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POPULISM EMERGENT:
A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING ITS CONTEXTS,
MECHANICS, AND OUTCOMES

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Abstract

This paper, based on cross-regional empirical research, provides an integrated analytical framework for understanding the emergence of populism in seemingly different political contexts in both Europe (including Greece, France and the Netherlands) and Latin America (including Peru and Venezuela). It is found that, given an appropriate context, political leadership is the most important factor for setting in motion a number of interdependent causal mechanisms that may produce populism. Those mechanisms include the politicization of social resentment, the formation of new cleavage lines, and intense polarization. When successfully emergent, populism's first and foremost outcome is the creation of new parties, or movements, of a distinctly personalist appeal. The causal explanation proposed in this paper is both parsimonious and credible. It also points to specific research themes related to successfully emergent populism.

Keywords

Populism; populist emergence; political leadership; polarization; causal mechanism; personalist parties/movements

Issues, questions, methods

Ever since Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner's earliest attempts to define and operationalize populism,¹ this field has remained a highly contested terrain. In subsequent decades, there have developed three broad approaches to the populist phenomenon, each with different normative implications: a social-structuralist, a cultural-ideological, and a political-institutional.

The socio-structural approach to populism was the first to be taken, primarily by Latin American authors impressed by the authoritarian experiments of Getúlio Vargas in Brazil and Juan Perón in Argentina.² To their understanding, populism was the almost inevitable outcome of social change and mass mobilization in a specific set of countries at the semi-periphery of world economy while they tried to implement import-substitution industrialization. The cultural-ideological approach has been presented in several variants,³ all of which see populism as a set of ideas presented in "a Manichean discourse that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring elite."⁴ Within this broad approach, populism is examined as a certain style of politics with its own particular attributes,⁵ appeal,⁶ specific language,⁷ and discursive patterns.⁸ A third, more recent approach has helped shift attention from impersonal structures and abstract ideas to concrete political actors by placing emphasis on the political underpinnings of populism and conceiving it as a political strategy for mobilizing support so as to gain power.⁹ Of the foregoing approaches, the first is spatiotemporally

¹ Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds. *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1969).

² Torcuato Di Tella, "Populism and Reform in Latin America," in Claudio Véliz, ed., *Obstacles to Change in Latin America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 47-74, and, by same author, "Populism into the Twenty-First Century," *Government and Opposition*, 32, no. 2 (1997): 187-200; Gino Germani, *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism* (Brunswick NJ: Transaction Books, 1978); Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America*, translated by Marjory Mattingly Urquidí (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979); Nicos P. Mouzelis, *Politics in the Semi-Periphery: Early Parliamentarism and Late Industrialization in the Balkans and Latin America* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986).

³ Danielle Albetrazzi and Duncan McDonnell, "Introduction: The Sceptre and the Spectre," in idem., eds., *Twenty-First Century Populism; The Spectre of Western European Democracy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp. 1-14; Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and, Mudde, "The Populist Zeitgeist," *Government and Opposition*, 39: 4 (2004), 542-63.

⁴ Kirk A. Hawkins, "Is Chávez Populist? Measuring Populist Discourse in Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Political Studies*, 42: 8 (2009), 1040-67.

⁵ Peter Wiles, "A Syndrome, Not A Doctrine," in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism*; Alan Knight, "Populism and Neopopulism in Latin America, especially Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 30 (1998), pp. 223-48.

⁶ Margaret Canovan, "Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy," *Political Studies* 47:1 (1999), pp. 2-16.

⁷ Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁸ Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America: The Ecuatorian Experience* (Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 2000); Ariel C. Armony and Victor Armony, "Indictments, Myths, and Citizen Mobilization in Argentina: A Discourse Analysis," *Latin American Politics and Society*, 47: 4 (2005), pp. 27-54; Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory. Capitalism - Fascism - Populism* (London: Verso, 1977); Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005); Jan Jagers and Stefaan Walgra, "Populism as Political Communication Style: An Empirical Study of Political Parties' Discourse in Belgium," *European Journal of Political Economy*, 46: 3 (2007), pp. 319-45.

⁹ Best examples of this approach are Kenneth M. Roberts, "Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism in Latin America: The Peruvian Case," *World Politics*, 48: 1 (1995), pp. 82-116; idem, "Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics*, 38: 2 (2006), pp. 127-48; Kurt Weyland, "Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 31: 3 (1996), pp. 3-31; idem, "Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,"

limited and, therefore, finds no application in contemporary pluralist political settings; the second approach, despite its many insights, fails to give a convincing answer as of why populism is selected, and by whom, to become the symbolic basis for political organization; the third approach focuses correctly on the political and organizational aspects of populism, also paying attention to charismatic leadership, but still fails to identify the concrete mechanisms through which populism may become politically dominant.

As my main concern in this article will be with populism in democratic (rather than authoritarian or oligarchic) regimes, I conceptualize populism as simply the flipside of political liberalism. I accordingly define it in the most minimal way possible as “democratic illiberalism.” Such a definition includes the core characteristics of the universe of our concept’s referents while effectively excluding the variable ones.¹⁰ As it should be evident, this conceptualization of populism sides mostly with the political-institutional approach but also, following two intimately related intuitions, seeks to improve and, eventually, amend it. According to the first intuition, populist parties, unlike conservative, nationalist, socialist, or communist ones, depend for their success on leadership rather than ideology, which, moreover, as will be explained later, has a distinctly personalist tint. Leadership, therefore, offers as key analytical variable in both understanding populism and assessing its successes, or failures. According to the second intuition, populist constituencies are *potential* electoral majorities. Populist leaders, therefore, are expected to emerge where established political or party systems undergo major de-alignment processes resulting in the loss of salience of previously important political divides, the subsequent shattering of old political loyalties, and, eventually, the freeing of large numbers of voters from previous party and ideological attachments. In such instances, and despite the great differences among disillusioned voters in terms of class, sex, age, education, ethnicity, race, religion, or region, it is logical to assume that new majorities may be formed if the recently released and other free-floating voters are brought together and solidified into a new political party or movement. Populism, consequently, is seen in the present context as a strategy (i.e., the major independent factor) by political entrepreneurs eager to gain power, or, paraphrasing Laitin, “the macrosociological outcome of rationally pursued strategies by individual [leaders].”¹¹ The question is: why, when, and how certain leaders decide to employ populist appeals and make them their basis for attracting voters in their pursuit of power? To give credible answers, we need a new, integrated analytical framework for the study of populist emergence.

Stated in full, the thesis to be advanced in this article is *that populism obtains when a certain political entrepreneur is able to polarize politics by creating a cleavage based on the interaction between “the people” versus some establishment, thus forging a mass political movement.* In this sense, populism is seen as a strategic power game aiming to transform potential majorities into real ones by creating novel social cleavages. As translating such cleavages into political oppositions “calls for translators,”¹² my conception of populism centers on goal-oriented political leadership (agency) and, following a causally sensitive approach, explores the conditions under which populism is likely to emerge. Such an understanding of populism points directly to outcomes, namely, the creation of (populist) parties, or movements, and, further, to their consequences for contemporary liberal democracy.

