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**MASTER’S THESIS**

**RECONSIDERING POPULISM HISTORICALLY:  
LESSONS FROM BRITISH POLITICS**

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## THESIS APPROVAL PAGE



## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this master's thesis as "Reconsidering Populism Historically: Lessons From British Politics" has been written by myself in accordance with the academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that all materials benefited in this thesis consist of the mentioned resources in the reference list. I verify all these with my honour.

Date

18/07/2022

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**ABSTRACT**  
**Master's Thesis**  
**Reconsidering Populism Historically: Lessons from British Politics**  
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**Graduate School of Social Sciences**  
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Populism is one of the most used terms in recent years. It has been used in media and daily life often but what it refers to has become unclear. Although people use it to describe irrational and anti-democratic behaviors mostly, that is not an academically accurate usage and can't contribute to us while explaining politics.

There are many debates about the definition of populism in literature. In this thesis, we are going to argue that populism refers to the frustration of the people towards the system when the inclusiveness of democracy declines or people felt unrepresented. Accordingly, we are going to describe populists as the people who use this anger for either to gain more political power or just to put those ignored issues into political area. Also, we are going to argue that populism does not have a destructive effect on democracy under all circumstances and serves as an early warning system for inclusive democracy. The risks of populism depend on the power and structure of those countries. Meanwhile, we are going to argue that technological and societal changes have affected populism and transformed it in time. In order to make those claims stronger, we are going to explain them in the example of Brexit and British politics in general. While doing all of these, we are going to benefit from academic articles and books, newspaper reports, election manifestos of parties, and speeches by party leaders.

**Keywords: populism, inclusive democracy, Brexit.**

## **ÖZET**

**Yüksek Lisans Tezi**

**Tarihsel Olarak Popülizmi Yeniden Değerlendirmek: Britanya Siyasetinin**

**Öğrettikleri**

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Popülizm son yılların en çok kullanılan kavramlarından biridir. Medyada ve günlük yaşamda sıkça kullanılsa da kavramın neyi ifade ettiği muğlaklaşmıştır. Çoğunlukla irrasyonel ve antidemokratik davranışları ifade etmek için kullanılsa da, bu akademik olarak uygun bir kullanım değildir ve politikayı açıklarken bize bir fayda sağlamaz.

Popülizmin literatürde pek çok tanımı vardır. Bu tezde ise popülizmin, demokrasinin kapsayıcılığı azaldığında veya halk temsil edilmediğini hissettiğinde oluşan, sisteme yönelik öfke ve hayal kırıklığı olduğu iddia edilecek. Buna bağlı olarak popülistler ise, bu öfke ve hayal kırıklığına sebep olan sorunları siyasi gündeme taşımak veya buradan güç elde etmek için kullanan kişiler olarak tanımlanacak. Ayrıca, popülizmin demokrasi için her zaman yıkıcı sonuçlar doğurmadığını ve kimi zaman demokrasinin katılımcılığı için bir erken uyarı sistemi vazifesi gördüğünü iddia edeceğiz. Popülizmin riski, ülkelerin içerisindeki güç dengesi ve kurumsal yapılarına bağlıdır. Bu esnada, teknolojik ve toplumsal gelişmelerin popülizmi zaman içerisinde dönüştürdüğünü iddia edeceğiz. Bütün bu iddiaları toparlamak ve güçlendirmek için hepsini Brexit ve genel olarak Britanya siyaseti özelinde inceleyeceğiz. Bütün bunları yaparken akademik makaleler ve kitaplardan, gazete haberlerinden, partilerin seçim manifestolarından ve parti liderlerinin konuşmalarından faydalanacağız.

**Anahtar kelimeler: popülizm, katılımcı demokrasi, Brexit.**

**RECONSIDERING POPULISM HISTORICALLY: LESSONS FROM  
BRITISH POLITICS**

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>APRA</b>	American Popular Revolutionary Alliance
<b>EC</b>	European Community
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>MEP</b>	Member of the European Parliament
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>NHS</b>	National Health System
<b>SEA</b>	Single European Act
<b>SNP</b>	Scottish National Party
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UKIP</b>	United Kingdom Independence Party
<b>US</b>	United States



## INTRODUCTION

Populism has become one of the most used terms in politics over the last few years. Especially it started to attract attention after the United States (the US) elections and Brexit referendum in 2016. When we check the Google Trends, we can see that populism searches peaked worldwide in the fall of 2016 when the US elections happened. Some scholars like Chantal Mouffe (2018) refer to today's political climate as "a populist moment" or as Cas Mudde (2004) refers "populist zeitgeist". Most of the time, we hear phrases from politicians and journalists like "new populist wave" or "rising populism". Nevertheless, people who use these terms lack to give clear definitions of populism and how did they identify that in the first place. We usually come across this term in media outlets while they were referring to some politicians or policies as being "populistic." Yet, there are just a few politicians who call themselves populists. If it is so obvious what is populist and what is not, then why do politicians hesitate to call themselves with this label? Or if they are populists now, what happened to our old-school right wing-left wing division of politics and where does populism stand among them?

One of the reasons for the politicians' hesitation to embrace the term is the negative reputation this word gets over time. It could be easily used for labeling policies that are irrational and harmful. Also, most of the time populists are seen as a threat to democracy and associated with radical ideas such as fascism. However, inaccurate usage might eradicate the true meaning of the word since it is hard to describe today what populism really is. Neither populism is new, nor do we see it for the first time. It dates back to the 19th century when the People's Movement in the US and Narodniks in Russia appeared on the political stage. Since that time, its' characteristics have evolved through cultural and technological changes and reached the global scale. It is a subjective choice to support or oppose it but academically, it is something that we need to analyze objectively in order to understand today's political climate. Thus, we could create accurate predictions about the future.

Briefly, there are three targets in this thesis. The first one is to clarify the concept of populism and reveal its functional aspect in explaining politics. This will

show us that it is possible to interpret today's politics from a populist perspective while avoiding subjective judgements and political propaganda. The second one is to show the relationship between populism and power with the help of historical context. It is clear that populism can cause dangerous consequences which can threaten democracies sometimes. However, it does not mean that it will become a threat to democracies each time or only represent irrational ideas within the political domain. We could reach those outcomes by looking into the historical context of each country and their interrelation with populism. That's why as a third and main aim, this will be shown with Brexit and recent British elections cases that populism doesn't have to overthrow democracy or represent irrational ideas, and can be seen within every political party in a different way. Thus, we can overcome the idea that populism only inherently signifies irrational, anti-democratic tendencies which would eventually turn countries into authoritarian states.

In order to reach those goals, I am going to follow these methods; first, I am going to review the existing literature by searching for academic papers and books that have written about populism. In this way, I want to put forward recent theoretical debates about the topic within political science. Also, I am going to study its history through books, academic papers, and newspapers. Thus, we will be able to see its differences and continuities, and what caused changes in populism over time. This will help us while comparing theory with practice too. Lastly, in order to deepen the research and prove the main claims of the thesis, I am going to analyze Brexit and British politics in general. While doing that, I am going to use election manifestos of the political parties and speeches of the leaders as primary sources. Also, I am going to benefit from books, papers, and news about British political parties and leaders, populism in Britain, and Brexit.

