

CHAPTER 1

POPULISM

An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art

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At last everyone understands that populism matters. Recent political events have brought the word “populism” to the center of discussions across the globe. And although the term has been making headlines for the last two decades, today a wave of policymakers, pundits, and scholars are gripped by this phenomenon, which both undermines and inspires democracy and therefore usually sparks partisan debates that go beyond academic circles. Yet, many of those who turn to populism for the first time start from scratch, and thus overlook the growing body of scholarly work on this topic. This impulse may make some sense, because the burgeoning literature on populism seems unwieldy. The growth of populism as a phenomenon has led to a proliferation of scholarship: country experts, specialists in comparative politics, and scholars working on normative political theory have been advancing new insights on populism. However, the literature is not as disparate as it is often made out to be. There is a coherent wealth of research that should be used and built upon. As a consequence, the main aim of the *Oxford Handbook of Populism* is to present the state of the art on this topic, and to lay out for the scholarly community not only the knowledge accumulated but also ongoing discussions and research gaps.

From a survey of the literature on populism it is apparent that there is a body of research that shares certain characteristics. First, the literature is fragmentary. The empirical work on populism is almost invariably confined to specific countries or world regions. This is partly inevitable given the costs and difficulty of cross-national and cross-regional comparisons. But what is more concerning is that national and regional studies tend to overlook populism literature focused on other places, and often treat the specificities of national and regional manifestations of populism as generalizable. This means that populism literature is not as cumulative as it should be, and it is prone to exception fallacy. Second, the literature has reached a level of maturity in that it now, across the board, has

had to focus on populism in government as well as populism as an insurgent force. Its maturity can also be seen in the gradual movement away from ad hoc theorizing on the basis of single case studies as well as in the construction of theories that aim to have validity for certain world regions and/or specific manifestations of populism, such as populist radical right parties in Western Europe. Third, populism literature has entered the mainstream of the academic debate. This reflects the reality of the political world where populism has become in some senses and some forms a frequent phenomenon. Looking at countries as diverse as Australia, Ecuador, France, Poland, Thailand, and the United States, the rise (and fall) of populist actors seems to be something that has come to stay. As a consequence, the scholarship is gaining maturity and, as we show below, with the partial exception of the US, has become a topic for all fields of political science. The final characteristic of populism scholarship is that it is bound up with practical politics. The term is used to advance or undermine political causes in the media but also sometimes within academia. In other words, the very notion of populism sparks broad discussions and therefore those who study populism are, to a certain extent, forced to engage with the political world and cannot remain removed in ivory towers.

In this introductory chapter to the *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, we are interested in offering an overview of how research on populism has evolved over time and we structure this contribution in four sections. We start by presenting a concise history of populism. After this, we analyze the development of the scholarship since the 1990s, putting special emphasis on the production of academic articles on populism in political science journals. Then we explain the organization of the Handbook and the criteria we have used for selecting the topics covered. Finally, we conclude with some reflections on the future research agenda on populism and hope that scholars will find some of these ideas attractive for their own research.

A CONCISE HISTORY OF POPULISM

The first use of the term “populism” comes from nineteenth-century political movements on both sides of the Atlantic, and we use these instances as the origin of the phenomenon. However, the origins of the term can be traced further back in time through the modern history of democratic legitimacy. If we look at states from either a sociological or a normative perspective, we can conclude that all political associations are in some way created by their members, and the government is ultimately responsive to them. Thus the people are included in any theory of legitimate government in some capacity. Yet, in the history of modern democracy “the people” emerge not only as the source of political authority, but also as a unified entity able to act and to retrieve power from government officials: *the sovereign people*. This popular ground legitimizes democratic politics, but it also paves the way for populism.

The modern theory of popular sovereignty distinguishes between the powers of the government, on the one hand, and the people as the ground of authority in the state,

on the other (Ochoa Espejo, 2011). This theory emerged from the medieval appropriation of Roman Law, which distinguished between the authority of the people and that of its magistrates (Lee, 2016). Popular sovereignty was later developed in early modern theories of representation (Tuck, 2016). But what was originally a way to separate the grounds of authority from the exercise of government, in order to keep the latter in check, became a full-blown source of tension under the assumption that the sovereign people could shake off the rule of monarchs and retrieve their power (Sabaddini, 2016). The evolution of the idea of popular sovereignty would eventually allow the creation of constitutions written in the name of the people, imagined as the ultimate source of authority in the state (Nelson, 2016). This idea of the people as the ground of authority would become a beacon for the political imagination of popular movements in every democratizing government, from the eighteenth century up to this day. The idea that “the people” can authoritatively recover power from the government to reconstitute institutions, or wrestle power from corrupt or self-serving elites, would be the ground from which the earliest movements that could be properly called “populist” emerged in the nineteenth century.

The term “populism” is now often used pejoratively. But it certainly did not have a negative connotation at the beginning.¹ It was, in English, a concept that was used about and by the members of the US People’s Party. Its use was first reported in US newspapers in 1891 and 1892 (Houwen, 2013: 39). The People’s Party displayed some of the leitmotifs of populism. It was a Southern and Western movement based on hostility to the establishment of the railroads and banks, as well as to politicians in Washington. It was also a third-party force attempting to prise apart US politics by castigating the Democratic and Republican parties as too close to each other and too tied to special interests. What they stood for has been variously interpreted by historians. Initially the Populist project was dismissed as reactionary and regressive (Hofstadter, 1955) but later scholarship has emphasized its progressive and co-operative basis (Goodwyn, 1976) and even its technical aspirations to move government from the realm of politics into being almost a technocratic process (Postel, 2007). Across the scholarship on the US People’s Party, then, we have examples of how populism is used in very different ways. For Hofstadter the term was pejorative, equating the Populists with reactionary and regressive politics. For later historians, like Goodwyn and Postel, there was both a reinterpretation of what the party stood for as progressive and communitarian and there also, in effect, a reclaiming and recasting of the term populism.