(Contd.) _____

Comparative Politics, 34: 1 (2001), pp. 1-22; And Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Hypotheses on Populism: The Politics of Charismatic Protest," *East European Politics and Societies*, 15: 1 (2000), pp. 10-17.

¹⁰ Giovanni Sartori, “Guidelines for Concept Analysis,” in idem., *Social Science Concepts: A Systematic Analysis* (Beverly Hills and London, 1984), p. 79.

¹¹ David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yoruba* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 100.

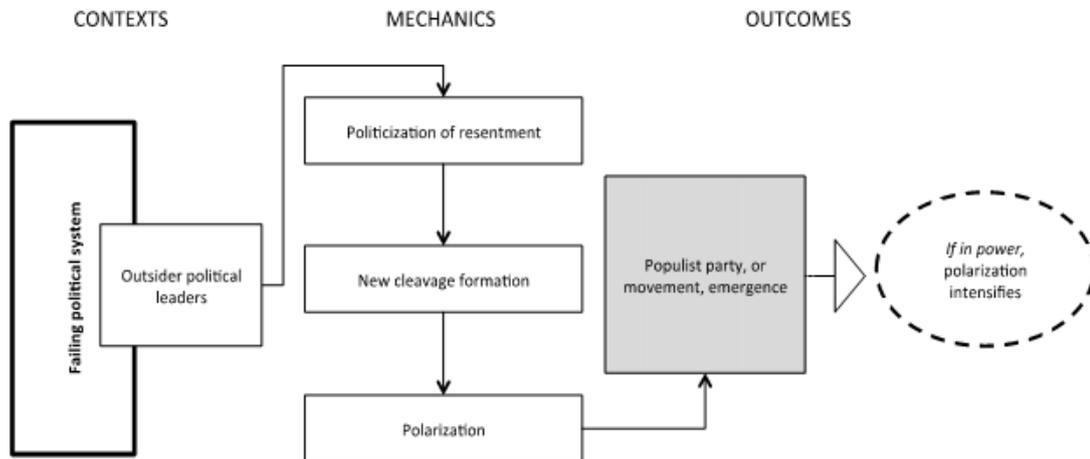
¹² Giovanni Sartori, "From the Sociology of Politics to Political Sociology," in Seymour Martin Lipset, ed., *Politics and the Social Sciences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 89, emphasis in original.

This analysis is explicitly comparative in scope. After conducting primary research on a large number of populist leaders, I have chosen in this article to focus on five well-known cases of *successful* populist emergence, which, nevertheless, present maximum variation in their geographical, ideological, and political characteristics. My sample consists of Alberto Fujimori, Hugo Chavez, Andreas Papandreou, Jean-Marie Le Pen, and Pim Fortuyn. This, firstly, includes representatives of Latin America as well as Europe, both western and southeastern, who, between them, cover more than four decades of populist politics. Secondly, those populist leaders represent different variants of populism: neoliberal (Fujimori), socialist radical (Papandreou, Chavez), and right radical, or “xenophobic”¹³ (Le Pen, Fortuyn). Finally, while all five leaders have succeeded in creating large populist parties, thus transforming their respective countries’ party and political systems, three of them (Fujimori, Chavez, Papandreou¹⁴) have also won national elections.

Through the comparative analysis of such a diverse sample of cases, this study seeks to unravel the common logic, contexts, mechanics, and political outcomes of populist emergence, dispel some persisting myths about this phenomenon, and provide a new synthetic understanding of it. The rest of the article is divided into four sections, each corresponding to a particular phase in the development of the populist phenomenon, complete with the specific conditions that are both sufficient and necessary for further success. The first section reviews the political environment in which populism emerges and finds it to be related to either falling political and party systems or recently established ones; it also studies the political outlook of the leaders involved and points to their status as outsiders. The second section examines the specific micromechanisms of populism, which are the politicization of resentment, new cleavage-making, and polarization. The third section concentrates on the outcomes of populism and, more particularly, mass mobilization and the formation of new mass movements or parties with a markedly personalist character. The last section is about conclusions and lessons learned. A summary of the causal argument presented in subsequent sections appears graphically in Figure 1.

¹³ For “xenophobic” populism, see more particularly Richard A. DeAngelis, “A Rising Tide for Jean-Marie, Jörg, and Pauline? Xenophobic Populism in Comparative Perspective,” *Australian Journal of Politics and Society*, 49: 1 (2003): 75-92.

¹⁴ With the obvious exception of Juan Perón, Hugo Chavez and Andreas Papandreou are the most successful populist leaders in Latin America and Europe respectively for three characteristics they share in common: the magnitude of the electoral victories that brought them to power; their longevity in office; and their ideological hegemony while in power and, at least for Papandreou, even after that. Papandreou’s populism in particular has, moreover, high theoretical value for it directly challenges two widely held beliefs in the study of this phenomenon: first, that European populism, unlike its Latin American counterpart, is associated with right- rather than left-wing parties and, second, that far-reaching populism is more likely to emerge in presidential rather than parliamentary pluralist systems. Both points call, of course, for more detailed analysis.

Figure 1. *The logic of populist emergence*

The causal explanation proposed in this article is both parsimonious and credible.¹⁵ It is parsimonious because it can explain a large number of populist cases irrespective of differences in geography, ideological predisposition, and political outcome; and it is credible because it is based on the *interaction* between “portable” causal mechanisms and the specific contexts in which they are embedded and become operational.

Actors and contexts

This section brings to the fore two significant empirical findings, one related to the nature of principal agencies, the other to environmental structures of opportunity for populism to emerge. As will be shown, populist leaders always present as outsiders to existing political systems at a time when the latter are in crisis or undergo deep realignment. I proceed in reverse order, first examining political crisis as a major contextual factor and then the rise of political outsiders within it.

The crisis of existing party and political systems

The assumption that populism emerges in times of economic crisis may have been commonplace in many an account of this phenomenon¹⁶ but is strongly rejected by other scholars¹⁷ for lacking

¹⁵ Tullia G. Falsetti and Julia F. Lynch. "Context and Causal Mechanisms in Political Analysis," *Comparative Political Studies*, 42: 9 (2009), pp. 1143-66.