What I argue with the thesis is that the concept of populism actually refers to the reaction of society in frustration when the inclusiveness of democracy is flawed. What we refer to today as populists are politicians who benefit from this reaction in order to gain political power or force governments to change certain policies of a country according to their understanding of politics. That's why we can utilize all theoretical approaches but accepting just one of them as an accurate definition might misguide us. What causes danger for democracy is not populism itself but the people

who abuse the power they gain through populism. That's why British democracy can show us an example of how populism can't grow further in a well-settled democracy that has a working check and balance system. Populists only achieved to change the United Kingdom's (the UK's) policy towards the European Union (the EU) but couldn't go further. We can conclude that populism only reflected some discontents of the people who were unrepresented in politics.

In the first chapter, I'm going to explore how academics identified populism and whether they were able to create a proper definition or not. I am going to discuss what makes the backbone of the populism concept and where should we look at first to be able to call something or someone populist. My main goal in this chapter is to find out what is populism and how can we define it. As I explained before, what I observed from both in media and daily life is that the word populism can be used for many things, and the term loses its' explanatory value. In my opinion, this situation damages social sciences because it means that the field was unable to explain certain social conditions and even makes it more complicated by adding this term in the literature. The term should signify more or less the same meaning for everyone. For this reason, I decided to explain the concept first to get a clear view of the topic. Recent debates on the topic show us that we can analyze populism under three theoretical frameworks; as an ideology, as a discourse, and as a political strategy. Under each section about those approaches, I'm going to present how scholars evaluated the term and how they based their arguments. Each approach gives us a better understanding of populism so that we can avoid using it as a buzzword. If we can overcome the complexity of the term and grasp the meaning, we can explain better its' historical background and how it affects today's political domain. Thus, the historical and explanatory value of the concept can be preserved. What we are going to find out with this chapter is that there is not a single explanation for populism, however, a variety of definitions do not prevent us to understand what populism is. Theoretical approaches show us that populism can be seen in every country and every political movement. That's why it should be considered why and how populism emerges and what kind of consequences can it have for democracies. There are some concerns about whether populism is dangerous or not for democracies. Theory shows that it is possible but not a must. As I'm going to demonstrate in this thesis with the Brexit case and

British politics in general, populism can be used as a tool to convince people into some policies and doesn't have to lead the country into a dictatorship or make their democratic conditions worse.

In the second chapter, I'm going to use historical examples to match those theoretical definitions with the cases in order to find out how accurate they were. Thus, I'm aiming to show that populism is not a unique thing that appeared only today. It is necessary to show its history to emphasize that it is not a temporary trend but has been playing a significant role in many countries for years. We can determine how and why people supported populism, and how it started and ended under different circumstances by analyzing its' history. Besides that, we should acknowledge that populism has its own historical timeline rather than playing a secondary role. Thus, we can prove that it is a living term that can be encountered in the future too as it happened before. Also, a comparison of the past and present versions of populism could give us a better vision of its' originality. Populism has changed together with society and technology. What we saw in history could be different from today's populism in terms of usage of language and propaganda tools, embraced principles, or the way they organize masses. When it first appeared in the late 19th century, the world had different dynamics both politically and technologically. In order to show the historical continuity of populism, we should analyze those changes so that they could help us to see where populism stands today. For this reason, I'm going to explain how technological changes helped the transformation of populism in terms of their capability of propaganda, goals and successes/failures, and their ability to manage when populists were elected. In the end, I'm aiming to prove that theory supports historical cases and populism is still a relevant part of the political domain despite all those changes.

In the third and last chapter, I'm going to discuss where we can see those populist approaches and historical changes in the example of British politics in order to emphasize the role of populism in recent history. The reason I chose the UK as a case is because it is one of the oldest, well-settled, and richest democracies in the world. So it would be easier to see the changes and impacts of populism through time. Another reason is that it is one of the places where we can see every aspect of the politics from the right wing to the left wing, so it creates opportunities to see how the "populist zeitgeist" affected those ideologies. Also, Brexit is an acceleration point for

populism both in the world and in Europe, so it would fit with the context. When we analyze Brexit from the populist perspective, we can see how populist ideology is rooted within the Brexit idea, how populist language resonated among British voters so it resulted in the success of the Leave campaign, or how populist strategy contributed to Brexit campaigns in both sides. In order to support those claims, I'm going to analyze UK parties' political stance through their manifestos and their leaders between 2015, when populism started to be a popular term, and 2019 when the last elections were executed. Thus, I'm aiming to show that populism had always been there and did not leave over the years even though attention has drifted away. What I want to achieve in general is to explain populism better with the examples from UK politics.

# **FIRST CHAPTER**

## **THEORETICAL APPROACHES ON POPULISM: IS IT AN IDEOLOGY, A DISCOURSE OR A POLITICAL STRATEGY?**

### **1.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this section, I am going to try to explain how the academy defined populism. The main purpose of this chapter is to compile definitions of populism and to make use of these definitions while evaluating populism in contemporary politics in the following chapters. The first thing that we should overcome with this section is the subjective use of the word as if it only signifies anti-democratic demagoguery. Populism provides us with more than that, and we can't get benefit from it if we continue our prejudices. This could only be achievable with the academic definitions which show both populism's contributions and risks for democracy. In recent researches, major approaches are ideological, discursive, and strategical approaches that explain the term from different perspectives. Accepting just one of these approaches as the correct, perfect definition will not help us but making use of each of them could contribute to our understanding of what populism really is. Just too simply put, we can say that the ideological approach elaborates the topic by finding out common political moves and behavioral patterns that populists share and creating a template out of them that helps us to identify populists when we see one. That approach also shows us populist principles and their ideological positioning among other political ideologies and discusses whether it is an ideology itself or not.

The discursive approach analyses impact of the language on politics and tries to prove how language can be a significant element to make the masses support specific ideals when it's effectively used by populists. Also, that approach identifies the words and sentences that populists mostly used. What discursive approach would provide us here is to show the possibility of becoming populist without aligning ideologically. We can accept the fact that a movement or a politician could be a populist discursively without having ideological populist agenda altogether. So, this will show us that populism can be used only as a tool in politics.

The strategical approach, on the other hand, demonstrates how populism is effective in mobilizing and managing the masses and revealing the true potential of their organizational capability. It is basically more about management and leadership. So, the structure of a movement can be populist rather than its ideals or discourse. Therefore, we can see populism within their political organizations, policy choices, and form of mobilization. The consequences of these choices depend not only on populism but also on other factors in politics, such as the democratic culture of those countries, form of government, or power structure of interest groups and communities. That's why we shouldn't blame populism for abuse of power since it just reflects the frustration of the people towards the political system. All those varieties of approaches show us how rich the populism field is but at the same time, it proves that it is one of the hardest concepts to define within the academy.

