Summary and Keywords

Populism is one of the most dynamic fields of comparative political research. Although its study began in earnest only in the late 1960s, it has since developed through four distinct waves of scholarship, each pertaining to distinct empirical phenomena and with specific methodological and theoretical priorities. Today, the field is in need of a comprehensive general theory that will be able to capture the phenomenon specifically within the context of our contemporary democracies. This, however, requires our breaking away from recurring conceptual and methodological errors and, above all, a consensus about the minimal definition of populism.

All in all, the study of populism has been plagued by 10 drawbacks: (1) unspecified empirical universe, (2) lack of historical and cultural context specificity, (3) essentialism, (4) conceptual stretching, (5) unclear negative pole, (6) degreeism, (7) defective observable-measurable indicators, (8) a neglect of micromechanisms, (9) poor data and inattention to crucial cases, and (10) normative indeterminacy. Most, if not all, of the foregoing methodological errors are cured if we define, and study, modern populism simply as “democratic illiberalism,” which also opens the door to understanding the malfunctioning and pathologies of our modern-day liberal representative democracies.

Keywords: Populism, illiberalism, liberal democracy, minimal definition, methodology, essentialism, conceptual stretching, negative pole, degreeism, normative (in)determinacy

Introduction

Although still relatively young, the study of comparative populism has made big strides in recent decades and is currently one of the most thriving areas of academic research. It remains, however, beset by several methodological shortcomings that not only have so far impeded a general agreement on what exactly constitutes this phenomenon but also frustrate its further systematic research, let alone the building of a general theory that will be relevant in grasping populism precisely in the context of contemporary liberal democracy. Part of the problem arises from our insistence on trying to understand the various forms of populism that have developed at various times and various places in the world in an in-
exclusive, catch-all way. This article takes a different approach. It is explicitly concerned with modern populism, that is, the occurrences of this phenomenon in post–World War Two democracies around the world, which is qualitatively different from populisms in either pre-democratic or non-democratic political settings. Such an approach is expected to help define our concept in a concise way, cure past methodological shortcomings, and make possible new advances in the comparative study of populism.

This article offers a synopsis of previous scientific breakthroughs in the study of populism, points to common conceptual and methodological pitfalls, and proposes a novel understanding of modern populism. More specifically, the first section briefly canvasses the history of the concept of populism and shows how various scholars have at times tried to understand the various instances of the phenomenon; the second section exhibits several recurring methodological fallacies in the study of populism and shows how each of them may obstruct comparative research; and the third section puts forward a truly minimal definition of modern-day populism that renders the concept amenable to empirical investigation and well suited to underpin a general theory on populism. In a separate Appendix, the various other major definitions of populism have also been assembled for comparative review.

Research Advances

The systematic study of populism began only in the late 1960s, but during subsequent decades there emerged at least four distinct waves, or “generations,” of scholarship on this phenomenon, each corresponding to a particular time period and research agenda. In this section, I provide a concise overview of the hitherto scholarly efforts to seize populism(s). Emphasis is placed particularly on each wave’s research intension and aims, the empirical cases observed, and the scholarly gains but also some inconveniences encountered.

The Pioneers

The earliest wave of studies on populism originated in a conference held in 1967 at the London School of Economics, during which a multidisciplinary cohort of scholars explicitly set out to define the phenomenon. The publication of the conference proceedings in book form (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969) thus effectively marks the beginning of the first wave of scholarship on populism, which then expanded into the 1970s and early 1980s.

As several scholars were able to notice at the time, many rulers of newly independent nations around the globe had eagerly embraced populism as their chief mode of political action. Populism was seen to “bob up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes” (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 1; all quotations in this paragraph are from the introductory chapter to the cited book). The phenomenon was detected in pluralist political systems but also in communist states, where “strong currents seem to move in a populist direction;” it was observed in new, modern nations, as well as in older, premodern ones, where its manifestations included “the droolings of Tolstoy over muzhiks, the rationaliza-
tions of Eastern European resentments against alien traders, and the slogans in terms of which rulers of new nations legitimate themselves and subvert liberal institutions.” On this realization, the question arose about whether populism has “any underlying unity” or whether one name covers “a multitude of unconnected tendencies.” Unfortunately, that early cohort of scholars was unable to reach a unanimous verdict—which is probably why their volume lacks a concluding chapter that would sum up findings and extract conclusions. And so conceptual ambiguity about populism became inherent in its empirical and theoretical study.

What prevented that early cohort of scholars from clearly defining populism and reaching solid conclusions of its ubiquitous appearance in so many and so different spatiotemporal environments? The obvious reason was the great extension of the concept without a prior organization of its intension. Those early-day scholars saw populism everywhere, but they hardly reflected on its ontology, nor did they care to distinguish between the many different historical and political contexts within which populism seemed capable of emerging. “There can be no doubt,” they wrote, “about the importance of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it is” (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969, p. 1; emphases in original). As late as the early 1980s, a major scholar still conceived populism to be “a bewildering variety of phenomena” ranging from techniques of direct democracy, such as referenda, to agrarian movements and authoritarian regimes (Canovan, 1981).

Thus, without a clear concept in mind, the early research on populism looked, indeed, like a “fishing expedition without adequate nets” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1039). The catch was impressive as it included premodern movements, such as the Narodniki in imperial Russia; nondemocratic regimes, such as Latin America’s postwar autocracies; interwar peasant movements in Eastern Europe and the Balkans; and anti-capitalist and anti-colonial movements in Africa. Interestingly enough, no significant traces of populism were found in the advanced Western democracies. Those who studied Europe, for instance, were just able to discern “a kind of proto-populism in the English Peasants’ Revolt and the Jacqueries of the fourteenth century, or in the Bundschuh and the peasant wars of the Reformation” (MacRae, 1969, p. 154). Canovan (1981) predominantly focused her research interest on either predemocratic agrarian or nondemocratic—and certainly anti-liberal—political populisms (e.g., the populisms expounded by Juan Perón and Huey Long in Argentina and the United States, respectively; the reactionary populism of George Wallace; and Swiss-style direct-democracy populism).