The term populism has also been used to describe the Russian movement of “going to the people” under the *narodniki* (Venturi, 1960; Walicki, 1969).² This was a movement of idealistic, revolutionary students from the cities who in the tumultuous years of the 1860s and early 1870s attempted to stir the peasantry in the countryside into overthrowing the Tsarist regime through living with and learning from them. The movement was unsuccessful, with the peasantry being suspicious and often turning the students over to the authorities. In their celebration of the untainted nature of the peasantry and with the unbridled sense that the establishment needed overturning, these Russian students shared some themes with the populists in the US. Although they had different

versions of agrarian workers—with the *narodniki* drawing on a Slavophile heritage and glorifying natural Russian rural institutions such as *obshchina* (Venturi, 1960) and the US Populists focusing on a more robustly hard-working American version of the rural workers (Goodwyn, 1976)—these were parallel versions of populism, albeit shot through with different emphases as a consequence of the different contexts in which they arose.

Although not frequently considered in the history of populism, a third form of foundational populism is the case of Boulangism in France. The notion of populism has been applied to Boulangism by commentators who place it in historical context (Hermet, 2001; 2013; Passmore, 2012; Birnbaum, 2012), by comparative scholars on populism in Europe (Betz, forthcoming; Eatwell, this volume), and by scholars seeking to trace the lineage of contemporary French populism (Winock, 1997; Wolfreys, 2012). Between 1896 and 1898 General Georges Boulanger was a key figure in the politics of the French Third Republic. He rose as an insurgent hero and his rise followed his appointment as Minister for War in 1886. He championed the workers and a resurgent nationalism and also campaigned against the parliamentary regime, looking to overturn it in favor of a radical plebiscitary republicanism (Passmore, 2012). He fled the country before elections in 1889 when he was charged with conspiracy and treason and ended up in Brussels, where he committed suicide in 1891. His campaign and rise to prominence owed much to his opposition to the existing parliamentary regime and his accusations against its corruption and disconnection from the people, and he appealed to a disparate collation of the peasants, workers, monarchists, and radical socialists (Betz, forthcoming; Passmore, 2012). His attack was on an elite still seen as largely monarchist and he advocated for a “heterodox democratic project” with a strong state and plebiscitary and integrative democracy (Betz, forthcoming).

What united the US, Russian, and French populists of the nineteenth century was their shared celebration, to differing extents, of the “true” common rural people—but this reflects the historical context and the importance given to the forms of agriculture and the rural–urban division that suffused the period. Deeper than this and as such something to be seen in later expressions of populism, these three historical examples share some of the common features of populism. There was a direct appeal to “the people” as inherently virtuous and dutiful or disadvantaged. There was also a powerful sense of opposition to an establishment that remained entrenched and a belief that democratic politics needed to be conducted differently and closer to the people. A strong sense of nationalistic or native pride permeated all three cases.³

While the three foundational cases of populism discussed above—the US People’s Party, the *narodniki*, and Boulangism—took place at the end of the nineteenth century, the emergence of populism in Latin America can be dated to the beginning of the twentieth century, in particular with the rise of Hipólito Yrigoyen in Argentina (1916 and 1922) and Arturo Alessandri in Chile (1920–1925) (Conniff, 2012; Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Although Yrigoyen and Alessandri have been analyzed as populist precursors in the region, scholars of Latin American populism have tended to distinguish different waves of populism and they usually describe the 1940s and 1950s as the

phase of "classic populism" (Conniff, 2012; de la Torre, this volume; Freidenberg, 2007; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014a).

What are the particularities of this wave of "classic populism"? There is wide consensus that with the onset of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Latin America underwent a period of significant economic decline that sparked a legitimacy crisis and demands for political incorporation (Collier and Collier, 1991; Roberts, 2008). The combination of economic hardship, rapid migration from rural to urban areas, and increasing demands for the expansion of political and social citizenship facilitated the emergence of populist leaders, who by developing a radical discourse were able to construct heterogeneous class alliances and mobilize excluded sectors of society (Drake, 1978; di Tella, 1965). Paradigmatic examples of populist leaders of this kind are Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre in Peru, José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador, and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in Colombia (de la Torre and Arnson, 2013: 14). When it comes to the usage of the concept of populism to describe this type of leadership, probably the most influential analysis is the one advanced by Gino Germani, an Italian intellectual who escaped fascism and migrated to Argentina, where he experienced at first hand the rise of Juan Domingo Perón in the 1940s. In dialogue with the work of Lipset (1960), Germani argued that the abrupt modernization process experienced by many Latin American countries during the first half of the twentieth century paved the way for the emergence of populism, which he defined as a multi-class movement that "usually includes contrasting components such as claim for equality of political rights and universal participation for the common people, but fused with some sort of authoritarianism often under charismatic leadership" (Germani, 1978: 88).

Although some scholars have employed the notion of populism to describe fascism in Europe (e.g. Gentile, 2006; Griffin, 1991; see also Eatwell, in this volume), it is perhaps the emergence of Poujadism in the 1950s in France that both marks the first modern form of European populism and, in a very practical sense, provided the basis for the more recent manifestation of populism in that country. Emerging out of an anti-tax protest, Pierre Poujade went on to form a movement (the Union de Défense des Commerçants et Artisans, UDCA) that championed the interests of small business people and of shop keepers and built on anti-establishment sentiment (Priester, 2007: 142–58). The UDCA was successful in getting deputies elected to the National Assembly in 1956 but was a spent force by the time of the subsequent elections in 1958 (Shields, 2004). One of these deputies was Jean-Marie Le Pen, who was the founder of the National Front in the 1970s, which provided the basis for a more enduring form of populism in France and a party that became a standard-bearer for right-wing populism in contemporary Europe (Rydgren, 2005).