## **1.2. IDEOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The concept of populism has gotten more popular over time with the help of global events. Although it's becoming more visible now, we could come across many individuals and organizations in history which has been called populist, especially in Latin America. However, most of the time they are linked with the other ideologies rather than only referred to as populist. When we consider the dominant ideologies during the Cold War and after, it is understandable why populism has remained underrated and not preferred by the researchers for explaining the political area. Those ideologies established their political traditions in time, meanwhile, populism was too hard to conceptualize and had undetermined historical linkage. In order to overcome these uncertainties, some scholars tried to define populism more clearly. They wanted to find out which characteristics populists have, thus they can make clear definitions and outlines for populism as an ideology.

Before we admit that populism is an ideology itself, we should look at first what is an ideology and if the populism is compatible with the definition or not. Basically, ideology means a set of ideas that an economic or political system is based

on.<sup>1</sup> These ideas determine the political positioning of the individuals, parties, politicians, or governments in a spectrum where pro-free market ideas are placed on the right side of it and state interventionist ideas on the left when we consider the economic issues. When it comes to social issues, we have another axis in which one side prefers authoritarian solutions and the other side defends libertarian ideals. In both cases, the main problem is whether we need to apply regulations by using state authority or let “the invisible hand” of the market handles the problems and regulate itself while solving economic and social issues. Sometimes these ideas might share some common grounds and get close to each other; they don’t have to be the exact opposite of the other in each case. However, their boundaries are mostly determined clearly and it is easy to understand whether a policy is based on a left-wing or a right-wing ideology. If we consider these points, where does populism stands when we think about it as an ideology? In order to uncover that we should analyze first the common and different features of the populists, so we can create an outline from there. Also, we should look at their interactions with the other ideologies to find out which criteria make them right-wing or left-wing, or something different. There are plenty of definitions of populism but we are going to choose the ones which consider populism as an ideology for now.

Finchelstein argues that modern populism was born in Argentina with Juan Peron (Finchelstein, 2017: 10). He makes a historical analysis in which he associates populism with the fascist timeline. However, he clearly distinguishes these two ideologies even though they have commonalities, and he finds it necessary to study the history of populism itself (Finchelstein, 2017: 40). From that historical perspective, populism might be divided into three categories; proto-populism (1860’s-1945), modern populism (1945-1990’s), and post-modern populism (1990’s-today). He analyzed the common attitudes of the regimes that were referred to as populist and made a list of sixteen characteristics of populism. In order to summarize those characteristics, I’m going to contextualize them under four titles; first will be the populist point of view against the democratic system, second will be populists’ accusations towards other actors in politics, third will be about leaders’ role within

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<sup>1</sup> “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary” accessed February 5, 2021, <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/ideology?q=ideology>



populism and fourth will be about political positioning and principles which can be seen common in populists.

Firstly, when we look at how they perceive the political system, Finchelstein argues that populists have an attachment to an authoritarian, electoral, anti-liberal democracy that rejects dictatorship (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). Although they praise democracy and reject dictatorship, their understanding of democracy weakly appreciates the rule of law and the separation of powers (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). Thus, we can conclude that their point of view on the democratic system is pragmatic rather than being principled. So we can evaluate populists' claims against other political actors from that pragmatism perspective.

Secondly when it comes to their accusations against other actors -although they support democracy supposedly- populists consider their political antagonists as the anti-people, enemies of the people, and traitors to the nation (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). Besides that, they also present themselves as standing for true democracy against imagined or real forms of dictatorships and tyrannies, which could be the EU, the parallel or deep state, globalization, military coups, etc. (Finchelstein, 2017: 86) They portray those groups as the ruling elites and they act of speaking in the name of the people against them (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). For these reasons, Finchelstein argues that populists have an apocalyptic vision of electoral successes as revolutionary moments in the foundation or re-foundation of society (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). They see the people as a single, homogeneous entity that is equated with their electoral majorities (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). In order to achieve those glorified electoral successes and prevail over the opposition, populists provide a role for leaders, and they follow some principles which we can see in common for most of them.

Thirdly, according to Finchelstein, populists found a political theology under a messianic and charismatic leader of the people (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). This leader carries a notion that is the personification of the people (Finchelstein, 2017: 86). In other words, they create a cult of personality as if the leader was a divine, saintly figure, and they acknowledge them as the embodiment of the people. That leader follows some principles which we can see in common with the other populists. Thereby as fourth, those steps can be summarized as; embracing a radical nationalism and an extreme form of political religion, the claim of anti-politics which means positioning

themselves above usual politics, a deep antagonism against independent journalism, dislike for pluralism and tolerance, and stress on popular culture as embodiments of national traditions (Finchelstein, 2017: 86).

Indeed, we can see some similarities between fascism and populism as Finchelstein argued when we consider their authoritarian tendencies; especially when they are attached to the right-wing ideas. Both fascism and populism have been based on the same “the people-anti people” binary and aimed at homogenizing the people as in their minds (Finchelstein, 2017: 79-80). However, the biggest difference is populism has never aimed to become a dictatorship even though has that potential, but rather they have chosen to pursue a corrupted democracy (Finchelstein, 2017: 169-170). What they are really against is liberal democracy and institutions unless they give them more power. For them, the system is biased against “the people’s will” under the rule of the elites who have never cared about people’s needs and only exploited them. Constitutional limitations and rule of law are nothing but obstacles before the will of the people (Finchelstein, 2017: 113). Maybe the best description for their understanding of democracy is “illiberal democracy” as Fareed Zakaria (2003) put forward.

Anti-institutionalism is also a common point between fascism and populism; they both rejected the mediating role of institutions and aimed to establish a direct link between the people and the state through leaders (Finchelstein, 2017: 127-128). However, fascists removed old institutions completely and turned into a full dictatorship when they got into power but populists only corrupted them by nepotism and partisanship. Fascists were not against technocracy, they did not hesitate to appoint experts in key positions as long as they were working in harmony with the government. In contrast, experts were seen as a part of “the elites” for populists. They were arrogant and working against the people, thus these positions must be given back to “the people”. Thus, we might argue that democracy is only a tool for populism and they only pay attention to the elections but no other obligations of democracy.

Although these points give us an idea about what populism could be, it is unclear whether all of them should be observable at the same time or if a couple of them is enough; if so, which ones are more crucial and indispensable is unknown.

Nevertheless, we might have an idea about how could we define populism as an ideology based on these points.

What Müller (2017) did was not only to answer the question of what populism is but also to explain what populism is not. He stated seven theses on populism and elaborate the definition of populism based on what has been said about the topic. When we analyze those seven theses, Müller starts his arguments by stating that "populism is neither the authentic part of modern democratic politics nor a kind of pathology caused by irrational citizens. It is a permanent shadow of representative politics" (Müller, 2017: 101). This statement can be seen as an answer to debates about the perception of populism. He argues that populism only exists within representative democracies and populists only insist that they are the legitimate representative of the people rather than opposing the system as a whole (Müller, 2017: 101). For this reason, anyone who supports those illegitimate actors is not considered a proper part of the people according to populists (Müller, 2017: 101). What should be noticed here is the populists' claim of being the only legitimate actor and their division of society in the moral domain. That moral justification makes their political position immune to empirical refutation (Müller, 2017: 102). Later on, Müller argues that populists not only criticize the elites but also they are against pluralism too (Müller, 2017: 101). That opposition to pluralism comes from their claim that they alone represent people, so being anti-pluralist is a requirement to become a populist (Müller, 2017: 101).