In sum, the earliest wave of studies on populism sensitized scholars to the importance of this phenomenon and put the study of populism firmly into the agenda of comparative politics. At the same time, however, it failed to provide a commonly agreed-upon definition of populism, causing instead significant conceptual stretching and empirical confusion, which still persist.
Classical Populism

A second massive wave of interest in the study of populism began developing during the 1970s and 1980s, mostly by Latin American scholars. Unlike the European pioneers, who aimed at definitions, this group of students on populism was primarily concerned with the socio-economic determinants of mass political movements that developed contemporaneously in their respective countries. As put by one of the most important representatives of the group, their aim was to explain “the conditions under which the political participation of the lower classes is channeled through a populist movement” (Germani, 1978, p. 95). In the end, there developed within the group two distinct approaches, one associated with modernization theory and another with structural Marxism. For the adherents of modernization theory, on the one hand, populism was a means to incorporate into politics the newly mobilized urban working and middle classes that emerged after the breakdown of oligarchic politics and the postwar transition of those countries to capitalism and modernity (Collier, 1979; Drake, 1982; Germani, Di Tella & Ianni, 1973; Malloy, 1977). For the adherents of Marxism and the dependency school, on the other hand, populism was a multiclass political movement corresponding to the stage of import substitution industrialization (ISI) (see Cardoso & Faletto, 1979; O’Donnell, 1973). According to this interpretation, “the statist and nationalist policies of ISI allowed populist leaders to build cross-class alliances between urban labor, the middle sectors, and domestic industrialists” (Roberts, 1995, p. 85). Their differences apart, however, both approaches saw populism as specific to historical and political circumstances of development in the world semi-periphery and “agreed on the importance of defining it in social terms, rooted in relations of production and market conditions” (Jansen, 2011, p. 79).

Having thus organized their research intension (i.e., populism as a means for mobilization in particular circumstances), the authors belonging in this wave had no problem selecting their cases, which mostly included countries in Latin America but, occasionally, other countries of the semi-periphery, such as Greece (Mouzelis, 1985). The high-profile cases were, of course, those of Argentina under General Juan Perón (Di Tella, 1990; Germani, 1978; Horowitz, 1999; James, 1988), Brazil under dictator Getúlio Vargas (Conniff, 1981, 1999A; French, 1989; Wolfe, 1994), and Mexico under Lázaro Cárdenas (Basurto, 1999; Knight, 1990, 1994). There were also some lower-profile cases (like, for instance, those of Haya de la Torre in Peru, Gualberto Villarroel in Bolivia, Arbenz Guzmán in Guatemala, or Eliécer Gaitán in Colombia) that “may have been shorter-lived or less consequential than those of Perón, Vargas, and Cárdenas, but a theory of populist mobilization suggests that they share many meaningful similarities with such high-profile cases” (Jansen, 2011: pp. 88–89).

Despite its relatively good match between concept intension and research extension, the problem with this wave of scholarship on populism has been its lack of comparability potential. In other words, it could only be used to explain authoritarian populist movements falling within the specific socio-economic context of Latin America during ISI and, perhaps, some other countries in the world semi-periphery. As all the cases studied have been either authoritarian regimes or outright dictatorships, this perception of populism
could have no traveling capacity beyond these particular cases. So, the argument that populism “often becomes a mass movement only in societies where typical Western European leftist ideologies of the working class fail to develop into mass parties” (Germani, 1978, p. 88) openly suggests that the lessons from Latin American “classical” populism cannot be easily utilized in the study of populism in liberal democratic contexts. Still, this specific literature has yielded significant gains as it sensitized us to at least two important features of populism during its emergence phase: first, its mass movement character; and, second, the role of individual agency and, more specifically, the importance of “charismatic” leadership (e.g., de la Torre, 2000; Dix, 1978).

**Neoliberal Populism**

The eventual exhaustion of import substitution strategies in Latin America eroded the material foundations of state-based populism and led to the social demobilization of those actors “whose economic interests had defined traditional populist agendas” (Conniff, 1999B; Roberts, 1995, p. 82). And yet, despite the fact that both modernization and dependency theories of populism had fallen into disrepute, the phenomenon itself anything but disappeared. The emergence of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela was a reminder that old-style quasi-democratic populist politics in the region was far from dead. But that was not all. For, during the 1980s and 1990s, a new type of populism flourished in Latin America in a radically different socio-economic and political environment than that of the 1930s and 1940s.

By the early 1990s, Latin American scholars were surprised to find out that a new breed of politicians in the region were able to implement neoliberal policies while also enjoying remarkably high levels of popular support—a phenomenon for which they coined the term “neopopulism.” The most prominent such cases were those of Alan García and, subsequently, Alberto Fujimori in Peru; Carlos Menem in Argentina; Collor de Mello in Brazil; and Carlos Salinas de Gortari in Mexico. In all those cases, populism enjoyed a second political epiphany, in which it was distinguished from classical populism in two respects: first, its social basis, which now consisted of members of the urban informal sector and the rural poor, as opposed to the organized working class; and, second, its implementation of neoliberal policies instead of import substitution and state corporatism (Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1999). What, therefore, became the central puzzle of the third wave of scholars of populism was the antinomy between populism and neoliberalism and, more particularly, “the rise of personalist leaders with broad-based support, who follow neoliberal prescriptions for economic austerity and market-oriented structural adjustments” (Roberts, 1995, p. 82).

As seen by this group of scholars, the endeavor of most Latin American countries for a neoliberal adjustment of their economies presented upcoming political entrepreneurs with new opportunities for “the transformation and revival of populism under a new guise, one that is shaped by the breakdown of more institutionalized forms of political representa-
There have been several gains from this wave of scholarship on populism. First, there was a renewed interest in “charismatic” leadership emerging in politically pluralist, rather than oligarchic, systems (Hawkins, 2003, p. 1138; Weyland, 2001, p. 14). Second, populism was seen in a politically instrumental fashion. Thus, for Weyland, populism is “a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (2001, p. 14). Third, there was a renewed interest in the discourse patterns used by populist leaders and their usages in politically incorporating the masses. At the same time, however, the findings during this wave suffer from several shortcomings, most important of which is their poor comparative potential with populism in regions with different economic and social structures, particularly Europe and North America. Nor, to the best of my knowledge, were there any serious attempts to study the features of “classical” populism and “neopopulism” in Latin America in comparative fashion.