As we noted above, populism has also been employed to describe the agrarian movements in Eastern Europe after World War I (Canovan, 1981) but it was from the late 1950s to the early 1970s that we can observe the first real development of a modern body of scholarship on populism. This can be seen in three different spheres. First, various scholars began to employ the notion of populism to pinpoint "societal problems" (Allcock, 1971). For instance, Shils (1956) maintained that populism should be considered an

ideology of popular resentment against elites whereby the people are portrayed as better than their rulers, while Dahl (1956) coined the notion of "populistic democracy" to describe a form of government that aims to maximize political equality and popular sovereignty at any cost. In turn, Kornhauser (1959) and Germani (1978) used the concept of populism to highlight how the rise of mass society involves the destruction of social bonds and the emergence of new multitudes available to be mobilized by movements at odds with elites. Another important example is the work of Lipset (1960) on political extremism that drew heavily on the US experience of populism by linking the emergence of McCarthyism back to the reactionary interpretation of the People's Party and in this way reinvested the negative connotation of populism.

Secondly, since the 1960s populism has come to be used in a number of different national and regional contexts. This is reflected not only in the work of Germani (1978) already discussed above and the influential book on dependency theory written by Cardoso and Faletto (1969), but also in other contributions with an emphasis beyond Latin America. For example, in his analysis of the electoral rise of Andreas Papandreou's Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in Greece in the late 1970s, Mouzelis (1978) claims that the latter represented a unique political force in the European context due to its populism. Mouzelis's main argument is that although PASOK presented itself as a socialist party akin to its West European counterparts, its resemblances were much stronger with Latin American populist parties that are characterized by the presence of a strong leader, whose popularity is related to his ability to mobilize excluded sectors by developing a Manichean rhetoric that distinguishes between the "bad" establishment and the "good" people. At the same time, it was also in the 1970s that Ernesto Laclau published his book *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism and Populism* (1977), in which he criticized Marxist economic determinism and built the basis of a new theoretical approach for the study of populism. In his subsequent work with Chantal Mouffe, Laclau would build on the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's work to propose, from a post-structuralist standpoint, a theory of radical democracy as the construction of political hegemonies (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

Thirdly, in 1968 there was, for the first time, a real attempt to compare usage and to try to reflect on the concept of populism itself. The conference at the London School of Economics that yielded the Ionescu and Gellner (1969) edited volume, brought together scholars from different strands. While it did not attempt, in the book form, to bring together the different scholarship on populism into a unified definition, it fostered a dialogue between scholars working on different world regions and with diverse theoretical backgrounds. This was, therefore, the first academic instance in which scholars tried to advance a truly cross-regional study of populism. It is worth noting that those who participated in this conference and the book that came out of it were not only political scientists, but also anthropologists, economists, historians, philosophers, and sociologists. This shows that the academic interest in populism has been driven by different disciplines within the social sciences and it is only since the 1980s that the political science community began to take ownership of this topic.

In fact, it was in 1982 that William Riker published the book *Liberalism Against Populism*, in which he applied social choice theory to illustrate the impossibility of realizing classical democratic views of collective action. Moreover, at the beginning of the 1980s the British political theorist Margaret Canovan (1981) wrote an influential and empirically wide-ranging book on populism per se. She did in her book what Ionescu and Gellner (1969) didn't, in attempting to draw a comprehensive overview of all instances of populism in order to discern commonalities; in the end, she produced a seven-fold typology of different variants: farmers' populism, peasants' populism, intellectuals' populism, populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, and politicians' populism. However, having drawn out the varieties, Canovan balked at identifying common traits, saying that all the variants of populism were "not reducible to a single core" (Canovan, 1981: 298).

Since the 1990s there has been a huge growth in scholarship on populism and political scientists have been at the forefront of the academic production. Taggart (2000) was an attempt to build on Canovan's general comparative approach but with an argument that drew out central features of populism, seeing it as a response to representative politics, lacking core values, and so having a chameleonic character that reflected the environment in which it arose—and always implicitly and explicitly drawing on notions of a "heartland" as an ideal of something that had been lost. But much subsequent work that was continued in this trend was focused on regions and countries and arose in response to real world developments of populism.

Two regions have particularly been affected by the growth of populism since the early 1990s: South America and Europe. After the transition from military rule to democratic regimes that took place during the 1980s, scholars interested in South American politics distinguished the formation of a new wave of populism in a set of countries of the region. Presidents such as Collor de Mello in Brazil (1990–1992), Fujimori in Peru (1990–2000), and Menem in Argentina (1989–1999) were characterized as populist actors, who in contrast to the emblematic cases of "classic populism" did not implement left-of-center social reforms, but rather favored the introduction of neoliberal policies (Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1996, 2001). The emergence of this new wave of populism sparked an original debate on not only the concept of populism, but also the ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy (e.g. Carrión, 2006; de la Torre, 2000; Gibson, 1997; Levitsky, 2003; O'Donnell, 1994; Panizza, 2000; Peruzzotti, 2001; Weyland, 1993). This academic discussion about the impact of populism on democracy has been reinforced by the configuration of a new wave of populism since the 2000s, one which is marked by the rise of radical populist projects from the left (Castañeda and Morales, 2008; de la Torre, 2007; Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). The latter have been driven by charismatic leaders such as Rafael Correa in Ecuador, Evo Morales in Bolivia, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, who have fostered major institutional reforms that seek to diminish the power of established elites and incorporate excluded sectors. Given that part of the electoral and political success of these populist projects relied on a commodity boom that has come to an end in the last few years, there is open discussion about the future of this wave of radical left populism and its legacies (Weyland, 2013).