¹⁶ Hans-George Betz, "The New Politics of Resentment: Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Western Europe," *Comparative Politics*, 25: 4 (1993), pp. 413-27; Herbert Kitschelt (in collaboration with A. J. McGann), *The Radical Right in Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995); Paul Taggart, *Populism* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ René Antonio Mayorga, "Outsiders and Neopopulism: The Road to Plebiscitary Democracy," in Scott Mainwaring, Ana María Bejarano and Eduardo Pizarro Leongómez, eds., *The Crisis of Democratic Representation in the Andes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 132-70; Martín Tanaka, "From Crisis to Collapse of the Party Systems and Dilemmas of Democratic Representation: Peru and Venezuela," in *Idid.*, pp. 47-77; Elisabeth Ivarsson, "What Unites Right-Wing Populists in Western Europe? Re-Examining Grievance Mobilization Models in Seven Successful Cases," *Comparative Political Studies*, 41: 1 (2008), pp. 3-23.

universal empirical support. In general, economic crisis-based theories of populism tend to exogenize politics, and especially such critical aspects of it as the role played by institutions, conflict and competition, the waging of ideological battles, the tensions between personal authority and collective organizations, social radicalism, and mass mobilization. As it emerges from the comparative analysis of our cases, a far better predictor of populism seems to be political crises that “shift or loosen the social moorings of party systems”¹⁸ and offer populist leaders a chance to pretend “to transcend traditional forms of ideological affiliations, allegiances, and partisanship.”¹⁹ As a recent study of Latin America populism shows, the latter is unrelated to economic downturns but likely to rise in weak or declining party systems.²⁰ It is precisely such political crises that are the common denominator in all our cases, albeit in distinct forms: the virtual collapse of time-honored party systems (as in Peru and Venezuela); tumultuous regime change, accompanied by the introduction of new party systems (as in Greece); or the serious malfunctioning of old party systems (as in the Netherlands and France). More analytically:

In Latin America, first, the party system created after Peru’s return to democracy in the late 1970s may have suffered from relatively low institutionalization but had been able to hold together for more than a decade.²¹ It included four political forces, of which most important by 1980 were the moderate right *American Popular Revolutionary Alliance* (APRA) and a leftist electoral front known as the *United Left* (IU). Yet, by the late 1980s, partly because of Peru’s electoral laws²² and partly because of the parties’ own mistakes,²³ the existing system began disintegrating to such an extent that, in the runoff of the 1990 presidential elections, no traditional party was represented and the votes went to candidates, Mario Vargas Llosa and Alberto Fujimori, opposing the traditional parties.²⁴ In Kenney’s words, “[r]arely have party systems collapsed so completely and quickly” as the Peruvian one in 1990.²⁵ Another of those rare exceptions was, to be sure, neighboring Venezuela. From 1973 to 1988, that country’s party system featured an “attenuated bipartism”²⁶ between center-left *Acción Democrática* (AD) and the center-right Christian Democrats (COPEI), which had regularly alternated in office. Thereafter, a prolonged crisis of governability culminating in an abortive coup in 1992, led to significant partisan dealignment and the replacement of two-partyism by limited multi-partyism, which, due to the rise of new anti-system political forces, was inherently unstable. The winner of the 1993 elections was Rafael Caldera, who, after breaking off COPEI and creating a new party, the

¹⁸ Roberts, “Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organizations,” p. 133.

¹⁹ Tismaneanu, “Hypotheses on Populism,” p. 11.

²⁰ Miguel Carreras, “The Rise of Outsiders in Latin America, 1980-2010,” paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Münster, Germany, 22-27 March 2010.

²¹ Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, “Introduction: Party Systems in Latin America,” in Scott Mainwaring and Timothy Scully, eds., *Building Democratic Institutions: Parties and Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 1-34.

²² Gregory D. Schmidt, “Fujimori’s 1990 Upset Victory in Peru: Electoral Rules, Contingencies, and Adaptive Strategies,” *Comparative Politics*, 28: 3 (1996), pp. 321-55.

²³ Steven Levitsky and Maxwell A. Cameron, “Democracy without Parties? Political Parties and Regime Change in Fujimori’s Peru,” *Latin American Politics and Society*, 45: 3 (2003), pp. 1-33.

²⁴ Julio Carrión, “Partisan Decline and Presidential Popularity: The Politics and Economics of Representation in Peru,” in Kurt Von Mettenheim and James Malloy, eds., *Deepening Democracy in Latin America* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 1998), pp. 55-70; Cynthia McClintock, “Presidents, Messiahs, and Constitutional Breakdowns in Peru,” in Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela, eds., *The Failure of Presidential Democracy: The Case of Latin America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 386-21; Kenneth M. Roberts and Erik Wibbels, “Party Systems and Electoral Volatility in Latin America: A Test of Economic, Institutional, and Structural Explanations,” *American Political Science Review*, 93: 3 (1999), pp. 575-90.

²⁵ Charles D. Kenney, “The Death and Rebirth of a Party System, Peru 1978-2001,” *Comparative Political Studies*, 36: 10 (2003), p. 1211.

²⁶ José E. Molina and Carmen Pérez, “Evolution of the Party System in Venezuela, 1946-1993,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 40: 2 (1998), p. 11.

Convergencia Nacional, led Venezuela to financial and economic disaster. The old system finally collapsed by the elections of 1998 in which voters abandoned all traditional loyalties and turned to a leader promising “to eliminate the old parties, to end corruption, and to rewrite the constitutional rules” of the country.²⁷ Time was ripe for *chavismo*.

Post-1974 Greece represents a particularly interesting case of a country experiencing a successful transition to democracy under an able and politically moderate leader, Constantine Karamanlis, simultaneously with the emergence of a radical populist movement, the *Panhellenic Socialist Movement* (PASOK), under the leadership of maverick Andreas Papandreu. Prime minister Karamanlis concentrated his attention on three fronts: the establishment of new institutions, including the introduction of a liberal constitution and the strengthening of an essentially two-party system that would keep politics moderate; a prudent macroeconomic administration so as to lay the foundations for achieving long-term socio-economic progress; and the tackling of hot foreign policy issues as were the smoothening of Greek-Turkish relations and, above all, Greece’s accession into the European Community. In such a fluid political setting, Papandreu rose by attacking the new institutional foundations of the young democracy, questioning its legitimacy, and rejecting its goals. Calling for general “change,” Papandreu’s populism had three main thrusts:²⁸ the uncompromised intransigence towards the ruling conservative party, which was pictured as simply reactionary; an exceedingly generous social policy of radical wealth redistribution; and an ultranationalist stand against Turkey as well as a rejection of Greece’s Europeanism. As a Greek author has nicely captured the situation, while demands were raised everywhere, “all this commotion was *socialism*, for any other name seemed tradition-bound and conservative. Yet, the fact of the matter was that a populist, not a socialist ideology was emerging.”²⁹

France and the Netherlands were not characterized by either actually collapsing or young and fragile party systems but by old, failing ones. From 1958 to 1981, the support enjoyed by France’s traditional parties was both high and stable as indicated by the fact that their proportion in the seven legislative elections held during that period ranged between 96.9 to 99.4 percent of the total vote.³⁰ The victory of Mitterrand in 1981 aroused great expectations, which however soon turned sour. By the mid-1980s, as the French society sensed the inability of both left- and right-wing governments to cope with recession, the mood became pessimistic and survey evidence showed a rising number of respondents to distrust politicians of all major parties, as well as a weakening of traditional party attachments.³¹ After 1986, the “cohabitation” of a socialist president with a right-wing prime minister caused a further blurring of ideological lines, thus widening the electoral window of opportunity for populist Le Pen. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn’s political star similarly rose in a time of growing adversarial politics and party realignment. Already by the end of the 1980s, the traditional pillars (*zuilen*) of the Dutch party system had become a thing of the past and, consequently, the politics of accommodation à la Lijphart had seemed to be over. As Hans Keman writes, after 1989 “the peaceful co-existence between the political establishment and the public at large [was] over. Dutch traditions of consensus, cooperation and seeking compromise by means of consociational practices appear[ed] to

²⁷ Jennifer L. McCoy, "Chavez and the End of 'Partyarchy' in Venezuela," *Journal of Democracy*, 10: 3 (1999), p. 66.