Müller argues that populists call for referendums frequently but it doesn't mean that they put emphasis on democratic debates on public issues and participation in politics (Müller, 2017: 102). According to him, this comes from their wish to be confirmed what they already determined as the will of the people (Müller, 2017: 102). Even though they think that they are the only representative of the people, when they started to govern, they will engage in occupying the state, mass clientelism, corruption, and the suppression of civil society (Müller, 2017: 102). Besides that, Müller argues that populists can write constitutions but they will be exclusive and designed to keep them in power (Müller, 2017: 102). However, they are likely to have constitutional conflict at some point (Müller, 2017: 102).

At that point, Müller argues that populism should be criticized as a threat towards not only to liberalism but also to democracy as a whole, but that doesn't mean

that one should not engage them in a political debate (Müller, 2017: 103). He emphasizes that talking with populists is not the same as talking like populists, and the problems they raise can be taken seriously without accepting their frames on the issue or their ways of solution. (Müller, 2017: 103). Because of these reasons, Müller argues that populism does not bring liberal democracy closer to the people as it has sometimes claimed, however, he admits that it can be useful to recognize unrepresented populations. (Müller, 2017: 103). Nevertheless, this does not mean that populists' claim that only they are the legitimate representatives is justified, rather it should force people who defend liberal democracy to think more about what might cause the failures of representation (Müller, 2017: 103). At that point, he says it should make them ask more general questions and raises a couple of them by himself:

*What are the criteria for belonging to the polity? Why exactly is pluralism worth preserving? And how can one address the concerns of populist voters understood as free and equal citizens, not as pathological cases of men and women driven by frustration, anger, and resentment? (Müller 2017, 103).*

Those theses show resemblance with Finchelstein's arguments in some points, like anti-elitism or speaking on behalf of "the real people". However, they do not contain a historical perspective and do not create a linkage between populism and fascism as Finchelstein argued. Nevertheless, they both observed almost the same characteristics of populists. We might argue that Müller takes a stand against populism and involves the methods of how to counter it meanwhile Finchelstein only observes examples of populism to identify it.

Mudde defines populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people." (Mudde, 2004: 543). This definition represents the core idea of the populist ideology, which is evaluating politics as an antagonistic relation between "the people" and "the elites". However, every political group might claim that they defend people's rights better and their solution is the best for the people, which is totally normal in democracies. If so, how do we distinguish populists and democrats? Well, for the populists, "the people" and "the elites" have exclusionary meanings, they use them in an antagonistic way. When they claim that they are speaking on behalf of the people, they do not include all people who live in that country. They only refer to

those people who are oppressed by the elites and call them the “silent majority”. That is an imagined community based on which values populists have praised, like nation, for the nationalists (Mudde, 2004: 546). This distinction is an outcome of their moralistic judgments about politics which classify opponents as “evil” and “immoral” rather than “wrong” or “incorrect”. As Müller describes, we might say populism is a moralistic imagination of politics (Müller, 2017: 19). Populists claim that only they, but no one else, represent “the people”, and will not recognize any other political actor as a legitimate opposition that also represents the people (Müller, 2017: 19). For them, political opponents and the elites are public enemies and traitors (Finchelstein, 2017: 149). However, when they got into power, they won’t take any action against those traitors but rather will use them for their rhetoric. Although being an anti-elitist is a must to become a populist, it is not enough by itself; they are also against pluralism (Müller, 2017: 20; Finchelstein, 2017: 101). That is why in some perspectives, they have been seen as a threat to democracy even though they continue to get their legitimacy through democratic elections.

Since populists mostly emerged in democracies, we should know what democracy means for them. The populists are not seen as a threat to democracy for no reason. Some scholars like Rosanvallon argue that populism is a pathology against democracy and calls it “counter democracy” which degrades it into a circus full of apocalyptic expressions (Rosanvallon and Goldhammer, 2008: 271-272). As an extreme form of skepticism of the government’s actions, populism might turn into a pathology of oversight and vigilance (Rosanvallon and Goldhammer, 2008: 268). The main interest of populism is not fighting on the usual political battlegrounds but instead posing as guardians of purity, saviors of the nation from extremes, and prophets of an apocalypse from which they will emerge victorious. (Rosanvallon and Goldhammer, 2008: 271) That’s why, Rosanvallon calls populism as pure politics of the unpolitical (Rosanvallon and Goldhammer, 2008: 268).

This viewpoint leads populism to be associated with radical ideologies such as fascism. Finchelstein argues that modern populism was born out of fascism and they belong to the same history (Finchelstein, 2017: 13). That perspective shows us their view about institutions because what populism offers is to create bridges between the corrupt system and the people who feel not represented enough.

Although populists have their own vision of politics, that point of view doesn't say much about their direct empirical solutions to economic or social issues as other ideologies, like Marxism or Liberalism, did. Rather, they use other ideologies for their own purposes. In that case, Mudde describes it as "a thin-centered ideology" that can attach to different political concepts (Mudde, 2004: 544). In other words, populism can be both right-wing and left-wing because what matters for populism is to create dichotomy rather than being a rational problem solver. It is not a codified doctrine, but it is a set of claims which has an inner logic (Müller, 2017: 10). That is one of the reasons why it is difficult to identify who is populist or what is populism in most cases. What kind of populism might occur is depending on what type of problems that specific country has been facing. In order to find out, we need to evaluate cultural, domestic, and regional factors. Because populism gains power from discontent and which ideological features are going to attach to populism depends on the socio-political context that populist actors could mobilize (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2011: 2). For instance, European populism is predominantly right-wing because of its nativist approach on issues such as immigration and they prioritize exclusionary national identity even though their economic programs slightly lean to the left. Meanwhile, Latin American populism is predominantly left-wing because they prioritize state interventionist economy and support inclusionary national identity (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013: 167). Consequently, we cannot argue that populism is only a right wing or left wing but rather we need to focus on these countries' problems and consider cultural, domestic, and regional context and systemic response against them in order to find out whether it is a right-wing or left-wing populism.

Charismatic leadership is also another important factor for populism even though it is not a compulsory element since there are some populist movements that have no charismatic leaders. While populist leaders refer to the people as the "silent majority", they refer to themselves as the voice of the people or manifest themselves as the embodiment of the people. For them, the leader's destiny is to serve the people by becoming them (Finchelstein, 2017: 143). Also, they believe that the leader inherently knows better than the people what they really want (Finchelstein, 2017: 111). What leadership has to provide is a sense of direct connection with the substance of the people and with every single individual (Müller, 2017: 34). The leader does not

have to be charismatic as long as they achieve this notion. However, it has a meaningful impact and even in some cases, the leader's legacy continues to reproduce populist politics (Müller, 2017: 34).

In conclusion, we can make an outline by those similar and different elements to uncover what populism is as an ideology. It has a historical continuity and we can see its examples since the 19th century. As it's mentioned before, it can be considered as an ideology that is "thin-centered" so it can attach to right-wing and left-wing ideas. Populism portrays politics as an antagonistic relation between their own understanding of "the people" and "the elites", and approaches it in a moralistic way rather than being rationalistic. Populism stands against the status quo and the institutions they believed that the people are not allowed to involve in them. Populists consider democracy as only a tool and corrupted by its current form. Lastly, we can deduce that populism mostly gains attention and succeed under charismatic leadership.