In the case of Europe, since the beginning of the 1990s research on populism has been focused on the electoral breakthrough and persistence of populist radical right parties. The early scholarship focused on a small number of parties as insurgent forces challenging the mainstream. The French National Front blazed a trail for such parties, becoming an institutionalized political party and, more importantly, a perennial feature of French politics. But soon there were many countries with some sort of radical right populist party, and now almost all European countries have seen the rise of this party family (Art, 2011; Norris, 2005; Mudde, 2007; 2013). The causes for these parties were seen by some as a consequence of the “silent revolution” that brought to the fore post-material values across Europe (Ignazi, 1992). These have triggered the emergence of identity politics not only through Green parties that defend multiculturalism, but also through populist radical right parties that favor a nativist interpretation of who should belong to the nation. For others the focus was more on the collapse of the European postwar settlement (Taggart, 1995). For both approaches, this newly emerging form of populism on the right was matched by equivalent insurgent non-populist forces on the left of politics paralleling challenging some of the same fault lines of the postwar settlement. In fact, some scholars argue that European countries are experiencing the emergence of a new political cleavage that is centered on cultural issues and is transforming the political landscape across the region (Bornschieer, 2010; Kriesi et al., 2008). To a certain extent this holds true not only in Western Europe but also in Central and Eastern Europe (see Stanley, this volume). Nevertheless, in this region political parties are much less institutionalized than in Western Europe, and in consequence, populist forces often emerge here as a way to demonstrate dissatisfaction with the political elite, particularly because of corruption (Kriesi, 2014).

More recent scholarship on populism in Europe then began to deal with populism in new forms. The first change was the ascendancy of populist parties into parties in government. This was most dramatically started in Austria in 2000 with the entry of the Austrian Freedom Party into a coalition with the Christian Democrats. This provoked a strong reaction from other governments (Fallend and Heinisch, 2016), but more importantly it marked the breakthrough of the insurgents into the mainstream (Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015; Akkerman, de Lange, and Rooduijn, 2016). The second new form was the identification of a left-wing variant of populism in Europe. This could be seen in parties with an older lineage such as the German party called the Left (*die Linke*) and the Dutch Socialist Party (March, 2012). However, with the onset of the Great Recession a new expression of leftist populism has come to the fore: first through the emergence of anti-austerity social movements that employ a populist frame (Aslanidis, 2016) and later through the formation of leftist populist political parties demanding an end to the austerity policies that have been forced by the European Union (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). SYRIZA in Greece and PODEMOS in Spain are the paradigmatic examples of this type of “inclusionary populism” that previous to the Great Recession had been much more common in Latin America than in Europe (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). At the same time, scholars have been analyzing the impact of the

Great Recession on the political system and have identified different patterns of populist mobilization across Europe (e.g. Kriesi and Pappas, 2015).

In many ways the United States has been the home of populism. It was the site of one of the foundational moments in populism in the People's Party in the late nineteenth century and gave us the very term populism. It has also seen a whole range of populist figures throughout history even after the demise of the People's Party, with politicians like Huey Long, George Wallace, Pat Buchanan, Ross Perot, and Sarah Palin and Donald Trump through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Lowndes, this volume). Michael Kazin (1995) goes as far as to trace populism throughout US political history as an endemic feature. But for a country with a political system that both privileges populist discourse and gives rise to so many disparate populist actors, there is a dearth of systematic scholarship of populism as a contemporary phenomenon. The work on populism in the US in reality falls mainly into three categories: (1) historical works on populism, particularly oriented towards the nineteenth century (e.g. Goodwyn, 1976; 1978; Postel, 2007); (2) political critiques of the radical right, often focusing on the extremes (e.g. Lipset, 1960; Berlet and Lyons, 2000); and (3) accounts of populism as a left project of emancipation (e.g. Grattan, 2016). What is remarkable, given the incidences of populism in the US, is that there is a real lack of systematic political science scholarship and that the use of the term populism, where it is invoked, is rather casual and not linked to the study of populism elsewhere. Not by chance, one of the best studies of the populist nature of the so-called Tea Party has been written by a historian (Formisano, 2012). By contrast, the book on the Tea Party written by Skocpol and Williamson (2012) almost does not employ the concept of populism.

Before we draw some lessons from this brief overview of the history of populism, we think that it is important to present a picture of the evolution of the scholarly production on populism. The graph in Figure 1.1 shows the number of books published in English since 1890 in which the word "populism" or "populist" appears in the title.⁴ To a certain extent, this graph supports our argument that scholarship on populism started

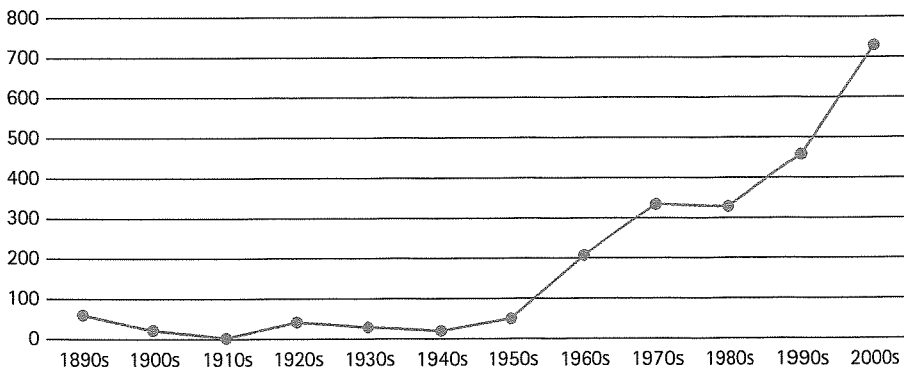


FIG. 1.1 Number of books in English in which the word "populism" or "populist" appears in the title (absolute number per decade).

to expand from the 1950s, when several scholars began to use the notion of populism to pinpoint “societal problems” and analyze different types of political forces in Latin America, Europe, and the United States. This trend toward increasing interest in the study of populism, experienced another fillip in the 1990s due to the rise of populist radical right forces in Europe and different forms of populism in the Americas. Today academic interest in populism is becoming much more global, to the point that scholars have begun to study populist forces in places such as Africa (Resnick, 2014), Asia (Mizuno and Phongpaichit, 2009), and the Middle East (Hadiz, 2016).