²⁸ Takis S. Pappas, *The Charismatic Party: PASOK, Papandreu, Power [Το Χαρισματικό Κόμμα: ΠΑΣΟΚ, Παπανδρέου, Εξουσία]* (Athens: Patakis, 2009).

²⁹ Angelos Elefantis, "PASOK and the Elections of 1977: The Rise of the Populist Movement," in H. R. Penniman, ed., *Greece at the Polls: The National Elections of 1974 and 1977* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1981), p. 119, emphasis in original.

³⁰ John Veugelers, "Social Cleavage and the Revival of Far Right Parties: The Case of France's National Front," *Acta Sociologica* 40: 1 (1997), p. 37.

³¹ Peter Fysh and Jim Wolfreys, "Le Pen, the National Front and the Extreme Right in France," *Parliamentary Affairs*, 45: 3 (1992), p. 311; Nonna Mayer, "The French National Front," in Hans-George Betz and Stefan Immerfall, eds. *The Politics of the Right: Neo-Populist Parties and Movements in Established Democracies* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

have evaporated.”³² As it had become evident already by the early 1990s, the religious and class cleavages of the past could no longer be the basis for modern Dutch party politics. In 1994, the old pattern of power-sharing among the three major parties was abandoned and a coalition was for the first time formed without the centrist Christian Democrats. Despite several successes, which brought it a second electoral victory in 1998, the new coalition eventually turned into a patronage machine. “Without ideology, and with nothing but jobs for the boys at stake, party politics was losing its *raison d’être*, and trust in the old democratic order could no longer be taken for granted.”³³

All in all, then, Peru, Venezuela, Greece, France, and the Netherlands had been suffering around the time of populist emergence from a crisis of representation that was commonly attributed to bad performance by existing political parties. As they were losing fast their previous legitimacy, political outsiders rose on promises of reestablishing social homogeneity and political efficiency, overcoming poverty and redressing social justice, or, as in the case of Greece, bringing about socialism.

Populists as outsiders

When examining the biographies of the leaders commonly considered as populists, an almost instantaneous finding is that, overwhelmingly, they are political outsiders. They both “describe themselves and ... are perceived by their contenders as well as by the general public as acting outside the party system.”³⁴ But when do politicians count as “outsiders”? Following Kenney,³⁵ outsider status depends on two conditions: first, whether some politician rises to political prominence from outside rather than from within the established party system and, second, whether that politician’s discourse is rejecting rather than tolerating the existing parties. Outsiders, in short, emerge in the foregoing view from outside the confines of already established party systems and thrive by rebuffing them; insiders, by contrast, are those politicians who emerge within established party systems and aim at their preservation. This conceptualization seems straightforward save the not-quite-uncommon occurrence of political entrepreneurs who, having risen to prominence within established parties in time-honored party systems, splinter from them by also attacking their foundations. What should we do with this category of leaders who, like Mexico’s Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas, the son of a revered former president and once a perennial political insider of long-ruling PRI, break away to head parties of their own? Following Barr, we should admit them into the category of “outsiders” since “they can likewise credibly claim to be fighting the establishment.”³⁶ There is, finally, an additional aspect to a politician’s status as an “outsider” which is not political but social. Authors like Anthony King have thus focused on “the *social* or even the *demographic* outsider” in the sense that such leaders do not belong to the predominant (ethnic, religious) groups in their respective societies nor to the dominant (social, economic) classes within them.³⁷ King’s focus was of course on Margaret Thatcher, a grocer’s daughter, but, as will shortly be shown, almost the entire group of populist leaders examined in this article display many of the characteristics of social or demographic outsiders. What follows is a brief portrayal of our leaders as outsiders.

Political outsider status is ubiquitous in our sample of leaders as all of them emerged to political prominence from outside established party systems. Before turning to politics, Chávez and Le Pen had been middle-ranked soldiers; under that capacity, the former organized an abortive coup in 1992 while

³² Hans Keman, "Introduction: Politics in the Netherlands after 1989: A Final Farewell to Consociationalism?" *Acta Politica*, 43 (2008), p. 150.

³³ Ian Buruma, *Murder in Amsterdam; Liberal Europe, Islam and the Limits of Tolerance* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 51.

³⁴ Andreas Schedler, "Anti-Political-Establishment Parties," *Party Politics*, 2: 3 (1996), p. 298.

³⁵ Charles D. Kenney, "Outsider and Anti-Party Politicians in Power," *Party Politics*, 4: 1 (1998): pp. 57-75.

³⁶ Robert R. Barr, "Populists, Outsiders, and Anti-Establishment Politics," *Party Politics*, 15: 1 (2009), p. 34.

³⁷ Anthony King, "The Outsider as Political Leader: The Case of Margaret Thatcher," *British Journal of Political Science*, 32: 3 (2002), p. 438.

the latter, a former paratrooper in Indochina and Algeria, was accused for using torture methods. Le Pen entered parliament in 1956 on a Poujadist ticket but lost his seat in 1962. In 1972, he founded the National Front (*Front National*, FN) but remained an obscure political figure with only minimal support, before his first electoral success in the municipal elections of Dreux in 1983 and, again, in the 1984 European elections. Fujimori, Fortuyn and Papandreou had been successful academics prior to entering politics; the former as the rector in Peru's National Agrarian University, Fortuyn as a sociology professor at the Erasmus University in Rotterdam, and Papandreou as the chairman of the Department of Economics at the University of California, Berkeley. Papandreou, moreover, in a way similar to Cárdenas, broke in 1974 from the Center Union party that his father had founded back in the 1960s to create his own populist movement in 1974.

Social and demographic status is equally prominent for all our leaders. Some of them had low-class origins (Le Pen, Chávez) and others foreign ethnic roots (both Fujimori's parents were Japanese emigrants to Peru and he himself, although baptized and raised as a Roman Catholic, was nicknamed *el chino*, the Chinaman; Chávez is of mixed Amerindian and Afro-Venezuelan descent). Pim Fortuyn, "the son of a travelling salesman, whom he despised, and a doting mother,"³⁸ self-declared homosexual and Catholic in a predominantly Protestant country, also qualifies for outsider status. As of Papandreou, however the scion of a prominent political family, he made his debut into Greek politics in the mid-1960s as a clear outsider as he had already lived for many years in America as a U.S. citizen pursuing the career of a liberal economics professor (having also married an American woman and served in the U.S. navy).

Causal mechanisms

In this section, I identify three distinct and yet interrelated causal mechanisms³⁹ that have been present in all our cases and are instrumental for generating populism: the politicization of resentment; the creation of a new cleavage between "the people" and some establishment; and intense political polarization. Each mechanism is closely related to three characteristics commonly attributed to the populist phenomenon: politicization of resentment relates to the anti-establishment character of populism; the pattern of new cleavage-making posits the issue of rationality behind populist emergence; and polarization points directly to populism's outcomes. All three mechanisms depend on strategic leadership action and are sufficiently "portable," which enables them to operate in many analytically equivalent contexts.