### **1.3. DISCOURSIVE APPROACH**

There is another approach that considers populism as a discourse rather than an ideology. Panizza describes this perspective by saying:

*Populism is a mode of identification available to any political actor operating in a discursive field in which the notion of the sovereignty of the people and its inevitable corollary, the conflict between the powerful and the powerless, are core elements of its political imaginary. (Panizza, 2005: 4).*

There is an inevitable similarity in the definition of populism with the ideological approach since both of their descriptions share the same basic idea; dichotomization of society. Inherently, the political area must be agonistic because otherwise, it would be just administration if everyone agrees on everything. In democracies, it is normal to have two or more political groups who oppose each other based on their ideologies or some other reason. All political actors in their speeches may claim to speak on behalf of the people, which makes it difficult to distinguish between populist and non-populist entities. From time to time we can observe that politicians from every ideology could use populist discourses but do not pursue a total populist agenda. They do not tend to use the word populist for themselves, and despite some links, they have not seen themselves as branches of international ideological

movement (Canovan, 2004). However, besides their differences in policy prescriptions, they do share a distinctive style and message (Canovan, 2004). If so, how do we identify populism and populist discourse? The distinction here starts with the analytical level. Unit of analysis changes from ideologies to political practices. Texts, speeches, and public discourses become the main source of it. Language becomes a priority rather than principles. Politicians may choose to use populist rhetoric without moving out of their ideological boundaries. Local concerns and what kind of political establishment they're challenging determine their campaigns and the values they express (Canovan, 2004). When we consider populism as a discourse, it does not constitute a clear set of ideas but rather it becomes a tool for politicians from every ideology to use. As Michael Kazin noted, the term populist should not be understood as their subjects were populist, but rather it is a flexible mode of persuasion to redefine the people and their enemies (Kazin, 1998: 3). It is a language whose speakers consider ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded by class, view elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter (Kazin, 1998: 1). That discourse is based on the idea that virtue resides in the simple people, who are the majority, and in their collective actions (Kazin, 1998: 3). However, there should be an appropriate moment for populism to rise and for politicians to be able to use that rhetoric. Yet again, we have to consider political participation and representation of the people within the system. As we emphasized in the previous section, populism is an anti-status quo/anti-institutionalist position but not every anti-status quo politics are a variation of populism. In order to find out what populism is in terms of discourse, we should focus on the logic that allows that discourse to be preferable by politicians. Later, we will see how politicians that use populist discourse to get benefit from these situations.

Laclau argues that if we consider populism as an ideology, it could engage in other ideologies, which makes it hard and complicated to find "pure" populism; thus every time, we have to put some exceptions forward (Laclau, 2005: 32). A large number of exceptions will make it difficult for us to establish a clear definition. Because we have bound within the linguistic practices, that makes it untranslatable in any definable sense with that method and will exhaust its meaning (Laclau, 2005: 32). At that point, Laclau offers to change the unit of analysis from movements and



ideologies to political practices. The subject level of analysis has also flaws because that might carry the nature of the subject and its' humanly defects; so it could make it harder to determine the characteristics of populism. Laclau says political practices must be the primary unit of analysis than the group because the group would only be the result of the articulation of social practices (Laclau, 2005: 33). In other words, articulation of demands reproduces populism on an ontological level, not the content of politics or ideologies themselves. That's why outlining populism from the contents might be misleading. He put forward three theoretical propositions:

*1) To think the specificity of populism requires starting the analysis from units smaller than the group; 2) populism is an ontological and not an ontic category; its' meaning not to be found in content, but in a particular mode of articulation of those contents; 3) that articulating form produces structuring effects themselves at the modes of representation. (Laclau, 2005: 34).*

He followed up the idea by claiming that if the institutional system is unable to absorb various demands of the public, it will create suitable conditions for populism (Laclau, 2005: 37-38). So inherently, those frustrated people will share the same anti-institutionalist character (Laclau, 2005: 38). In order to gather all of them under the same banner, populists create an inner frontier where they construct an enemy discursively which will represent the institutions and the elites. However, when the number of demanding people gets too many, their representation within the movement can't stay equal. That's why they need to have an element to make them consolidated, which Laclau calls an empty signifier (Laclau, 2005: 44). This signifier plays a role to merge a variety of demands of people and create an equivalent chain. Basically, what constitutes the symbolic division of society by populist discourse occurs on the basis of those empty signifiers derived from unfulfilled demands of the people and the non-inclusive systemic response of politics.

Chantal Mouffe also agrees with Laclau about the idea that populism is a discourse. She openly admits that populism is not an ideology by saying that:

*... it is not an ideology and cannot be attributed a specific programmatic content. Nor is it a political regime. It is a way of doing politics that can take various ideological forms according to both time and place, and is compatible with a variety of institutional frameworks. (Mouffe, 2018: 12-13).*

As we see in Laclau's statements, Mouffe also believes that there must be a certain time and conditions for populism to rise. She believes that today's political climate is appropriate to apply populist politics, that's why she calls this era a "populist

moment” (Mouffe, 2018: 11). However, her approach to this topic is not only an explanation of today but rather gives an agenda to left-wing ideas. So she clarifies her approach at the beginning of her book “For a Left Populism” by saying that:

*This book is meant to be a political intervention and it openly acknowledges its partisan nature. I will define what I understand by ‘left populism’ and argue that in the present conjuncture it provides the adequate strategy to recover and deepen the ideals of equality and popular sovereignty that are constitutive of a democratic politics. (Mouffe, 2018: 12).*

We can interpret those words as populism can be used by an ideology, which is left in this case. Also, it can be used to push forward some political ideas within an appropriate time and place. According to her, without democratic participation in the decisions concerning the common life, there can be no democracy (Mouffe, 2005: 52). This lack of representation and participation causes populist discourse to become a major force in political life. Today, democracy is defined on the ground of liberal ideas such as human rights and the free market. When these values are placed in an unquestionable position with the help of moral grounding, it leads to an end of political life. Values themselves are not the reason for the decrease in the inclusiveness of democracy. When those who identify themselves with these values use their hegemony to stop every objection against their policies, that’s where the populists begin to rise. Because anyone who opposes them for some reason becomes an evil opponent and it blocks democratic debates. If political antagonisms have been eradicated, that makes it impossible for political desires to be channeled through traditional parties (Mouffe, 2005: 55). In such a situation, demagogues can articulate the frustration of the people ignored by the system (Mouffe, 2005: 55)

Panizza also explains the emergence of populist practices as a failure of existing social and political institutions to confine and regulate political subjects into a relatively stable social order (Panizza, 2005: 9). However, it is not only a crisis of representation in which people embrace new identities while leaving the old ones, but also allowing to those who have never been represented because of their class, religion, ethnicity, or geographical location (Panizza, 2005: 11). He explains the emergence of populist discourse in three stages; the First stage is “...breakdown of social order and loss of confidence in the system’s ability to restore it (e.g. economic crises such as hyperinflation).” (Panizza, 2005: 11). The second stage is the exhaustion of political traditions and the discrediting of political parties due to allegations of corruption and

malpractice. (Panizza, 2005: 12). In such situations, populism takes the form of “politics of anti-polities” based on the belief that the control of public life belongs to a non-accountable and self-serving political elite. (Panizza, 2005: 12). Lastly, the third stage is “...changes at the level of the economy, culture and society, such as processes of urbanization and economic modernization, shifts in the demographic balance between social classes, and between regional and ethnic groups, as well as, more recently, globalization.” (Panizza, 2005: 13). All these circumstances make populists “outsider” and allow them to create a form of representation which is against traditional political institutions. As we discussed before, Panizza also agrees with the anti-status quo nature of populism. So, we might argue that populism is mostly about responses to systemic crises when the system is unable to reform and solve itself. Thus, populist discourse emerges with the claim of a new more inclusive system and convinces people to follow them.