The Contemporaries

In recent years, the study of populism has grown (and is still growing) exponentially. Largely based on the idea that a powerful populist Zeitgeist had already by the early 1990s overwhelmed Western democracies (Mudde, 2004), a young generation of scholars has been investigating a host of phenomena labeled as “populist” in Europe, the Americas, and other parts of the world. With all this effort, however, and despite all our gains in extensional coverage, we still lack connotative precision. Above all, the definition of populism remains the subject of heated controversy among social and political scientists, historians, and a miscellany of pundits. As indicated by several definitions proposed in the related literature (see Appendix), populism is understood primarily in terms of actors (the “people,” some elite, a leader); actions (mass mobilization, strategic leadership); style (moralistic, dichotomous, majoritarian); domain (old–new, left–right, democratic–non-democratic, European–non-European); consequences (polarization, social homogenization, charisma); and normative implications (threat to or corrective of democracy). However, on the whole and notwithstanding their merits, as I am shortly going to show, these definitional approaches stand on perilous conceptual and methodological grounds, which often impedes comparative and theoretical efforts.

At the same time, and probably because we have been unable to unambiguously settle the “what is” question, current research—and controversy—on populism is moving fast to “how much” questions. Researchers are now increasingly busy to assess degrees (more or less) of populism utilizing either classical content analysis of populist discourse (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or textual analysis of election manifestos and other populist party literature (e.g., Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). An even more recent area of growing interest is using survey data to measure populist attitudes at the mass social level (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Elchardus & Spruyt,
2016). However sophisticated those analyses, it once again appears that, to use Sartori’s metaphor, we have started to run before even having learned how to walk. For, at the end, “regardless of whether we rely on quantitative data or more qualitative information, the problem is the same, namely, to construct fact-finding categories that own sufficient discriminating power. If our data containers are blurred, we never know to what extent and on what grounds the ‘unlike’ is made ‘alike’” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1039). I shall return to this problem after having discussed in the following section 10 conceptual and methodological shortcomings that often have troubled our efforts to unravel the riddle of populism.

Conceptual and Methodological Pitfalls

As most seem to agree, for over half a century now we have been engaged in a lively but hitherto futile search for a common understanding in the study of populism. As the battle of definitions has become in recent years even more intense, most scholars admit a conceptual morass. At the same time, there is no introspection about the reasons of such a lack of consensus and, particularly, the fallacious thinking that has caused it. Why is it so? Conceptualizing populism, and using it for cross-area comparisons, I submit, has suffered from at least 10 drawbacks that often recur in our study of populist phenomena and, in this degree or another, cause methodological pitfalls. Those are: (1) unspecified empirical universe, (2) lack of historical and cultural context specificity, (3) essentialism, (4) conceptual stretching, (5) unclear negative pole, (6) degreeism, (7) defective observable-measurable indicators, (8) a neglect of micromechanisms, (9) poor data and inattention to crucial cases, and (10) normative indeterminacy.

Unspecified Empirical Universe (The Summum Genus Problem)

One should naturally begin by asking: In our preoccupation with populism, what is actually being compared at the highest level of generality? In other words, what is the summum genus, or family—the all-inclusive class of things—to which our concept refers? The implication is, of course, that we must be comparing items that belong to the same family, genus, species, and subspecies—“in short, to the same class . . . [that] provides the ‘similarity element’ of comparability, while the ‘differences’ enter as the species of a genus, or the sub-species of a species” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1036). Since in our analysis of populism we are bound to eventually engage with classifying (in a per genus et differentiam way), it is important that we are able to specify right from the beginning the general empirical universe to which this term applies. Regrettably, we are still far from it. As even a glance at the literature (or even just at the Appendix to this chapter) will suffice to show, our empirical analysis of populism refers to several, and often diverse, families of phenomena including “political movements” or “parties” (Di Tella, 1965, p. 47; Dix, 1978; Germani, 1978; Jansen, 2011, p. 82); “ideologies” or “creeds” (Laclau, 1977, pp. 172–173; Mudde, 2004, p. 543; Stanley, 2008; Wiles, 1969, p. 166); specific “discursive patterns” (Hawkins, 2009, p. 1042; Laclau, 2005; Pauwels, 2011); political “strategies” (Betz, 2002, p. 198; Ware, 2002; Weyland, 2001, p. 14); representation “modes” (Roberts, 2015; or specific political “styles” (Kazin, 1995; Knight, 1998, p. 227; Moffitt & Tormey, 2014), some of which
are particularly related to “communication techniques” (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Urbinati, 2013, p. 137). The problem is that, since each of the foregoing families of phenomena points to quite diverse units of analysis, the field remains fragmented and full of variables that are hard to compare across the empirical universe. How can all those phenomena (including movements, parties, ideologies, creeds, discourses, strategies, modes, styles, and maybe much more) that are invariably defined as populist become comparable? Unless one is determined to stand by her own stance and happily go on fighting futile definition wars, the only way out is to envisage a high-level conceptualization of populism that, on the one hand, will be relevant to our specific research interests and aims, while, on the other hand, serving as the ultimate genus under (and in relation to) which all populist phenomena (the species and subspecies) will conveniently be subsumed.

**Context Specificity**

Like many other political concepts, populism is history-anchored and culture-bound. Having said that, and granting that a concept is its intension (i.e., the things that we have in mind when we engage in empirical research), it is necessary that we contextualize our definition of populism. Unlike all-purpose general definitions, which seek to determine the meaning of a term within a broad language frame, contextual definitions ask “what a term means or should mean within a narrower context, perhaps a specific research site or research problem” (Gerring & Barresi, 2003, p. 204). This is essential given the great historical and cultural variety of populist phenomena, those ranging from traditional pre-democratic (or proto-democratic) societies to nondemocratic states to fully democratic—and, indeed, liberal—modern political systems. Because of such a grand range, any definition of populism requires some contextual specification when applied to a particular set of empirical cases. In effect, when we assert, for instance, that 19th-century U.S. populism is “not the same” as early 21st-century European populism, our argument is simply that those phenomena are embedded in different historical contexts and hence their causes and outcomes are also different. This also alerts us to the fact that the perception of populism differs according to the distinctly national, or world regional, experiences of the scholars studying it (Gerring, 1997, p. 983). This explains, for instance, why students of populism in Latin America have focused a great deal on political participation of the underclasses, while in Europe emphasis has shifted to the people’s quest for social and national integration and in the United States to issues related to economic inequality. Even in the context of a single country, populism may take on quite different characteristics in different stages of historical development as, to take just two well-known examples, has happened in France (compare Bonapartism, or Boulangerism, with Le Pen’s *Front National*) and the United States (compare the 19th-century People’s Party with the contemporary Tea Party movement or, even more recently, the spectacular appeal of Donald Trump). In short, since concepts are anchored in specific contexts, it is important that we use definitions of populism that are attentive, not to all historical and political contexts imaginable, but only to the particular ones that each time fit our particular research interests and thus help organize our research intension.
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Essentialism