What does this brief overview of the history of populism tell us about the current state of the scholarship? In our opinion three key features stand out. First, we can say that there is a huge proliferation in the scholarship. There is extensive coverage of populism where it has emerged as a political force and there is certainly a broader application of the concept across the world. It is a welcome development to see that scholars are employing the term to study not only Europe and the Americas, but also many other regions. Secondly, as much of the interest in populism has been in its challenge to democratic politics and is linked to a perceived distrust of existing politics in certain segments of mass publics, so the focus on populism has become—for better or worse—very much the preserve of political scientists. Finally, despite the growth of literature and its concentration within one discipline, the study of populism still bears the hallmarks of its disparate and atomized origins. This means that the study of populism has not been recognized even by its own scholars and there has been a marked reluctance to systematically and comprehensively make use of work on populism from other regions or other historical periods. Too often the contemporary use of the term makes no reference to or acknowledgement of the existing body of work. We hope that the present volume helps to minimize this problem, as we include here chapters on populism in various regions, focused on a wide range of topics and with different analytical perspectives.

THE POLITICAL SCIENCE SCHOLARSHIP ON POPULISM SINCE 1990

While it is true that research on populism did not start just yesterday, it is important to acknowledge that the expansion of academic studies on this topic began to get greater traction starting in the 1990s. As the graph in Figure 1.1 shows, between 1990 and 2010 approximately twelve hundred books on populism were published in English and there are no signs that this trend toward increasing academic interest in populism will drop off in the near future. Nevertheless, there have been no attempts to examine how the political science community, mostly, has been studying populism. Can we identify if certain conceptual approaches are more dominant than others? Which are the methodologies that scholars prefer when it comes to studying populism? Do certain world regions receive more attention by those who are interested in populism? To answer these

types of questions, we discuss in this section a database that considers most of the articles on populism published in political science journals since 1990. This exercise does not aim to offer a perfect picture of how political scientists are analyzing the populist phenomenon. Our goal is much more modest: this is just a first attempt to examine the academic scholarship on populism in the discipline that now most focuses on it.

To accomplish this goal, we constructed a database that includes all the articles published on populism in fourteen selected journals from 1990 to 2015.⁵ With the aim of acknowledging the different approaches that exist in the discipline, we selected journals that consider the whole discipline (e.g. *American Journal of Political Science*), focus on comparative politics (e.g. *Comparative Political Studies*), and cover specific world regions (e.g. *Latin American Politics and Society* and *West European Politics*).⁶ Moreover, we opted for a very restrictive criterion for selecting the papers: we included in the database only those articles in which the word “populism” or “populist” appears in the title and/or in the abstract. Based on this criterion, the total number of articles considered in the database is 158.

The graph in Figure 1.2 shows the number of articles published across the fourteen selected journals. As can be seen, the journals where we find the largest number of contributions on the topic in question are *West European Politics* (twenty-five articles), followed by *Party Politics* (twenty-two articles) and *Government and Opposition* (twenty articles). Another aspect that is worth mentioning is that some of the most prestigious journals in political science, such as the *American Journal of Political Science* and *American Political Science Review*, have almost no publications on this topic. This is probably related to the fact that mainstream political science in the United States, in part because of the importance of the study of US politics in its own right and an emphasis on certain forms of methodological sophistication, has until very recently devoted little attention to populism. The 2016 presidential election might represent a turning point, since US scholars have argued that two candidates—Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump—can be classified as populist leaders (Hawkins, 2016; Lowndes, 2016).

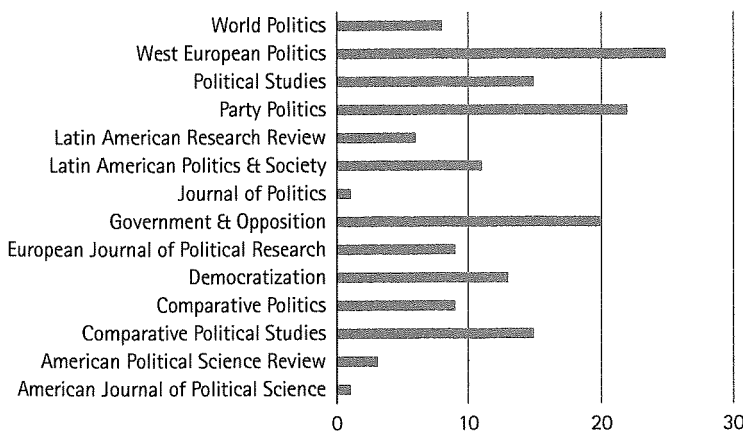


FIG. 1.2 Number of articles on populism, 1990–2015, per journal (absolute numbers).

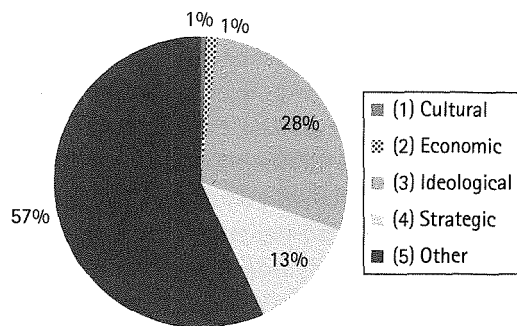


FIG. 1.3 Conceptual approach employed in articles on populism published in fourteen selected political science journals, 1990–2015 (percentage).

Research on populism has always been characterized by an open and ongoing debate about how to define the phenomenon. We examined if these recent articles in political science employed a cultural, economic, ideological, or strategic definition of populism. As can be seen in the graph in Figure 1.3, most contributions cannot be coded within these four categories. The reason for this is that many authors simply do not present a definition of populism or they develop a conceptualization that is very unclear. An important lesson that can be drawn from this is that part of the problem in the populism scholarship in political science (and probably also in other disciplines of the social sciences) is not so much the absence of sharp conceptualizations, but rather the tendency of scholars to avoid specifying their own understandings of populism. Moreover, while this debate is far from reaching an end, the graph also reveals that two types of conceptualizations—ideological and strategic approaches—have a relative degree of dominance within the field.