The politicization of resentment

Populism rests on widespread social resentment with existing political and party systems. When the latter fail to meet the needs of the people and deliver the goods expected from them, there may emerge a powerful culture of disillusionment⁴⁰ and resentment against the prevailing political order. When resentment is high, established parties, whether in government or in opposition, are more likely to try containing it lest it upset existing political alignment patterns. This is not however true for populist parties, which thrive precisely on politicizing resentment and the sense of victimhood that accompanies it.⁴¹ Witness the cases.

³⁸ Buruma, p. 60.

³⁹ For an excellent recent introduction to the causal mechanism approach, see Peter Hedström and Petri Ylikoski, "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 36 (2010), pp. 49-67.

⁴⁰ See, in particular, Tismaneanu.

⁴¹ I thank Juan Linz who reminded me of Max Scheler's important book *Ressentiment*, published in 1912 and later suppressed by the Nazis, in which he explains resentment as a key factor of creating identities and new moral frameworks.

In Peru, first, Fujimori capitalized on accumulated popular disaffection with a political system incapable of facing a deep economic crisis, containing terrorism, and strengthening democracy. In 1989, only 43.5 percent of individuals from lower-class sections surveyed in Lima said that Peru had a functioning democratic system while 42 percent believed the system to be undemocratic.⁴² Broken promises by incumbent parties had made people turn against the old system but not necessarily willing to follow new prudent leaders. The sense of such a hopeless disaffection was captured nicely by a Lima street graffiti that read *No más realidades, queremos promesas* (no more realities, we want promises) (reported by Arturo Valenzuela). Similarly, in Venezuela, after the crisis of governability in the late 1980s and the military coup of 1992, the social situation was one of “endemic discontent, the tendency of large sectors of the population, from all walks of life, to be dissatisfied with the government’s performance.”⁴³ The majority of people had turned against “partyarchy”⁴⁴ and towards new leaders like Chavez who could tap “into expectations, illusions, fears, doubts, worries, and emotions in a population profoundly disenchanting with the existing political regime.”⁴⁵ Indeed, as Kurt Weyland has shown by using survey data, popular dissatisfaction with the actual state of democracy had a more significant impact on vote intentions for Chavez than had sociotropic economic discontent.⁴⁶

The cases from Europe tell an essentially similar story. In France, the 1981 advent of Socialists to power did not markedly improve the French citizens’ lives. As the bad economy in the early 1980s led to ‘discipline’ and ‘rigueur,’ while increased immigration caused widespread ‘insecurité’ in society, confidence to all traditional political parties declined precipitously. Repeated public opinion polls in the mid-1980s “resonated with accusations that politicians were incompetent, dishonest and remote from everyday reality.”⁴⁷ It was in such an environment of generalized disenchantment and ubiquitous protest that Le Pen and his party were able to project their populist discourse and gain handsome political profits. The Netherlands in the 1990s was a case of prosperity-born bitterness with the established political system. “How could it happen”, asked *The Economist*, “in a land of famous tolerance, where druggies and gays litter the parks, foreigners gather on every street corner, and ... no one even notices? ‘Precisely because they do litter the parks and the streets, and none of the politicians really notices,’ admits a supporter of one of the traditional parties, ‘but lots of ordinary people do’.”⁴⁸ Finally, Greece in the mid- and late-1970s represents a case in which resentment grew in reverse proportion to the very real successes of the right-of-center government of Karamanlis in consolidating a new democratic system after the collapse of authoritarianism. Populist Papandreu proposed his own radical program in direct antithesis to the newly-founded institutional framework, and called for a new political and socio-economic order based on socialism, participatory egalitarianism, and national independence. By unrealistically inflating the expectations of the Greek public during a politically delicate situation, Papandreu became the champion of society’s less privileged sectors thanks to promises for the nationalization of many industries, the creation of cooperatives throughout the country, and the sharp increase of social welfare schemes.

⁴² Roberts, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism,” p. 98.

⁴³ Molina and Pérez, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Cf., Michael Coppedge, *Strong Parties and Lame Ducks: Presidential Partyarchy and Factionalism in Venezuela* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1994).

⁴⁵ Damarys Canache, "From Bullets to Ballots: The Emergence of Popular Support for Hugo Hugo Chávez," *Latin American Politics and Society*, 44: 1 (2002), p. 71.

⁴⁶ Kurt Weyland, "Economic Voting Reconsidered: Crisis and Charisma in the Election of Hugo Chávez," *Comparative Political Studies*, 36: 7 (2003), pp. 822-48.

⁴⁷ James G. Schields, *The Extreme Right in France: From Pétain to Le Pen* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 206, and, similarly, Nonna Mayer and Pascal Perrineau, "Why Do They Vote for Le Pen?" *European Journal of Political Economy*, 22: 1 (1992), p. 133.

⁴⁸ *The Economist*, 16 March 2002, p. 50.

For upcoming populist leaders, the politicization and strategic manipulation of resentment over political decline helps attenuate previous cleavages (such as those of social class or ethnicity) while introducing novel symbols and, from there, new identities and new forms of organization. Such a kind of opposition, which Juan Linz has called “semi-loyal”⁴⁹ and most students of populism attribute to the inherently anti-systemic nature of populist parties, assumes that “the problems faced by common citizens are not the fault of those in office *per se*, but the system through which they rule.”⁵⁰ This is why such opposition is directed against entire political systems rather than solely against incumbent parties. For, as Roberts notes, with this classic populist technique, “a leader poses as the embodiment of national unity and the public interest against the dispiriting divisiveness of partisan or particular interests.”⁵¹

New cleavage formation

The politicization of resentment is but a necessary step towards the creation by emerging populist leaders of a new social cleavage between “the people” and the people’s enemies. It has been a common assertion that populism builds upon a “we versus them” Schmittian divide that splits societies into two broad social categories, “the people” and some “establishment.”⁵² Less understood are, however, the following points made in this and the next sections: (a) the new divide presupposes, and is closely connected to, the culture of resentment with prevailing political systems; (b) such a divide is the handiwork of creative leaders through a process of new symbolic production; and (c) the process of new cleavage formation entails the purposeful creation of novel social identities. Let us begin making sense from the content of the divide itself.

As “the people” is a notoriously hard category to pin down and define, let us try to tackle its polar opposite, the people’s enemies. Based on the previous analysis, my contention is that, what always stands as an enemy to emerging populism, is an established political system and, more specifically, the nexus of dominant parties, their respective individual leaders, and other supporting elites including the bureaucracy. Therefore, populists’ enemy, far from being an imaginary construct, is quite real and directly perceptible – although the threat it is thought of as representing may of course be an imaginary one.