Based on the view that populism is characterized by a set of attributes that are necessary to pin down both its identity and functions, most conceptualizations of populism are essentialist. Although many “attempts to capture the essence of populism have sprung up at different times and in different places, . . . it is very difficult to see a consistent pattern” (Taggart, 2000, p. 10). In consequence, each of them captures one or several important dimensions, features, or functions of the phenomenon, which are then assumed to be primordial in constituting populism. Thus, to take just one example, after canvassing the recent literature on populism, Rooduijn (2014, p. 578) has recorded no fewer than 12 characteristics of populism mentioned in it: people-centrism; anti-elitism; homogeneity of the people; direct democracy; exclusionism; proclamation of a crisis; simplistic language; direct communication style; polarization; image of outsider; centralization of leader; and a loosely mediated relationship between leader and followers. This, to be sure, is a far from complete list, as further perusal of the literature reveals additional characteristics such as a strong moral element, charismatic leadership, and much more. Populism, therefore, often ends up in being treated as a family resemblance category—one, that is, whose members share a set of commonalities, or defining attributes, not all of which are to be found in every instance (Collier & Mahon, 1993). This approach is beset with problems. First, as Hempel has warned, the notion of essential nature of some entity is so vague “as to render this characterization useless for the purposes of rigorous inquiry” (1952, p. 6). The situation is made worse with the accumulation of several such features and other properties, which moreover lack theoretical elaboration. To mention a few examples: What is ideology? What constitutes morality (and how do we perceive immoral in contemporary politics)? And when does charismatic leadership obtain? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the same features that are recognized as essential in the various definitions of populism are often identical with properties declared necessary in other mass phenomena that are quite distinct from populism, such as millenarian and—both ancient and modern—religious movements, charismatically led political communities, regional or separatist parties, militant republicanism, contemporary right-wing extremism, nationalism, and even fascism. There is pressing need, therefore, to reduce the concept’s properties while also focusing on the concept’s ontology.

Conceptual Stretching

Essentialism is directly related to conceptual stretching, that is, broadening the boundaries of the concept so as to include an ever-increasing number of empirical referents without reducing its properties—something that “has been conducive to indefiniteness, to undelimited and largely undefined conceptualizations” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1035). As Canovan writes, “The more flexible the word has become, the more tempted political scientists have been to label ‘populist’ any movement or outlook that does not fit into any established category” (1981, p. 6). Indeed, in the study of populism, conceptual stretching has been an ancestral sin. Witness the plethora of different collective and individual units lumped together under the rubric “populism” over almost half a century ago: “the Levellers; the Diggers; the Chartists; the Narodniki; the US populists; the Socialist-Revolu-
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tionaries; Gandhi; Sinn Fein; the Iron Guard; Social Credit in Alberta; Cárdenas; Haya de la Torre; the CCF in Saskatchewan; Poujade; Belaunde; Nyerere” (Wiles, 1969, p. 178). The situation has hardly improved since. “Populism” has been used to describe such qualitatively disparate phenomena as “Maoism, Nazism, Peronism, Nasserism or Russian Narodnichestvo” (Laclau, 1977, pp. 143–144). Following a similar line of least resistance, another author places “Le Pen and Tapie, Bossi and Berlusconi, Haider, Blocher, De Winters, Glistrups and the leaders of the Romanian Populists, Tudor” in the same populist family (Tarchi, 2002, p. 122). A yet another author has stretched the concept to the point of including such disparate contemporary phenomena as (a) radical right-wing parties, such as the French National Front; (b) nonradical right-wing parties, such as Canada’s Social Credit movement; (c) left-wing parties, such as the Scottish Socialist Party; (d) Tony Blair, presented as “a champion of mainstream populism”; along with (e) a large, and ideologically variegated number of individual leaders including, among others, Filip Dewinter and Bernard Tapie from Europe, and Ross Perot, Ralph Nader, and Pat Buchanan from the United States (Mudde, 2004, pp. 549–551). The list can grow even larger if one also includes postcommunist agrarian parties in Eastern Europe; “nationalist” populist parties (like Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia or Vojislav Seselj’s Serbian Radical Party); or communist populist parties (like the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, which campaigns against the new elites in the Czech Republic) (Mudde, 2001). To avoid stretching the concept of populism to a point of meaninglessness and get instead a “general” concept with worldwide applicability requires that we reduce the number of its necessary properties, or qualifying attributes. It is worth to always remember that, assigned as we are with the task to construct a mousetrap, it is mice after all that we want to trap and not other small mammals, reptiles, or birds of the field.

