autocracies. In the western world, such examples can only be found in Hungary and Poland, where although there wasn't an abolishment and re-invention of democratic institutions, yet the governments operate under a strict agenda with an exclusionary nuance, violating human rights that concern specific groups of people.

The last big difference between the two lies in the question set by academics regarding inclusionary and exclusionary populism: "*can populism be considered as a democratizing force or is it a threat to democracy?*" Most agree upon the fact that inclusionary populism is considered the most democratizing of the two, yet it resulted in a quasi-autocracy, plunging the countries even deeper in crises. Exclusionary on the other hand, has not shown any democratizing characteristics – on the contrary it proved to be secessionist, as within an already established liberal democracy,

violates basic human rights of social groups that do not fall into the self-defined dominant nation. In conclusion, it is understood that many definitions and approaches on populism can be found and there are a lot of aspects that can be further studied.

One such aspect is technopopulism – which was the conclusive point of the main part of the dissertation – as it could be a good starting point to further examine and better understand the conditions surrounding the current state of the political scene in the advanced western democracies. Given this approach and the hypothesis that populism is mainstream, there can be some confusion regarding the nature of populism – both inclusionary and exclusionary, as it can no longer be perceived clearly either as a beneficiary or a damaging phenomenon, just as it's the case of inclusionary populism, which has sparked a lot of controversy around its nature – if it's a beneficiary or a damaging political phenomenon.

In conclusion, it seems that populism is more relevant than ever before, as it's proven to be a growing phenomenon, both by political analyses and the researches conducted by academics all over the world. This dissertation aimed to contribute to this growing bibliography on populism, providing a brief introduction to both inclusionary and exclusionary populism, by discussing the main points of both types and concluding to the presentation of similarities and divergences between the two, especially during a time of rapid changes both culturally and politically. The main part concluded with technopopulism for two reasons: a) because it's the latest addition to the populist theory, that incorporates the current political trends, as well as the technological advancement also, as a factor of utmost importance, as it's of major influence on the political life of any regime, and b) because despite the fact that it's the latest addition to the populist political theory, it serves as a fertile ground, which creates even more queries and challenges for current and future scientists to explore and in their turn, to substantially contribute to academia.

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