The foregoing contention finds robust empirical support in all of our cases. Fujimori’s populism became successful through the systematic attacks of both Peru’s traditional political forces and Mario Vargas Llosa, his main rival for the 1990 presidential election, who espoused a neo-liberal economic platform. Fujimori thus sought to mobilize the public sentiment “against what he called *partidocracia*, charging that the corruption, inefficiency, and sectarianism of entrenched party elites had brought Peru to the brink of economic collapse and civil war.”⁵³ Chavez also turned against the old party system and their representatives, whom he referred to as “the *cogollos* and the *cupulas del poder* (the cabals and the chambers of power), the *escualidos* (the filthy ones), the elites and leaders of the traditional parties.”⁵⁴ Turning to European populists, Papandreu was the one who popularized in Greek political parlance the term “*το κατεστημένο*” (the establishment). This included the Greek domestic oligarchy, the traditional political parties, and, above all, Karamanlis and his right-of-center government, who were persistently portrayed as merely expressing “the interests of our country’s ruling class, that is, the

⁴⁹ Juan J. Linz, *Crisis, Breakdown, and Reequilibration* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), pp. 32-3.

⁵⁰ Barr, p. 32.

⁵¹ Roberts, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism,” p. 98.

⁵² Roger Eatwell, “The Rebirth of the ‘Extreme Right’ in Western Europe?” *Parliamentary Affairs*, 53: 3 (2000), pp. 407-25; Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties*.

⁵³ Roberts, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism,” p. 97-8.

⁵⁴ Kirk A. Hawkins, “Is Chávez Populist?” p. 1154.

domestic bourgeoisie which is dependent upon the western monopoly capital.”⁵⁵ In the first half of the 1980s, Le Pen turned against the ruling Socialists but also, and more ferociously, against the factious Right which was split between a center-right (*Union pour la Démocratie Française*, UDF) and the new-Gaullists (the *Rassemblement pour la République*, RPR). Fortuyn rose to political prominence standing against bureaucracy and the so-called *regenter*, that is, the Dutch elites that still were regarded as resembling the republican merchant class of the 17th century.

If “the establishment” is in populist verbiage something quite concrete and readily perceived as such by potential populist constituents, the same is not true for the other pole of the “we-they” antithesis, “the (resentful) people,” which is always a construct. Unlike other social categories, which are determined in more or less objective ways by ancestry, ethnicity, language, religion, geography, or class, “the people” has an indeterminate membership characterized by a variety of social identities.⁵⁶ “The people,” as Canovan writes, “can refer to the peasants; to the ‘producers’ of U.S. populist platforms; to Perón’s *descamisados*; to the electorate; to the nation; to everyone except one’s political opponents; or quite frequently (and often deliberately) to no determinate group at all.”⁵⁷ Because of its conceptual fluidity and notional malleability, “the people” is subject to instrumental manipulation by populist leaders, especially in times of change. When long-established political or party systems disintegrate, and old cleavages unfreeze, voters search for new certainties and are, therefore, ready to change identities. In such cases, “the people” presents as a new social category made up of the social material available in each country. Emerging populist leaders, therefore, make their appeals to very diverse social categories but with a propensity for mass mobilization.

In Peru and Venezuela, both Fujimori and Chavez made special appeals to the urban lower social classes (*el pueblo*), whether *mestizo* or indigenous. The majority in this category consists of the poor and marginalized of the informal sector in the economy (*los desposeídos*) who had failed to benefit from the traditional parties’ state interventionism. At the same time, the working class remained suspicious and no populist leader enjoyed the support of the labor movement in his respective country. Interestingly, while Chavez always stood firmly against neoliberalism, thus maintaining lower class support, Fujimori made inroads into middle and even upper class support after embracing neoliberalism shortly after coming to power. In Europe, on the other hand, populism appealed mostly to either insecure middle classes or to more affluent native strata with xenophobic instincts and a strong urge for the maintenance of traditional law and order. Le Pen, appealing directly to “the little people [and] the excluded,”⁵⁸ attracted voters from all social sectors, “old and young, rich and poor, Catholics and non-Catholics, rural and urban, upper and working class.”⁵⁹ The same is true for Papandreou who made his appeals to what he termed the “underprivileged” class, consisting of the vast majority of the Greek electorate. Finally, Pim Fortuyn turned primarily to the middle and upper-middle classes, which form the backbone of the Dutch social structure.

The point to be made is that populist leaders are not only found to attract what Kenneth Roberts summarily terms the “subaltern sectors.”⁶⁰ Even prosperous people can be attracted by populism.⁶¹ This explains why populist parties may succeed in quite different socio-economic environments ranging from poor places like Ecuador to the most prosperous European countries.

⁵⁵ Andreas Papandreou, *Transition to Socialism: Problems and Strategy for the Greek Movement [Μετάβαση στο σοσιαλισμό: Προβλήματα και στρατηγική για το ελληνικό κίνημα]* (Athens: Aichme, 1979), p. 38.

⁵⁶ Paul Taggart (2000: 95) felicitously uses the term “the heartland” to describe an imagined territory “in which, in the populist imagination, a virtuous and unified population resides.”

⁵⁷ Margaret Canovan, *Populism* (London: Junction Books, 1981), p. 295.

⁵⁸ DeAngelis, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Mayer and Perrineau, p. 129.

⁶⁰ Roberts, “Neoliberalism and the Transformation of Populism,” p. 89.

⁶¹ Betz, p. 420.

Polarization

Polarization is the third, and final, mechanism that is necessary for populism to emerge in the form of a party or mass movement. It involves pitting the disenchanting and resentful people against the privileged establishment in an antagonism of such a great intensity that may threaten to tear society apart. When polarized, societies tend to cluster around opposing poles; as the majority of the people cleave to one pole or the other, the middle ground of politics gets lost and the median voter becomes a rare occurrence. Significantly, as Lipset and Rokkan have explained, such polarized conflicts are not just “over specific gains or losses but over conceptions of moral right and over the interpretation of history and human destiny.”⁶² In environments of extensive popular resentment and high polarization, populist leaders, rather than catering to the median voter or even to specific constituencies, are inclined to follow a polarizing strategy for building a mass following. On the other hand, large masses of people are inclined to abandon old loyalties and less important identities, and exchange them with new ones.

From the foregoing arise two conclusions, both once again underlying the importance of leadership. First, when populism is ascendant, polarization, far from being systemic, is rather endogenous to the preceding mechanisms of resentment politicization and cleavage formation, and, therefore, closely related to populist leadership action. Second, polarization, besides exacerbating already existing disgruntlement with the traditional political order, helps solidify the newly imposed cleavage between the mythical “people” and the infamous “establishment.” The more populist political entrepreneurs make concerted efforts to rearrange societies around this new cleavage, the more the people tend to abandon old loyalties and positions, and aligning themselves accordingly. As Palonen concisely states it in her study of Hungarian populism, “polarization is [in fact] a political tool – articulated to demarcate frontiers between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and to stake out communities perceived as moral orders.”⁶³