Negative Pole

The difficulty of having to deal with a multitude of (presumably) essential properties and apply them to disparate units of analysis becomes particularly evident when one tries to think about real situations in which those characteristics are either absent or, at the very least, extremely weak. The question then is: Populism is different from what? Unless of course we are ready to accept that populism is a concept without negation, i.e., one with no specific boundaries, and therefore indeterminate, we have to define it a contrario—in other words, to settle what populism is not. This, however, is far from easy since, in operational terms, the negative pole must always score as zero on each and all of the core dimensions that characterize the positive cases (Goertz, 2006, p. 32). In most cases, conceptually as well as definitionally, populism is seen as the opposite of “elitism,” the latter understood as a situation in which all power is concentrated in the hands of a limited number of “immoral” people who are “mediocre” and, having “lost touch” with the people, lack “responsiveness” (see, for instance, Hayward, 1996; Worsley, 1993). Could, therefore, “elitism” be understood as populism’s polar opposite? I am afraid not, for reasons that go beyond the very conceptual morass surrounding this term, let alone the lack of real empirical referents.2 If elitism is stretched to include any situation in which some “elite” rules, then we end up with a whole gamut of diverse political situations: non-
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democracies (oligarchy, aristocracy, authoritarianism, fascism), certain types of pluralist democracy (technocracy, meritocracy), and even with elite pluralism (as in Schattschneider’s [1975] notion of the “semi-sovereign people”). Nor is technocratic elitism inherently inimical to populism. “Indeed,” writes Mudde, “one of the most successful [populist] movements, Social Credit in Canada, argued for a largely technocratic regime” (2004, p. 547). Or, to take another example, Ecuador under Rafael Correa, “populism has tuned into elitism . . . [in which] technocratic reason . . . replaces the give-and-take of democratic debate over proposals” (de la Torre, 2013, p. 39). Evidently, then, “elitism” proves a concept devoid of heuristic value (a Sartorian “cat-dog”) and, indeed, without modern-day empirical referents. Thus undefined, elitism cannot be a valid fact-finding container—and, for the time being, we are left with no real negative pole for populism. Still, any definition of populism, for making the notion distinctive, must be such that it excludes nonpopulism.

Degreeism

Despite the lack of unanimity about populism’s negative pole, most comparative-minded scholars choose to treat populism as a continuous (more-or-less) rather than a dichotomous (either-or) concept. Sartori (1984) has forcefully argued against degreeism, especially when measurement is problematic, and defended dichotomous, or categoric, concepts that are defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. Indeed, despite a recent infatuation with attempts to measure populism (i.e., constructing interval scales for showing differences, or distances, among the cases), essentialist characteristics are extremely hard to pin down and, of course, measure. Take, for instance, the frustrating efforts that have been made to gauge populism through content and other discursive analyses (mentioned above). As Pauwels (2011) admits, such analyses suffer from questionable data reliability, irregular sampling, and coding biases; it is also impossible to measure (degrees of) populism over time and space. When treated along a continuum, populism cannot be separated from nonpopulism. Rather, it is a property that to a certain extent can be predicated of all political systems, whether democratic or not. What is still perfectly feasible, however, is to use ordinal scales for indicating the rank order of populist phenomena. Such quantification may only “enter the scene after, and only after, having formed the concept” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1038). Despite their undisputed value, such categoric concepts have by and large been avoided in the study of populism for the obvious difficulty they present (cf., Weyland 2001). This already raises the issue of concept operationalization, to which I am now turning brief attention.

Empirical Operationalization

Although not all concepts can be made operational (think, for instance, of beauty, virtue, or, indeed, morality), clear conceptualization is ideally accompanied by some kind of operationalization, that is, stating “the conditions, indeed the operations, by means of which a concept can be verified and, ultimately, measured” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1045). Such operations necessitate the use of clear indicators or, in Hempel’s own words, “criteria of application couched in terms of observational or experimental procedure” (1952, p. 41). Con-
concept operationalization, thus, should take the form: let $x$ be what can be defined (and verified or falsified) via the indicators $a$, $b$ and $c$ (Sartori, 2009). The problem is that the feasibility, let alone validity, of operationalization is inversely analogous to the number of characteristics inherent in our concept definition. This alerts us further in two respects. First, the more its properties, the larger the number of operations we must undergo for verifying the concept. Second, we must perform our operations with all, not only some, properties. It is probably because of such difficulties that operationalizing populism is still underdeveloped. Most efforts toward operationalization concern specific variables of the concept (the nature of its ideology, its discursive style, the characteristics of its leadership) rather than the concept itself. Such efforts include, among others, the distinction between “thin” and “thick” ideology (Stanley, 2008), the content analysis of various populist manifestations (Hawkins, 2009; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Pauwels, 2011), and the status of populist leaders on the basis of various indicators (Levitsky & Loxton, 2013).

Neglect of Micromechanisms

Perhaps the most conspicuous absence from the literature on populism is the systematic attention to the role of various mechanisms—at both the micro- and meso-levels of analysis—that could help to better explain the phenomenon across the different spatiotemporal settings in which it occurs. A mechanism stands midway between general theory and empirical facts and points to “a specific causal pattern that can be recognized after the event but rarely foreseen. […] It is less than a theory, but a great deal more than a description since it can serve as a model for understanding other cases not yet encountered” (Elster, 1993, pp. 3, 5). Examples of such mechanisms are charismatic leadership, symbolic framing (and other similar preference-formation mechanisms such as Riker’s “heresthetics”), the strategic use of political polarization, social mobilization, patronage politics, several cognitive and other social psychological mechanisms (used by the populist voter for, say, reducing dissonance or coping with prospective loss), and, of course, transformational mechanisms that populist parties often employ once they happen to come to power for presenting themselves as more responsible, rather than merely responsive, political agents. Despite the fact that many studies of populism are replete with such mechanisms, they are seldom identified as such, let alone examined and tested in comparative fashion with an aim at (mechanism-based) theory building.

Poor Data and Inattention to Crucial Cases

With the expansion of interest in populism and the proliferation of studies on this phenomenon, we are currently endowed with increasing amounts of empirical research and survey data, most of which, however, has been accumulated in indiscriminate and rather haphazard ways. For the individual researcher, to be sure, “[t]his may be an expedient way of handling his private research problems, but remains a very inconvenient strategy from the angle of the additivity and the comparability of his findings. As a result, the joint enterprise of comparative [populist] politics is menaced by a growing potpourri of disparate, non-cumulative and—in the aggregate—misleading morass of information” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1039). Poor data, in turn, prohibits any meaningful classifi-
cation of our cases, which eventually paves the way to poor—on no—theory. A related problem in this respect concerns case selection bias. Most analysts naturally choose to study populism by using cases that they can handle more easily whether because of personal familiarity, linguistic facility, or other biases. This may, however, cause a neglect of particularly important “crucial cases” since they may provide definitive evidence to theoretical claims; as Harry Eckstein once argued, even “a single crucial case may certainly score a clean knockout over a theory” (cited in King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994, p. 209). Such is, most prominently, the case of Greece’s Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK), which, largely because of linguistic unfamiliarity and nonproximity to empirical sources, remained for many years outside the radars of comparative research on populism (for recent exceptions, see Pappas, 2013, 2014A; Pappas & Aslanidis, 2015). And yet, by any measure conceivable, this party is a real trailblazer and by far the most successful case of populism in contemporary Europe and, arguably, across the entire Western democratic world.³