However, it doesn't have to be an outcome of public needs but rather might be a toolkit for some other political aims. Wodak argues that populism, especially when it has attached to the right-wing ideologies, relies on rhetoric where they construct fear and create scapegoats (Wodak, 2015: 1). That scapegoat image is taken from “the others” which is dangerous for the future of “the real people”. They might be minorities, specific religious or ethnic groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), or political establishments such as the EU. However, the main consideration is always constructing fear of the others. For instance, fear of losing one's job due to immigration, fear of losing national autonomy due to demographic changes and participation in some political establishments, and fear of losing old traditions and values due to cultural variety and degeneracy (Wodak, 2015: 3). They legitimize this language by the use of specific moral stances and reformulated historical narratives and myths (Wodak, 2015: 6). That discursive strategy of “victim-perpetrator reversal”, “scapegoating” and “the construction of conspiracy theories” allows them to get more popularity and media visibility, and let them push forward different agendas (Wodak, 2015: 4). Hawkins argues that the discursive definition of populism inherently describes something cultural (Hawkins, 2009: 1043). What distinguishes populism from other political discourses is a series of common, rough elements of linguistic

form and content (Hawkins, 2009: 1043). He explains its difference with the ideology by saying:

*...unlike an ideology, populism is a latent set of ideas or a worldview that lacks significant exposition and “contrast” with other discourses and is usually low on policy specifics. It has a subconscious quality that manifests itself primarily in the language of those who hold it. (Hawkins, 2009: 1045).*

He continued to emphasize the importance of language by saying that:

*...but unlike common understandings of rhetoric, the ideas that constitute populist discourse tend to be sincerely held and embodied in the language of their proponents. In the case of populism in particular, the language is too inflammatory and too suffused with a radical notion of democracy for most people to be able to or even want to consistently pretend it; to use populist rhetoric almost certainly means that we believe in what it represents. (Hawkins, 2009: 1045).*

#### **1.4. STRATEGICAL APPROACH**

Some scholars argue that populism is a mode of political strategy constituted by policy choices, political organization, and forms of mobilization. In that approach, populism is neither defined by the values of the political actor nor the way they communicate but by their relationship with their followers (Moffitt, 2016: 23). There is no consensus on the perfect definition of populism as a political strategy, as happened in the other approaches. However, those definitions give us another perspective on how to define populism.

In his work on ethno-populism in Latin America, Madrid classifies populist parties according to their electoral appeals in order to explain why populism has been a successful electoral strategy. (Madrid, 2008: 482). He uses both economic and political criteria to define populist strategy; such as redistribution of income and nationalization of natural resources as a populist economy, and anti-establishment and anti-system appeals in the political area to mobilize the masses. (Madrid, 2008: 482). Those policies aim to hurt “the elites” while improving the conditions of “the people”. However, Acemoglu argues that adopting those policies might be harmful to the rich but also not in the best interest of the poor majority or median voter. That’s why populist policies emerge as a way for politicians to signal that they will choose future policies in line with the interest of the median voter (Acemoglu et al, 2013: 31).

Some have opposed that policy-based definition because of its lack of historical inclusivity as populist variations might change in time at the same places. That's why Weyland defines populism in terms of political organization. He argues that 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 (Weyland, 2001: 14). For him, the populist strategy focuses on the methods and instruments of winning and exercising power (Weyland, 2001: 12). In this case, we see that populism has been reduced to the leader and its movement's unorganized nature. However, there are plenty of examples that populist parties have discipline and organization. Also, there are other organizations, such as religious or labor-based parties, which have charismatic leaders and a low level of institutionalization, and may seek to change the political system but not be considered as populist (Hawkins, 2010: 168). Hawkins emphasizes the importance of making clear distinctions in order to find out defining features and underlying logic of populism, and he raises a couple of questions:

*...the fact that these attributes are all in some way aspects of organization, it is not clear why they appear together. For example, is charismatic leadership something that exists independent of low institutionalization, or do these reinforce each other? If an organization has all of these attributes except a charismatic leader, is it still populist? Likewise, even if an organization has all of these attributes, it is not evident that it then becomes populist. Other organizations, such as religious or labor-based parties and millenarian movements, also have charismatic leaders and/or low levels of institutionalization early in their organizational life cycle and may seek to change the political system, yet we do not necessarily consider them populist. What underlying quality makes the difference? (Hawkins, 2010: 168).*

Hawkins discusses populism under four categories; low institutionalization, movement organization, disruptive tactics, and insularity. He argues that populists create poor institutionalized movements because they mistrust hierarchical forms of organization and they value folk wisdom (Hawkins, 2010: 168). Also, it is a result of charismatic leadership because the leader provides them with a unified identity or capacity for decision making but this might create a problem that is members would lack an identity or decision-making capacity independent of the leader (Hawkins, 2010: 170). Secondly, he argues that populists organize as a movement based on a network of amateurs rather than a hierarchy of salaried specialists (Hawkins, 2010: 171). Direct citizen involvement is considered a good thing because, in populism,

closeness to the people is the basis of merit; not professional training (Hawkins, 2010: 172). Thirdly, he argues that populists see themselves and their leaders as a unique bearer of the popular will. Because of their Manichean worldview, they are more likely to treat electoral processes and procedural rights as legitimate practices (Hawkins, 2010: 173). For this reason, it is hard to consider them democratic since they won't hesitate to have an anything-goes attitude toward their opposition (Hawkins, 2010: 174). Lastly, he argues that populist organizations are isolated from the rest of civil society unless they show their support for the populist cause (Hawkins, 2010: 175). Because of their anti-system attitude, older organizations do not consider them credible participants in a pluralist system (Hawkins, 2010: 175).