Our cases offer abundant evidence of growing political polarization during populist ascendancy. In Peru, political polarization centered on Fujimori’s fierce opposition to the stabilization plan proposed by Vargas Llosa and involved a strongly anti-establishment discourse against the country’s chief political institutions (such as political parties, Congress, and the judiciary), capitalizing on their failure to contain the Shining Path insurgency or redress a deepening social and economic crisis. In Venezuela, Chavez proved a master of polarization through mobilization and mass meetings, fiery symbolic rhetoric, sloganeering, and opponent slandering. Turning from the beginning against traditional two-partyism, Chavez chose to “repoliticize social inequality,” thus affecting every sector of society from labor and business groups to the armed forces, the church, and the media. In effect, “the political salience of social inequalities increased as the [old] party system decomposed and emerging populist figures competed to realign political loyalties. Although Chavez ... did not organize his followers as a class, he nevertheless exploited and deepened a stratified social schism in political identities and policy preferences.”⁶⁴ Although having preceded Chavez by a decade, Papandreou had used an almost identical strategy that was both confrontational and polarizing. Papandreou attacked his conservative political opponents claiming that they stood for authoritarianism while serving foreign interests and that PASOK was the only genuine democratic force. Fortuyn and Le Pen, too, contributed to their respective societies’ polarization by mobilizing both distrust of politicians and

⁶² Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, “Cleavage Structures, Party Systems and Voter Alignments: An Introduction,” in Seymour Martin Lipset and Stein Rokkan, eds., *Party Systems and Voter Alignments: Cross-National Perspectives* (New York: Free Press, 1968), p. 11.

⁶³ Emilia Palonen, “Political Polarisation and Populism in Contemporary Hungary,” *Parliamentary Affairs*, 62: 2 (2009), p. 321.

⁶⁴ Kenneth M. Roberts, “Social Polarization and the Populist Resurgence in Venezuela,” in Steve Ellner and Daniel Hellinger, eds., *Venezuelan Politics in the Chávez Era; Class Polarization and Conflict* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003), p. 55.

grievances over immigration and multiculturalism,⁶⁵ two issues of great social salience and a capacity to expose the traditional establishment. Fortuyn described Islam as a “backward culture,” questioned the Muslim immigrants’ ability to assimilate in a liberal state like the Netherlands, and advocated the closing of borders to new immigrants. Fortuyn’s polarizing tactics appeared to be in stark contrast to the previous rules of the game based on proportionality. Similarly, Le Pen, who once campaigned under the slogan “Two million unemployed, two million migrants we don’t want,” politicized immigration like no other French politician had ever dared do portraying as the major cause of France’s social and economic maladies.

Political outcomes

New cleavage-making and polarization are for enterprising populist leaders a resource for mass mobilization at national political level. When successfully used, the most visible outcome is the creation of new, populist political parties or mass movements that, now being inserted into already established party systems, help to modify them. As it emerges from the short review of the cases that follows, the chief characteristic of all populist parties is their distinctly personalist character.⁶⁶

Beginning with Peru, Fujimori’s *Cambio 90* was a party that entered the political arena shortly before the 1990 election and soon became the country’s most powerful force. Its success hinged predominantly on the personal appeal of its leader together with the active campaign of its membership, which reached 200,000. However, its success at the polls did not translate into a lasting party organization. After the election, Fujimori’s dramatic shift in favor of harsh neoliberal economic reforms led to intraparty clashes and alienated erstwhile supporters. Fujimori decided to strengthen personalism, remove the party’s secretary general, close the party’s central office, and follow a more authoritarian style of governing.⁶⁷ In the remaining of the decade, Fujimori founded three more parties, one for each subsequent election. Those were, indeed, “disposable” electoral machines serving only their leader’s political campaigning;⁶⁸ their only ideology was “to back whatever Fujimori wanted to do, without questions.”⁶⁹ In Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, preparing for the 1998 election, founded the Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento Quinta República – MVR*), originally a military group now turned into a political party. After he won that election by a landslide (56,2 percent against 40 percent gained by his main opponent Henrique Salas Römer), Chavez set up the so-called *Círculos Bolivarianos*, that is, citizens’ self-help committees organized at the neighborhood level, which effectively functioned as propaganda and mobilization mechanisms, and set out to implement his promise of “Bolivarian revolution,” a program for radical change named after the Independence hero Simón Bolívar. In France, Jean-Marie Le Pen had founded his National Front party (*Front National – FN*) already in 1972 but spent a dozen years in the political wilderness before finally making the news in the 1984 elections for the European Parliament winning 11 percent of the vote (and 10 of the 81 seats allotted to France). In the 1990s, Le Pen, after the splintering of his major intra-party opponent, Bruno Mègret, succeeded in keeping FN under his own control and, in 2002, lead it to its greater electoral success. In the Netherlands, Pim Fortuyn set up his own political party, tellingly named *List*

⁶⁵ Cf., Ivarsflaten.

⁶⁶ From this derives a consequential implication calling for further research: Unless successfully institutionalized, a rather rare occurrence indeed, populist parties tend to decline after their leaders’ biological demise or departure from politics. Interestingly enough, even when institutionalized, as it has been the case with both PASOK and the French NF, populist parties remain under the leadership of their founders’ heirs apparent. Today (January 2012), PASOK is still led by George Papandreou, Andreas’ son, and the French FN by Marine Le Pen, Jean-Marie’s daughter. Meanwhile in Peru, Keiko Fujimori, daughter of Alberto, based on her father’s political clientele, has created her own party and is actively involved in her country’s national politics.

⁶⁷ Roberts, “Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organizations,” p. 139.

⁶⁸ Levitsly and Cameron, p. 11.

⁶⁹ Coppedge, in Diamond et al.

Pim Fortuyn (LPF), in early 2002. That party, however, primarily because of the assassination of its founder during the 2002 Dutch election campaign, had no time to build formal organizational structures, clarify its ideology, or propose a coherent policy program. Despite (or, perhaps, because of) its leader's loss, the LPF won at the polls 17 percent of the national vote, or 26 seats in the 150-strong Dutch parliament. Thereafter, it followed a trajectory of political decline until it altogether disappeared in 2006. In post-authoritarian Greece, Andreas Papandreou founded PASOK, a radical populist party that soon emerged as the true protagonist in contemporary Greek politics.⁷⁰ As long as Papandreou was at the party's helm, there developed in the party "an unmistakable sense of mission and genuine ideological commitment in the manner [the leader] and his lieutenants approached their tasks."⁷¹ There also was in Papandreou's populist leadership a distinct delegative element in the sense that the leader was not constrained by existing institutions but was accountable only to the electorate that gave him the mandate to govern. As Papandreou once famously put it, "There exist no institutions; only the people exist."

The personal aspect in populist parties becomes manifest in at least three distinct, empirically testable, and readily measurable aspects: the almost absolute and centralized control exercised by single leaders over party organizations; the great, and unmediated, emotional passion that accompanies the leader-led relationship, which relates to deep social divisions; and the delegative and missionary – as opposed to deliberative and procedural – character of such relationships. Unlike ordinary democratic leadership, which typically involves established hierarchies, institutional checks and balances, decentralized decision-making, and collective responsibility, populist leadership exhibits highly centralized authority structures, the absence of clear bureaucratic characteristics, and the leader's untrammled control over subordinates. Populist leadership is, moreover, characterized by the direct allegiance and loyalty of followers to the person of the leader. Most often, such relationships are full of emotional passion,⁷² stand on high moral grounds,⁷³ and are self-righteous in that the leader's program is presented as heralding a bright new world. Finally, populist leadership has a strong delegative character⁷⁴ pointing to an authoritarian-cum-missionary type of rule which, in case of failure to enhance social aggregation and rally the entire social body around newly-founded institutions, is likely to deepen polarization in societies where some part is already pitted against another.