Normative Indeterminacy

Although conceptual stretching “also represents a deliberate attempt to make our conceptualizations value free” (Sartori, 1970, p. 1034), populism is heavily burdened with normative connotations, whether positive or negative. This is particularly acute when it comes to populism’s impact on democratic politics given populism’s strong affinity to moral precepts and its appeals to “the people” as a potential electoral majority. Shouldn’t the people come to power? And isn’t it good for democracy? Opinions differ sharply. On the negative side, even when leaving aside the public appeals of mainstream politicians in Europe and elsewhere to voters for avoiding “populist excesses,” many scholars think of populism as an aberration (and, indeed, a specter) of political democracy and conceive it as an “internal periphery” of it (see, for instance, Canovan, 1999; Rosanvallon, 2006). As another author has put it, “populism is to representative democracy what demagoguery was to direct democracy: internal to and parasitical on it” (Urbinati, 2013, p. 145). On the positive side, it is being proposed that, rather than threat, populism may serve as a corrective to democracy by bringing the excluded masses back into politics, thus enhancing pluralist representation and accountability. One way to avoid the conundrum has been to simply determine that populism is both corrective and a threat to democracy (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012).⁴ Otherwise, the matter will remain inconclusive as long as we cannot reach a generally agreed-upon conceptualization of populism and, most importantly, study empirically and comparatively the intended and unintended consequences of this phenomenon in the different settings in which it has already appeared.

The Minimal Definition

We are back where we began in this chapter—or, more precisely, we are back to the very beginning of our concern with populism in that first conference held in 1967 at LSE,
where Isaiah Berlin, serving as Chairman of the concluding section, spoke to the rest of participants with these words:

Now we must address ourselves to the biting of the sour apple, a difficult part of our proceedings, which is the attempt to formulate some kind of model or definition or formula into which we can fit all the various types and nuances of populism which have been discussed; or, if we think that we cannot do it, to give reasons for our failure to do so, which might be equally fruitful. (Berlin, 1967, p. 114)

As shown in the previous sections, the hitherto failure to agree on a common understanding of contemporary populism is related to our mixing up, and studying together, different kinds of populism, which in turn has caused several methodological pitfalls. As we are now confronted with the steady increase of populism in the democratic world and with an ever-increasing production of studies on populism in the academic world, we simply cannot afford, as Taguieff (1995) implicitly suggests, to abandon attempts at a rigorous definition. More than ever, we need a minimal definition of populism so that, ultimately, we will be able to both classify our empirical cases and theoretically compare them in meaningful ways. This section undertakes the task to offer such a minimal (that is, per genus et differentiam) definition of populism which, by addressing the previous methodological shortcomings and reducing the number of necessary attributes in the intension, will make our concept theoretically more “general” and, at the same time, better able to cover greater empirical mileage.

A minimal definition is one that includes only the core, or defining, characteristics of the concept’s referents while excluding the variable (or accompanying, secondary, or contingent) ones (Sartori 1984). Since the core properties should alone be able to bound the concept extensionally, any secondary properties are to be “treated as the focus of empirical investigation rather than as a matter of definition” (Collier & Gerring, 2009, p. 5). Ideally, as Gerring remarks, a minimal definition should be “perfectly substitutable” (2001, p. 78)—which is to say that one ought to be able to replace “populism” in any sentence with the minimal definition with no loss of intended meaning.

That minimal definitions are difficult to achieve hardly needs stressing. As Kurt Weyland has conceded, “[i]t is often difficult to identify characteristics that are necessary and jointly sufficient in classifying a case as an instance of a phenomenon and to distinguish those definitional attributes from background conditions, causes, functional requirements, and consequences, as Sartori demands . . . The particularly confusing concept of populism provides a best case for this skeptical position” (2001, p. 4). Keeping such difficulties in mind, here is the golden rule that we must follow when engaging in reconceptualization:

Make sure that the definiens of a concept is adequate and parsimonious: adequate in that it contains enough characteristics to identify the referents and their boundaries; parsimonious in that no accompanying property is included among the necessary, defining properties. (Sartori, 1984, p. 56)
But this would hardly be the end of our difficulties. “Concepts,” writes Goertz, “are about ontology. To develop a concept is more than providing a definition; it is deciding what is important about an entity” (2006, p. 27; emphasis added). A concept’s ontology, therefore, is intimately related to causality. Good concepts have causal theories and hypotheses embedded in them, which is to say that they “must also possess theoretical, or systematic, import; i.e., they must permit the establishment of explanatory and predictive principles in the form of general laws and theories” (Hempel, 1952, p. 46). It is from those theories and hypotheses that we set out to understand how a concept presents in the real world, interacts with its environment, and, through various mechanisms, which vie for our explanation, causes change.

So, what is populism in the context of our contemporary democratic world? Under this innocuous formulation we are compelled to treat populism as an object concept (Sartori, 1984), that is, a concept used to identify distinct, albeit quite diverse, referents. On that account, and stripped to its essentials, populism could well be defined as the idea that political sovereignty belongs to and should be exercised by “the people.” Obviously, the key term in the foregoing definition is “the people”—the meaning of which may differ from one place to another, and thus can only become clear after empirical and comparative research. Whatever the case, the foregoing conceptualization of populism entails four essential attributes of “the people”: its potential to form a political majority; its allegedly homogeneous “over-soul” nature; its embattled social positioning in an ostensibly bipolar world; and its belief of holding the moral right. All those attributes draw from early republicanism and, while not extraneous to the democratic principle, are fundamentally inimical to contemporary political liberalism.

That being so, and by taking our reconceptualizing effort only one little but brave step further, we eventually achieve a truly minimal definition that understands contemporary populism simply as democratic illiberalism (Pappas, 2012, 2014A, 2014B). Consequently, the terms “populism” and “democratic illiberalism” are in this view perfectly substitutable and can be used interchangeably in our efforts to study modern populism, as carrying exactly the same meaning and denoting exactly similar things.