Similar to Hawkins' explanations, Kenneth Roberts argues that populism has four subtypes based on the organization of civil society and partisanship of the organizations (Roberts, 2006: 130). If leaders build serious organizations in both domains -high partisan and civil society-, he calls it organic populism (Roberts, 2006: 130). He gives Mexico under Lazaro Cardenas as an example. Cardenas did social reforms and countered the opposition rivals, built mass labor and peasant confederations, used land reform and labor rights to secure popular support and reorganized the party around these corporatist pillars of representation (Roberts, 2006: 130). Secondly, if high civil society and weak partisan structure occurred, it's called labor populism where labor unions became the primary vehicle for populist mobilization (Roberts, 2006: 130). He gives Argentina under Juan Peron as an example. Peron used his position as the minister of labor to organize workers and gained their loyalty, which later this unionized workforce served as the organizational backbone of his presidency (Roberts, 2006: 131). However, Peron was loathed institutionalizing a party organization, he preferred a political movement dependent on his personality and avoided the development of bureaucracy (Roberts, 2006: 131). Thirdly, if there is high partisanship and a low level of civil society, Roberts identifies it as Partisan populism in which the development of labor and civil organizations lags behind the party organization (Roberts, 2006: 132). He gives Peruvian leader Victor Raul Haya de la Torre and his APRA (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) as an example. APRA emerged on the northern coast of Peru among plantation workers, small farmers, and other groups. However, Haya de la Torre was interested in building

his party and increasing its organizational capacity rather than organizing labor unions. (Roberts, 2006: 132). That high partisan organization created a sense of community among its members and established territorial organs at the local, regional, and national levels, as well as sports and cultural groups and associations representing students, workers, youth, and professionals. (Roberts, 2006: 132) Although APRA made little effort to mobilize the peasantry around claims for land reform, organized labor was a relatively small and weak actor in Peru's economy; so its level of organization in the partisan sphere was more extensive and formidable (Roberts, 2006: 132). Lastly, if both aspects -partisanship and civil society organization- are low level; Roberts called that electoral populism (Roberts, 2006: 132). In this case, populists do not try to build organizations in either sphere but only mobilize voters in electoral campaigns without making them participate in party organizations, labor unions, or other large-scale associations (Roberts, 2006: 132). What matters most is charismatic leadership, which generates political loyalty, discursive attacks on elites, and redistribution of the individual or collective benefits (Roberts, 2006: 132). He gives Jose Maria Velasco Ibarra of Ecuador as an example who was elected five times but only completed one term meanwhile did so little on party organization and the labor movement in his country; and Alberto Fujimori of Peru who founded four different parties between 1990 and 2000 in order to make registration labels for his campaigns rather than establishing well-founded party organization or strengthening labor movements (Roberts, 2006: 132-133).

In these arguments, we can see that populism is explained in organizational terms which shows us the diversity of the concept. Even though those mobilization and organization types have distinct patterns, they are all considered as populism. What also we might consider here is how those patterns are affected by socio-economical situations within those specific times. Roberts argues that populism occurs during a period of political and economic transition or loosens the social moorings of the party system (Roberts, 2006: 133). Clearly, we can observe the effects of industrialization and the growth of the urban working and middle class in civil society and political level. Also, the leaders play important role in here too while deciding whether to create organizations or not or mobilize the masses in a partisan way or not. However, Barr (2009) argues that "charismatic" leadership is not a vital part of

populism despite it has associated with it most of the time. Rather he admits the leaders' role but mostly emphasizes clientelism and plebiscitary linkages of the populism when they have taken power (Barr, 2009: 42). He defines populism as a mass movement led by an outsider or maverick seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitary linkages (Barr, 2009: 38). Thus, this definition excludes insiders since they cannot be easily trusted because they are already a part of the system, and also excludes outsiders who offer different things than anti-establishment appeals (Barr, 2009: 38).

While elaborating the democracy, Canovan identifies populism as a shadow cast by democracy itself (Canovan, 1999: 3). According to her, we need to shift our attention from the ideology and policy content to structural conditions in order to clarify the populism concept (Canovan, 1999: 3). Meanwhile she also says that simple usage of the language itself is not enough to call politicians populist but also solutions need to be simple as well. (Canovan, 1999: 5). Canovan argues that modern democracy can be understood as a point of intersection between redemptive and pragmatic style of politics (Canovan, 1999: 9). The tensions between those styles allow populism to appear (Canovan, 1999: 9). Pragmatically, democracy means institutions and this institutionalism puts aside redemptive type of democracy and its "salvation" discourse (Canovan, 1999: 10). Thus, populism embraces anti-institutionalist characteristics, which promote directness, spontaneity and overcoming alienation, because institutionalism inevitably leads to an alienation (Canovan, 1999: 10-13). To have a well-functioning pragmatic democracy is illusory since it needs to have some sort of redemptive elements in order to continue to preserve power and legitimacy (Canovan, 1999: 16). So, populism benefits from this gap and accompanies democracy like a shadow (Canovan, 1999: 16).

In conclusion, when it comes to populist strategy, we can argue that what matters most is how to organize masses and political organizations that help populists to gain and maintain power, and how leaders manage the unmediated power that derives from the public directly. As Jansen argued, populism should be seen as a way of mobilization and political project that can be undertaken by challengers and incumbents in pursuit of a wide range of social, political, and economic agendas (Jansen, 2011: 77). All those approaches are not mutually exclusive and have many



overlaps but each of them emphasizes a specific part of it. In this approach, populism is seen as a form of mobilization and organization rather than a set of inter-related ideas as in the ideological approach or a way of making claims and discourse in a discursive approach.

## **1.5. CONCLUSION**

In light of these explanations, we can argue that populism contains broader meaning rather than only signifying irrational and anti-democratic behaviors. Populism can be seen in different shapes and forms as it has explained in this chapter. However, fundamentally, it stems from anger and frustration of the people for being unrepresented in the democratic system when its inclusiveness decreased. Each approach emphasizes this case even though they explained the term from different perspectives. In this sense, populism can be seen as an early warning system for democracies. If we accept populism as an adjective that is only used for framing, there is no need to include this term within political sciences. What matters to us is whether we can explain certain political situations with this term or not. Therefore, academic definitions show us that populism was able to provide us with many alternatives while understanding politics. We can determine whether a political movement is populist or not in terms of ideologically, discursively, or strategically. Thus, we can make accurate inferences about that movement's current goals and understand its' nature with the help of those approaches. As we indicated in the beginning, populism has a negative public image that relates it to taking advantage of power. However, if those movements abuse their powers when they succeed with the help of populism; this doesn't make populism responsible. There are lots of variables that affect those types of outcomes at this point; such as political traditions and democratic culture of the country, people's welfare and public opinion on democracy, the existence of systems to balance political power, whether the reasons that public support for populism still there or not, etc. In this case, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser, populism can have a positive effect on the quality of democracy since it helps to give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the political establishment (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 209). However, this does not imply that populists intend to get rid of the whole establishment

but they try to maintain cooperation with segments of the establishment that are more proximate to them in ideological and strategical terms (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 216). Populists criticize the poor results of democratic regime and offers to revise democratic procedures (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 207). They claim that rule of law and the "checks and balances" only limit the capacity of the people to exercise their collective power (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 207). However, these formal and informal mechanisms prevent populist extremism (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 210). At that point, Mudde and Kaltwasser analyze the impact of populism in power on democracies in two groups, consolidated and unconsolidated democracies. In consolidated democracies, for instance in Slovakia, it had positive impacts and contributions to completion of democracy but in unconsolidated democracies, for instance in Peru, it had devastating effects and lead to a process of democratic breakdown (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012: 211).