A more positive note on the evolution of the political science scholarship on populism can be seen in the graph in Figure 1.4, which shows the methodological approaches employed by scholars when it comes to studying the phenomenon in question. Qualitative and quantitative approaches are used almost with the same frequency (35 percent and 34 percent respectively), reflecting methodological pluralism in the analysis of populism. In addition, an important fraction of the published articles is focused on conceptual and/or theoretical debates (22 percent). This is something very peculiar to the study of populism as many scholars delve into abstract questions related to the definition of the phenomenon and its interaction with other phenomena or concepts such as democracy, extremism, hegemony, and popular sovereignty, amongst others.

Finally, we think that it is also relevant to examine which world regions are taken into account by the political science scholarship on populism. As can be seen in the graph in Figure 1.5, Western Europe and Latin America are the two regions that receive the most attention by far. Curiously, there is not much research on populism in North America, something that—as mentioned earlier—is probably related to the dearth of comparative studies of American politics within US political science and the focus on methodological

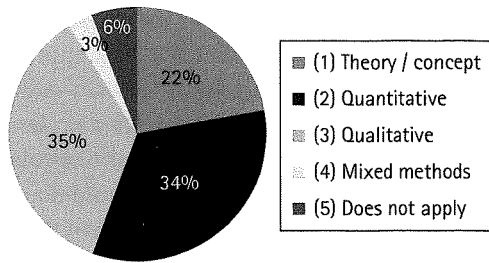


FIG. 1.4 Methodological approach employed in articles on populism published in fourteen selected political science journals, 1990–2015 (percentage).

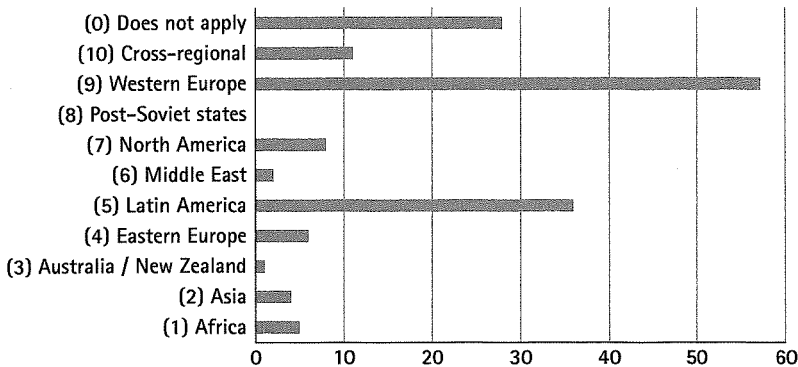


FIG. 1.5 Regions analysed in articles on populism published in fourteen political science journals (absolute numbers).

sophistication in US political science. Work on US populism has been produced mainly by scholars from other disciplines, particularly by historians (e.g. Formisano, 2012; Kazin, 1995; Postel, 2007) and legal scholars (e.g. Krammer, 2004, Michelman, 2001). Another interesting finding is the existence of a small amount of publications that have a cross-regional focus. This is a welcome development, since it allows the generation of cumulative knowledge beyond one specific country or world region.

ORGANIZATION OF THE HANDBOOK

We assembled this volume with the idea of trying to cover all the different aspects of populism that have been studied. For this purpose, we asked both junior and established scholars who are working on populism to write contributions on specific topics. We provided them not only clear guidelines but also feedback on the drafts of their contributions. The volume is organized in four parts. We open up with a short first part that presents the three definitions of populism that in our opinion are the most important

in the scholarly debate in political science.⁷ These three definitions can be thought of as different conceptual approaches, namely the ideational approach (Cas Mudde), the political-strategic approach (Kurt Weyland), and the socio-cultural approach (Pierre Ostiguy). Each of these approaches proposes a particular understanding of populism and indicates different ways for undertaking empirical analysis. Those who are not familiar with the question of how to define populism would do well to read these contributions in order to get a better sense of the current state of the discussion in political science.

It is worth noting that there is one type of conceptual approach that we have deliberately excluded: definitions centered on the economy. In fact, despite their different understandings of populism, Mudde, Weyland, and Ostiguy share the idea that populism should *not* be defined on the basis of a specific type of economic policies. Nevertheless, some scholars are still influenced by the work of Dornbusch and Edwards, two economists, who at the beginning of the 1990s argued that populism is an economic approach “that emphasizes growth and income distribution and deemphasizes the risks of inflation and deficit finance” (Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991: 9). For instance, Daron Acemoglu and his colleagues have published an article in which they claim that populism should be thought of as “the implementation of policies receiving support from a significant fraction of the population, but ultimately hurting the economic interests of this majority” (Acemoglu, Egorov, and Sonin, 2013: 2). There are two main problems with this type of economic definition. First, it points to the alleged consequences of populism but does not provide clear criteria for conceptualizing populism as such. Secondly, this type of definition limits populism to leftist or inclusionary forms, and in consequence, cannot grasp rightist or exclusionary expressions of populism that are predominant in various places of the world today.

The second part of the Handbook covers populism in different world regions. We have been able to commission contributions on Africa (Danielle E. Resnick), Australia and New Zealand (Benjamin Moffitt), Central and Eastern Europe (Ben Stanley), Latin America (Carlos de la Torre), post-Soviet states (Luke March), East Asia (Olli Hellman), and Western Europe (Paul Taggart). Because of their relevance for the study of populism, we also commissioned pieces on populism in two countries: India (Christophe Jaffrelot and Louise Tillin) and the United States (Joseph Lowndes). Unfortunately, we have not been able to include chapters on populism in China and in the Middle East. This omission is related to the fact that there is little current research on populism about those places. Moreover, the few studies that exist on populism in China and the Middle East are inclined to employ economic definitions of populism, which—as we indicated above—are problematic when it comes to conceptualizing the phenomenon and undertaking empirical research. All the chapters of this section work with one (or a combination) of the three conceptual approaches presented in the first section of the Handbook. Regarding the timeframe of the analysis, we asked all the authors to focus their contributions from the 1990s until 2016. The only exceptions are the chapters on Latin America and the US, written by Carlos de la Torre and Joseph Lowndes, respectively. Given that in the Americas there is a long trajectory of different kinds of populist forces, we asked

the authors of the pieces on Latin America and the US to provide analyses that start before the 1990s.