Our new conceptualization of populism qua democratic illiberalism offers major advantages regarding its ontology, causal powers, and empirical validity, while it also keeps us safe from major methodological pitfalls.

First, at the highest level of generality, our minimal definition points clearly to “illiberalism” as the ultimate genus, that is, a family of more specific phenomena that may develop within contemporary democracy. In this light, illiberalism pertains to several—and hierarchically organized—units of analysis, such as individual leaders, political parties or movements, party systems, and even regimes (dubbed “populist democracies,” cf. Pappas, 2014B); it also calls attention to a host of secondary attributes of the populist phenomenon (such as specific ideological and symbolic themes, certain discursive patterns, political strategies or styles), which are often, but rather confusingly, elevated to core-property status.
Second, it does bear repetition, modern populism is not about any kind of illiberalism; it refers to illiberal phenomena that develop within the specific historical context of contemporary representative democracy and in opposition to the principles of political liberalism. With this clause, and unless we may intent otherwise, populism becomes highly contextualized and relevant to the study of contemporary democratic politics. At the same time, however, our definition is not applicable to predemocratic (e.g., the Russian Narodniki) and premodern types of populism (e.g., 19th-century U.S. populism) or, indeed, to nondemocratic populism (e.g., Argentina’s early Peronism).

Third, by reducing the concept’s properties, we achieve a clear grasp of what constitutes its ontology. As we have seen, a concept’s ontology rests on its core characteristics, which alone amount to what a concept really is (Goertz, 2006). Thus, our definition is indeed minimal in that it contains only two necessary properties, which, when in tandem, can sufficiently capture the ontology, or nature, of the phenomenon we want analyzed: “democraticness” and “illiberalism.” In other words, when put together, these two characteristics become the constitutive—i.e., necessary and sufficient—dimensions of modern populism, that is to say, the concept’s very intension.

Fourth, as a result of both spatiotemporal context-specificity and a clear intension, our minimal concept also becomes well bound extensionally with regard to the ensemble of referents to which it may apply. Some cases, to be sure, will be mixed bags, and therefore their inclusion in analysis, or exclusion from it, will be assumed by how one defines “democracy” or “illiberalism.” Should we, for instance, classify Hungary’s Jobbik as a populist (i.e., illiberal but still democratic) party, or is it to be relegated to the category of nondemocratic parties, which fall outside our research concerns? Another example: Is the strong anti-immigration discourse of the Danish Progress Party a clear enough indication of “illiberalism” (so that we can classify this party as populist), or is it reckoned simply as a set of ultra-conservative ideas, and policy proposals, of an otherwise perfectly liberal party?

Fifth, and perhaps even more crucially, our new minimal definition of modern populism points directly to its two negative poles, that is, political liberalism (as has been analyzed by several authors, most notably Rawls, 2005) and autarchy (or, if I were to use a rather tautological term, nondemocratic illiberalism). These distinctions, depicted in Figure 1, already establish what modern populism is not, at the same time providing us with a clear dichotomous view of our object: Populism, in short, is always democratic but never liberal. Such a conception points to two clear cleavage lines that may open up in modern politics and which are essential for further understanding the populist phenomenon: one cleavage dividing democratic from nondemocratic forces (which effectively pits liberals and populists jointly against autocratic non democrats) and another dividing liberal from broadly illiberal forces (which pits liberals against populists and non democrats jointly).
Sixth, having now established what populism is (“democratic illiberalism”) and what it is not (whether political liberalism or “nondemocratic illiberalism”), our concept has already become specific enough to attempt its empirical measurement and try to comparatively assess its degrees in time and space. It is here, too, that we can code our populism-related variables in contradistinction to the variables related to both “liberalism” and “democraticness,” and make them the basis for quantitative analysis. To this end, it certainly helps that the proposed minimal definition is easy to operationalize empirically.

Thus, seventh, the two core attributes of newly conceptualized populism bear a very traceable relation to sets of specific indicators and therefore lend themselves to empirical testing. “Democraticness” can thus be operationalized as electoral participation and constitutional legality, while “illiberalism” involves at least three indicator-level variables—the acknowledgment of one single cleavage in society, the pursuit of adversarial politics, and majoritarianism (in contrast to liberalism’s acceptance of cross-cutting cleavages, the pursuit of political moderation, and the protection of minority rights).

Eighth, the foregoing minimal definition of populism also points to several of the mechanisms that help it materialize: the means and agents necessary for forging, and disseminating, the populist proposition; the symbolic and actual making of “the people”; the inevitable choice of polarization as the best way to wage political struggle; the exaltation of morality over reason; etc. In addition, and precisely because it specifies the ontology of populism while it is also explicit about its opposite poles, our minimal definition is particularly well suited for comparing positive (populism-laden) and negative (populism-free) cases and also providing credible explanations about populist causality.

Finally, at least from the liberal democratic point of view, the herein-proposed definition of populism is endowed with strong normative determinacy since it clearly posits this phenomenon as the chief foe of contemporary liberal democracy. It therefore calls specifically for the comparative analysis of populist parties in office, which, especially when able to form single majority governments (as, for instance, in several Latin American states, but also in Greece, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey, among other countries), seem to have seriously damaged political liberalism, instead leading those countries to either increased illiberalism (Greece, Poland) or political autarchy (Hungary, Turkey).

To sum up and conclude this article, my initial intent has been to provide a concise overview of how the study of populism has grown—rather extravagantly—during recent decades; to identify the major methodological pitfalls that have troubled comparative empirical research; and, finally, to propose a most minimal definition for the further study of populism in the context of contemporary democratic politics. Meanwhile, however, the...
empirical evidence produced by continuous research on populist phenomena around the world has become massive. Our next, and certainly more courageous, task is to bring together conceptual finesse and the mass of empirical findings into a coherent framework of analysis so as to produce nothing less than a general theory of modern-day populism.

Appendix: Main Definitions of Populism

Populism as Movement
“A political movement which enjoys the support of the mass of the urban working class and/or peasantry but which does not result from the autonomous organizational power of either of these two sectors. It is also supported by non-working-class sectors upholding an anti-status quo ideology” (Di Tella, 1965, p. 47).