A final point, to which only fleeting mention can be made in this article, concerns populism in power. Evidently, few purely populist parties succeed in winning elections and rising to state power. Perhaps disproportionately to reality, our sample includes three such parties that, respectively, came to power in Greece in the early 1980s, Peru in the early 1990s, and Venezuela in the late 1990s. Despite their enormous variability in these countries' and times' political culture, socioeconomic conditioning, and international circumstances, one similarity stands out in common for all three cases: once in power, populist leaders have always relied on polarization to continue to rule and become hegemonic. This has invariably led in countries where populists are in power to the emergence of intense politicization and the bipolarity of politics between two irreconcilably antagonistic social camps. PASOK, for instance, once in power, opted for intensifying rather moderating its previous polarization

⁷⁰ See, for a full analysis, Pappas, *The Charismatic Party*.

⁷¹ John O. Iatrides, "Papandreou's Foreign Policy," in Theodore C. Kariotis, ed., *The Greek Socialist Experiment: Papandreou's Greece* (New York: Pella, 1992), p. 130.

⁷² Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, eds. *Passionate Politics. Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁷³ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life: A Study in Religious Sociology*, translated by Karen E. Fields (New York: Free Press, 1995); James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

⁷⁴ Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy*, 5: 1 (1994), p. 59.

tactics by adopting an “openly and consistently confrontational strategy.”⁷⁵ Aiming at delegitimizing the conservative party, it attacked it claiming that it stood for authoritarianism and foreign interests while PASOK was fighting for democracy and national independence. As Pridham and Verney sum it up, PASOK’s strategy “was based on the promotion of a new dividing line allegedly separating the Right from the so-called ‘democratic forces.’ Despite PASOK’s ‘Socialist’ title, its self-presentation was essentially as a populist force which was ‘non-Right and anti-Right’.”⁷⁶ Polarization was even more exacerbated in Peru and Venezuela, where populists won power. The presidency of Fujimori fuelled political polarization and intensified the conflict between pro- and anti-government social segments. As one pro-Fujimori congressman nicely described that cleavage, “[t]he members of the democratic opposition are the ones who have always held power. With Fujimori, people like me are in congress. The opposition would never have allowed me into their ranks because I’m not like them. I’m not white. I’m not from Lima. And I don’t have money.”⁷⁷ Polarization however led Peruvian democracy to a constitutional crisis, during which Fujimori, aided by top military officers, decided to carry out an *autogolpe*, which suspended congress, the courts, and several constitutional guarantees. Polarization has been even more intense in Venezuela after Chavez’s 1998 ascent to power. The new leader, whose “inflammatory rhetoric antagonized both political and economic elites and even nonelite groups like organized labor that belonged to the old order,”⁷⁸ changed the constitution and initiated a fight for political hegemony geared around the polarization between two social poles: one representing the poor underclasses, the other symbolized by the more well-off Venezuelans. The outcome of that polarization was the coup d’état attempted against Chavez’s government in 2002 that was organized by the social opposition to his rule and (successfully) halted by his equally massive support base.

Conclusions

This comparative study has proposed a valid, integrated analytical framework for revisiting the populist phenomenon and, more particularly, analyzing its contexts, mechanics, and outcomes. Utilizing both supply-side and demand-side aspects of it, populism has been examined primarily as a strategy used by upcoming political entrepreneurs for gaining power, and establishing political hegemony, in environments undergoing deep political transformations. In such moments and contexts, played in the hands of creative leaders through a series of causal mechanisms, populism has the capacity to destroy old political identities while at the same time help create new affiliations and political loyalties. Leadership is, therefore, advanced as the key analytical variable for explaining how populism emerges and when it succeeds in contemporary democracies.

Populism has been shown to be an ideologically unspecified and spatiotemporally unbound phenomenon that is more likely to emerge during major political de-alignment and party system crises rather than in the aftermath of economic calamity and social turbulence. A closely related finding is that there is not a single *populist* constituency whether within a specific country or across countries; individuals belonging in the informal sector of economies like those of Peru or Venezuela may be attracted to populist leaders in similar ways as French industrial workers, Greek farmers, or Dutch upper-middle class strata. Still, despite their original social and political heterogeneity, once constructed, populist constituencies present as solid organic entities, “the people.” When successfully implemented, populism’s first and foremost outcome is the emergence of new (populist) parties, or movements, of distinctly personalist character, which seek to transform potential majorities into real

⁷⁵ Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Polarization in Greek Politics: PASOK’s First Four Years, 1981-1985,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 23: 1 (1997), p. 84.

⁷⁶ Geoffrey Pridham and Susannah Verney, “The Coalitions of 1989-90 in Greece: Inter-Party Relations and Democratic Consolidation,” *West European Politics*, 14: 4 (1991), p. 46.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Levitsky, p. 82.

⁷⁸ Roberts, “Populism, Political Conflict, and Grass-Roots Organizations,” p. 141.

ones. If successful, a second outcome follows the first, which however has only been alluded to in this article: Once in power, populist parties exacerbate polarization, which in turn leads to high social politicization and bipolar politics; this, to be sure, is a serious challenge for established democratic patterns.

The causal explanation proposed in this study is both parsimonious (as it allows for maximum variation of the cases sampled) and credible (as the expected outcome obtains via causal mechanisms which are embedded in specific political contexts). What must be added is that, even when similar causal mechanisms are set in motion in analytically equivalent contexts, the populist outcome is still indeterminate⁷⁹ for a number of factors related to either context (e.g., the non-availability of populist leadership) or causal mechanisms (e.g., the unsuccessful politicization of resentment or the failure to ignite polarization) or both.

Finally, this study has opened new roads for further comparative research on the populist phenomenon in at least three areas clearly identified in the preceding analysis. The first such area concerns the personalistic element of populism and how it is related to ordinary democratic politics, which is based on collective decision-making processes, institutionalized patterns of behavior, and accountability. The second area for future research should concern the interplay of the mechanisms that are necessary for populism to emerge. Particularly important is, I submit, the comparative study of polarization that appears to be at the heart of the populism both during its ascendancy and after it has won power. Corroborating previous research,⁸⁰ polarization is related to a certain radicalism that is inherent in populism, and which becomes apparent when populist parties, or movements, come to power. Which is related to the third major area of future research, that is, the meso- and long-term consequences of populist rule in the countries where it has risen successfully. For, as we currently stand witnesses, this group of countries seems everywhere to grow bigger.

⁷⁹ Falleti and Lynch, p. 1151; also see Mario Bunge, "Mechanism and Explanation," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 27: 4 (1997), pp. 410-465.

⁸⁰ For instance, Takis S. Pappas, "Political Leadership and the Emergence of Radical Mass Movements in Democracy," *Comparative Political Studies*, 41: 8 (2008), pp. 1117-40.

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