For the third part of the Handbook, which is called "Issues," we invited several scholars who are working on different aspects of the populist phenomenon. Selecting the list of topics was not easy as there are many issues that one could find interesting, but not all of them have received enough attention by scholars. In addition, for this part we deliberately wanted to have contributions that do not focus on one specific country or region, but rather advance bold arguments that "travel" to different places. Achieving this criterion was anything but simple, because most scholars are experts on one country or region and therefore are reluctant to develop broad arguments. Take, for instance, the issue of immigration. In the last few years we have seen an explosion of academic publications on the xenophobic tendencies of the populist radical right, but this is *one* particular party family that has been gaining influence in Europe, and in consequence, there is no reason to think that populism is *per se* against immigration. Just as in Part II, we asked all authors to work with one (or a combination) of the three conceptual approaches presented in the first part of the Handbook.

Kirk A. Hawkins, Madeleine Read, and Teun Pauwels open Part III with a chapter on the causes of populism, which not only offers an overview of the different arguments advanced in the scholarly debate but also proposes a new theory for understanding the emergence of populism. After this, Kenneth M. Roberts examines the difficult relationship between populism and political parties, and then Paris Aslanidis specifies the characteristics of populist social movements. The next chapter is written by Chris Bickerton and Carlo Invernizzi Accetti, who analyze the unexpected parallels between populism and technocracy. In turn, Benjamin De Cleen makes clear that populism and nationalism are two different phenomena that are often confused, while Roger Eatwell disentangles the similitudes and differences between populism and fascism. Subsequently, Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove have a contribution that addresses an important dimension that so far has received little attention: the link between populism and foreign policy. Then Francisco Panizza examines the extent to which populism is prone to trigger a peculiar type of identification, as part of its logic. After this, Sahar Abi-Hassan considers the ambivalent relationship between populism and gender. The next chapter is written by José Pedro Zúquete, who explores the extent to which populism bears some resemblance with religion, and then Luca Manucci writes about the links between populism and the media. Finally, this part closes with Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's chapter, which is focused on the question of how to respond to the rise of populism.

In the last part, called "Normative debates," we turn to the analysis of populism from the perspective of normative and critical political theory. Our emphasis here is on what populism ought to be in relation to democracy. The authors in this part concentrate on the connections between populism and the principles and practices of democratic institutions, and they make explicit normative evaluations of populist practices. From a historical perspective, Duncan Kelly argues that populism is part of the history of popular sovereignty, and moreover, that such a history connects European and American democratic politics from the period of the 1848 revolutions through the

present. Yannis Stavrakakis draws from Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's Gramscian theory to discuss how populism articulates social practices into political identities which seek to build political hegemonies. From a very different theoretical perspective, Stefan Rummens argues that populism is a threat to liberal democracy. In his view, populism is in every case a symptom of a political problem, but not itself a solution. Nadia Urbinati, in turn, argues that populism as a ruling power produces governments that stretch the democratic rules toward an extreme majoritarianism, thus undermining democracy. In a similar vein, Jan-Werner Müller argues that contrary to widely held views, populism is not opposed to constitutionalism; rather, we can talk about a populist constitutionalism. Unlike others, however, populists use constitutions to inhibit pluralism. Paulina Ochoa Espejo further explores the relationship between populism and the people, and argues that the way we conceive of populism depends in great measure on how we conceive "the people" or the *demos* in a democracy. Jason Frank changes the question of *who* the people are, to *how* the people act in order to better appreciate populism's egalitarian praxis. Similarly, James Ingram disrupts the usual associations of populism as an enemy of cosmopolitanism, and explores the possibility of a productive cosmopolitan populism. Finally, Kevin Olson explores the heritage of social democracy since the nineteenth century, which in his view provides the means for a potential reconciliation between populism and democracy, establishing the material conditions for a radically populist politics.

RESEARCH AGENDA

We would like to finish this introductory chapter to the *Oxford Handbook of Populism* by saying something about the current and future research agenda on populism. If it is true that the political science scholarship on populism is maturing and, in consequence, there is an important body of literature on which to build, it is relevant to know where we stand today, and which are the blind spots that scholars could try to address in the near future. Our first point is that populism has been slowly moving from the margins into the mainstream of the discipline. To a certain extent, this can be explained by the growing relevance of populist forces across the world and, in some cases, the entry of these forces into the political mainstream. As a result, contemporary analyses of populism are becoming much more global than before (e.g. de la Torre, 2014; Moffitt, 2016; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Taggart, 2000). Scholars interested in populism are studying not only cases in Europe and the Americas, but also African countries (Resnick, 2014) as well as new forms of Islamic populism (Hadiz, 2016). A further point is that those who research populism engage either implicitly or explicitly in normative discussions. This is related to the fact that populism is partially determined by how individuals and political systems envision the ideals of democracy, including the creation of collectives and the attainment of popular sovereignty. Thus, discussions regarding the definition of populism are influenced by normative standards and ideals that are often expressed in political theory and philosophy.

Furthermore, the increasing amount of research on populism translates into empirical innovation. This is particularly true for those who adhere to the so-called ideational approach, since they have developed new methods to measure both the demand for populism as well as the supply of populism. For instance, Kirk Hawkins (2009) has employed the holistic grading technique to analyze empirically the level of populism in the discourse of presidents, whereas Bart Bonikowski and Noam Gidron (2016) have used automated text analysis to study populist claims-making in US electoral discourse. At the same time, Agnes Akkerman and her colleagues have developed a set of items to measure populist attitudes at the mass level in the Netherlands (Akkermann, Mudde, and Zaslove, 2014), while Eric Oliver and Wendy Rahn have employed a similar set of items to show that Trump supporters hold populist sentiments (Oliver and Rahn 2016). This type of applied empirical research is a welcome development, since it helps to generate cumulative knowledge on how to classify specific leaders and parties as populist or not as well as to better understand why certain segments of the population support populist forces.