“A political movement which challenges established elites in the name of a union between a leader and ‘the people’ (undifferentiated by group or class)” (Dix, 1978).

“[T]he political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established elites” (Roberts, 2006, p. 127).

“Any sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people” (Jansen, 2011, p. 82).

Populism as Style
Populism “connotates a political style [that] implies a close bond between political leaders and led” (Knight, 1998, p. 227).

“A political communication style of political actors that refers to the people” (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007, p. 322).

Populism as Ideology
“Any creed or movement based on the following major premise: virtue resides in the simple people, who are the overwhelming majority, and in their collective traditions” (Wiles, 1969, p. 166).

“Populism in modern democratic societies is best seen as an appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society” (Canovan, 1999, p. 3).

“A [thin-centered] ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be the expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004, p. 543; 2007).

“A thin-centered ideology which advocates the sovereign rule of the people as a homogenous body” (Abts & Rummens, 2007, p. 409).
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"An ideology which pits a virtuous and homogenous people against a set of elites and dangerous ‘others’ who are together depicted as depriving (or attempting to deprive) the sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice" (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 3).

Populism as Discourse

“Populism consists in the presentation of popular-democratic interpellations⁶ as a synthetic-antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology” (Laclau, 1977, pp. 172–173).

“A language whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter” (Kazin, 1995, p. 1).

“A style of political mobilization based on strong rhetorical appeals to the people and crowd action on behalf of a leader. [. . .] It is a rhetoric that constructs politics as a moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo and the oligarchy” (de la Torre, 2000, p. 4).

“A Manichaean discourse that identifies Good with a unified will of the people and Evil with a conspiring elite” (Hawkins, 2009, p. 1042).

Populism as Strategy

“A political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland, 2001, p. 14).

“A mass movement led by an outsider or maverick seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitarian linkages” (Barr, 2009, p. 44).

Populism as Political Culture

Populism is “the proposition that government policy should be what the people want and that the people are free when their wishes are law” (Riker, 1982, p. 238).

“An interpretation of democracy made from within a republican structure and perspective of government and politics” (Urbinati, 2013, p. 141).

Populism as Omnibus Concept

“Populism is a dimension of political action, susceptible to syncretism with all forms of movements and all types of governments. [. . .] Whether dimension or style rather than ideology or form of mobilization, populism is so elastic and indeterminate as to discourage all attempts at a rigorous definition” (Taguieff, 1995, p. 25).

References

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Notes:

(1.) For the true aficionados, a summary of the conference proceedings appeared in 1968 under the title “To Define Populism” (*Government and Opposition, 3*(2), pp. 137-179), while a complete transcript of the proceedings is to be found in the library of the LSE under the title “London School of Economics Conference on Populism, May 20-21, 1967: Verbatim Report,” shelf mark HN 17 C74.

(2.) An elitist is supposed to argue against “the volonté générale of the people” (Mudde, 2004, p. 543); contend that the masses are “immoral,” degenerate, or somehow inferior; and try “depriving the [allegedly] sovereign people of their rights, values, prosperity, identity and voice” (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 3). But who in our contemporary
mass democracy is such a vile elitist? If we cannot find any (and I personally see none), we obviously run out of cases and are thus left with an *embarrass de pauverté*.

(3.) When compared with other contemporary democratic populist parties around the world, PASOK easily scores the highest rates in terms of party longevity, electoral success, duration in office, and ideological hegemony in society. Founded in 1974 by charismatic Andreas Papandreou, it has enjoyed a long and continuous political life full of electoral breakthroughs (it won 48.2% of the national vote in 1981 and was still in command of an impressive 44% by the elections of 2009). In the last four decades, PASOK has ruled Greece for 23 years (21 singlehandedly and only 2 as a coalition partner). And, perhaps most importantly, PASOK imposed its ideological hegemony upon Greek society at the expense of political liberalism. For these reasons, PASOK approximates the *ideal type* of populist party and deserves more scrutiny by students of comparative populism.

(4.) Paradoxically, Mudde's (2004) definition of populism, which is based on the existence of a *moral* social majority allegedly antagonizing an “immoral” elitist minority in society, bespeaks a deeply anti-democratic state of political affairs since *majority rule* (to be distinguished from the *principle of majority*) excludes from power—and, indeed, from all politics—minority groups, those often being perceived as wicked, morally degenerate, corrupt, or otherwise inferior.

(5.) This same term has been used in the past to describe analytically distinct empirical phenomena and, therefore, with different meanings. Perhaps the earliest use of the term was made by Fareed Zakaria with reference to democratically elected governments that are, however, soft on the protection of the their citizens’ civil liberties—a phenomenon he identifies with the politics of several nations around the world ranging “from modest offenders like Argentina to near tyrannies like Kazakhstan and Belarus, with countries like Romania and Bangladesh in between” (Zakaria, 1997, p. 23). This author’s *illiberal democracy*, therefore, presents just as another “diminished subtype” of democracy (Collier & Levitsky, 1997), which, besides its loose empirical application, is of questionable analytical value. Another author who has used the term in a more suggestive, yet conceptually unspecified, way is Ivan Krastev, a specialist on Central and Eastern European politics, who has proposed “democratic illiberalism” as a “major [and quite dangerous] trend of the modern political world” that gives priority to “building capitalism over building democracy” (Krastev, 2007, p. 62). Still, although for Krastev democratic illiberalism is *distinct* from populism, they may work in tandem to produce their catastrophic results: “The liberal era that began in Central Europe in 1989 has come to an end. Populism and illiberalism are tearing the region apart” (Krastev, 2007, p. 56). For our own purposes, by far the most apposite mention to “democratic illiberalism” was made by Hungary’s populist Prime Minister Victor Orbán when, in a speech in July 2014, he described his views about the future of his country as a purely *illiberal* state. Here are his exact words: “And so in this sense the new state that we are constructing in Hungary is an illiberal state, a non-liberal state. It does not reject the fundamental principles of liberalism such as freedom, and I could list a few more, but it does not make this ideology the central element of
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state organization, but instead includes a different, special, national approach” (Orbán, 2014).

(6.) As explained in Mouzelis (1986, pp. 88-89), interpellations are “ideologies which call on, or interpellate, people as class subjects.”

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