Before concluding, let's turn our attention to the future research agenda on populism. The first point that we want to stress is that scholars interested in populism should not overlook the existing body of literature. Cumulative knowledge is necessary for the progress of the field, and the contributions of this Handbook offer a good overview of the current state of the art. At the same time, although there is no consensus on how to define populism, scholars should make an effort to present a clear conceptualization of the phenomenon. This implies clarifying not only what is populism but also what is not. In other words, we are of the opinion that future research needs to put more attention on the family of concepts related to, or opposed to, populism, since this is an important exercise for avoiding conceptual overstretching. We need to make sure that we do not collapse the semantic field, equating populism with other phenomena or categories that are often, but not always, associated with it, such as xenophobia in Europe or clientelism in Latin America or anti-establishment politics in all parts of the world. Part of this can be done through empirical research and measurement, but we also need to think more thoroughly about the differences and similarities between populism and other phenomena that regularly occur together with it but are not necessarily part of it. Populism rarely travels alone. It is necessary to identify what it travels with.

Populism also needs to be considered comparatively. It is no longer adequate to leave the term to those needing a word of abuse in political editorializing in newspapers or to those that construct ad hoc, context-specific definitions. Just as with any other concept we need to see the boundaries and be clear about them but we also need to look at the reach of the term. This means being prepared to reach across different regional and historical contexts and treat the term comparatively. Fortunately, there are some interesting examples of research on populism with a cross-regional focus, such as Weyland's (1999) study on populism in Eastern Europe and Latin America as well as the work of Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) on the impact of populism on democracy in Europe and the Americas. Other interesting examples are the comparison between exclusionary vs inclusionary subtypes of populism in Western Europe and Latin America (Mudde

and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), the analysis of left-wing populism in Argentina and right-wing populism in Turkey (Aytaç and Öniş, 2014), as well as the comparative study on responses to populists in government in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and Western Europe (Rovira Kaltwasser and Taggart, 2016).

In addition, the inherent tension between populism and democracy forces a dialogue between political science and normative political theory. We don't see this as a problem, but rather as a strength of the academic debate that can and should illuminate future research. The debate of the relation between populism and democracy has up to now been conceived in terms of opposition, in order to determine whether populism is good or bad for liberal democratic practices. Yet, this debate has begun to become stale: if something has so far become clear from these debates it is that, as a matter of fact, populism goes hand in hand with democracy (Arditi, 2004; Canovan, 1999; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014b). This may be true normatively as well. If democracy cannot be detached from populism, can we think of ways to make populism an ally to democratizing forces? This new approach may require that we shift our efforts to understand, evaluate, and critique the *how* of populism, both in government and in opposition, such that populist practices can retain the tendency to expand participation and inclusion, without undermining pluralism and the rights of minorities or the loss of all decorum.

The aspiration for this Handbook is both that it provides a sign-post to the considerable body of work that has been done in the past on populism in the hope that this can be built upon, but also that it may provoke reaction and response in future research. Populism, for some, is a challenge to the functioning of contemporary democratic politics. For others it is an indicator of problems with politics. While, for others, it is a radical and empowering force. Whatever way it is seen, a systematic understanding of populism based on the knowledge of the new body of populism studies that we identify in this Handbook is a necessary part of understanding not only populism but the politics that it generates.

NOTES

- 1 One of the features of the term populism is that it is widely used but loosely applied and so presents some difficulty. The casual use of the term, often as one of opprobrium, is frequent. There is some sense of differentiating between the "vernacular" use of the term where it is employed by politicians and media commentators as a short-hand pejorative word and a more analytical academic usage (which may or may not share the pejorative connotation of the vernacular use). We are focusing here on the second but we are aware of the first.
- 2 There is a debate about whether populism is the best translation of *narodniki* (Pipes, 1964).
- 3 Interestingly, the link with agrarianism can also be found in the emergence of populism during the first decades of the twentieth century in Eastern Europe (Ionescu, 1969). Before the communist period, Eastern European societies were mostly rural and only marginally democratic. Therefore, it is not a coincidence that agrarian populism became an important ideology through which different leaders, movements, and parties tried to denounce

- the often deplorable situation of the rural population (Canovan, 1981: 98–135; Mudde, 2012: 218–19).
- 4 The data presented here comes from the catalog WorldCat (<https://www.worldcat.org/>). We have searched for all books in English from 1890 until 2009 in which the word “populism” or “populist” is used in the title. For practical reasons we decided to present the data in absolute numbers for decades. It is worth mentioning that we made the same search with Google Books Ngram Viewer, which works with percentages instead of absolute numbers, and the results show the same trend of increasing publications on populism.
 - 5 We are very grateful to Cristóbal Sandoval for his work on the construction of this database.
 - 6 The fourteen selected journals are the following (listed in alphabetical order): *American Journal of Political Science*, *American Political Science Review*, *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *Democratization*, *European Journal of Political Research*, *Government and Opposition*, *Journal of Politics*, *Latin American Research Review*, *Latin American Politics and Society*, *Party Politics*, *Political Studies*, *West European Politics*, and *World Politics*.
 - 7 Those who are familiar with the work of Ernesto Laclau (2005) might wonder why we didn't include a chapter with the conceptualization of populism advanced in his work. The reason for this is twofold. On the one hand, the so-called ideational approach developed by Mudde in this volume stays in close relationship with the work of Laclau, although it is also true that Mudde and many others who are sympathetic to the ideational approach distance themselves from Laclau's normative impetus and are inclined to undertake empirical knowledge in a more positivist fashion. On the other hand, given that many of the articles that we include across the Handbook propose new insights on the populist phenomenon by relying on the work of Laclau, his impact on the scholarship is well represented.

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