Political power contains corruptible nature. Hence, it is not populism that corrupts politics but the power gained through it. This situation can be seen as "the chicken or the egg dilemma". A leader who desires absolute power may have achieved it through populism, or a populist leader may have begun to degenerate after gaining power. Either way, this is just one of the possible outcomes. At this point, it is necessary to take a look at history to find out if there is a different consequence of populism. According to historical examples, how did populism relate to power and what kind of results did it have? The inclusion of historical analysis can extend the explanatory value of the term. Although the concept has gained popularity in recent periods, it's not something new. There were many movements and leaders which fit with those definitions. However, it should not be understood that populism continues in the same way as it was in the past. It is a living and changing term that updates itself with today's conditions. For these reasons, it is appropriate to examine the historical background of populism and its transformation over time in the next section. Thus, we can determine whether populism is a capable term to analyze recent developments or not.

## **SECOND CHAPTER**

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POPULISM: IS THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY UNIQUE?**

#### **2.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this section, I am going to demonstrate historical examples of populism, how they match with the theoretical approaches and if they were accurate or not, and the changes in the practices and instruments they used from past to present. This chapter argues that populism, which has a history not earlier than 200 years, can be seen in almost every part of the world and was adopted by all segments of the political spectrum. Just as a political movement can change the environment, the exact opposite could happen and the environment can change political movements too. Earlier stages of populism have emerged in a very different world in terms of society and opportunities. In this case, we should analyze the history of populism under two periods; the Cold War period which shows us modern era examples of populism, and after the Cold War until today which shows the post-modern examples. The reason for that categorization is because populism spread together with democracy and many countries were unable to distinguish themselves from this clash of ideologies. During the Cold War, liberal democracy and communism competed and most of the world was under the influence of either the US or the Soviets. In this bipolar world, this competition affected the domestic policies of the countries and shaped their perception of friends and foes. Therefore, populist movements that emerged both from the right and left ideologies during this time have established their "the other" figure and populist rhetoric according to this competition. Especially Latin America was important during this time since earlier examples had emerged in this region. Besides that, this should be considered that communication tools were limited and control of the information was easier than today. So, we had a different social structure in terms of demography, communication, and traditions. Also, the authority-citizen interactions were based on trust, fear, and global security concerns. However, recent years brought us new perspectives, a new way of life, new ethics, and new instruments that can affect

politics altogether. Inevitably, populism has been affected by those changes too. Direct communication with the masses became easier with the help of the internet, societal concerns changed from global security to local, and regional issues such as immigration, climate change, or economic crisis. This new era provided politicians to use populism more effectively. For these reasons, we should analyze what determines the goals and methods of populism meanwhile comparing it with the earlier versions of it.

What I aimed with this chapter is to determine how and why people supported populism, how it started and ended under different circumstances, and where it stands today by analyzing its' history. As I argued before, populism stems from the frustration of the people towards the political system. There are both examples of how it demolished democracy as well as how leaders have just democratically overthrown. If we understand the reasons behind this support, it would be better for us to predict whether it would lead to a dangerous path for democracy or not. Also, we can see if academic definitions of the term were accurate or not. Thus, we could be able to see whether there is any explanatory value left and can it be used to explain today's situations and events such as Brexit and British politics in general. Also, another argument in this chapter is that populism is not a unique condition that we faced today and has its historical timeline rather than playing a secondary role.

## **2.2. MODERN AND POST-MODERN SPECIFICITIES OF POPULISM IN THE HISTORY**

Before we continue with the next chapter, it should be stated why these sections are needed and why divided in this way. Both modernism and post-modernism are terms that are hard to determine when they started. However, we should discuss in which sense we used them in this chapter. Modernism basically refers to the period of changes in Western society, especially in philosophy and art, with the impact of the Enlightenment, technology, and the Industrial Revolution. Urbanization, wars, and newly emerged technologies highly contributed to the changes in way of thinking and living of the society. Scientific knowledge and experimentation are prioritized as the accurate way of finding the knowledge. It was thought that the human consciousness

has the capability to understand and change the environment. Therefore, political ideologies emerged based on these ideas. What we saw during World War II and the Cold War was a clash of these ideologies. Meanwhile, populism was not a worldwide known, influential idea yet. However, it was effective in some parts of the world. For this reason, I decided to analyze populism during this period to show how populism was always been there and how it has changed after new groundbreaking technological and societal changes later.

The postmodern period, on the other hand, refers to the strong skepticism toward modernist assumptions. As Lyotard (1979) argued, that is an opposition to the "grand narratives" or "metanarratives" of modernism such as Enlightenment, progress, or Marxism. Unlike modernism, human consciousness and stability of meaning are doubted and ideologies are criticized based on their usefulness. We can see how technology, especially communication technologies, affected human consciousness and its perception when the reality was questioned during this time. In this period, "the medium is the message" (McLuhan, 1964). Those mediums were even capable to create what Baudrillard (1981) called hyperreality which claimed people become unable to distinguish reality from simulation. Especially after the 1990s, those technologies peaked. The impact of the internet and related technologies were revolutionary. Meanwhile, the Cold War ended and even some scholars declared the end of history (Fukuyama, 1992). Just as social life has turned into a new form with the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution; the end of ideological wars and the progress in communication technologies have revealed a new social life, new traditions, and new consequences for the political area. That's why, it would be appropriate to analyze this period secondly in which populism became more popular, effective with the help of new technologies, and widely known.

### **2.2.1. Populism in the Modern Era (Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century - 1990's)**

Some scholars share the idea that populism is a modern phenomenon (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 21). After the impacts of the Industrial Revolution and the spreading of democracy in the World, we can see the early examples of populism in the US and Russia in the late 19th century (Canovan, 1981: 3; Mudde & Kaltwasser

2017: 21; Finchelstein, 2017: 88). Regional features in terms of economy and sociology determine the populist definition of “the people” and “the elites”. For instance, the Euroscepticism of populist movements within the EU is not a coincidence but a result of the socio-economic impact of the EU upon European countries. For that reason, populist movements of the same era share similar characteristic reactions to regional and global challenges.

The emergence of populist movements in the US comes across the economic and social transformations of the US society. After industrialism and urbanism, new socio-economic interest groups emerged like bankers and industrialists. Consequently, their impacts on politics have increased due to their economic power while the importance of the craftsmen and farmers were decreased. This situation caused unrest among certain sections of society. Therefore, the first populist movements defined those farmers and lower class people who feel underrepresented or excluded as “the pure people”, honest and hardworking. Meanwhile, they defined bankers, industrialists, and politicians as “the elites”, corrupt and arrogant. (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 23). Those movements formed alliances, which were spreading around rural areas, and they spoke on behalf of the farmers while carrying this message: “the farmers of the country have labored, and the others made the laws” (Canovan, 1981: 26). Their attempt to make government do things they can’t do forced them into politics and turned their movement into populism (Canovan, 1981: 28). The Americans have been able to protest those socio-economic changes and inequalities without questioning the entire system with the help of populism (Kazin, 1998: 2). Michael Kazin explains that populist rhetoric as:

*Populist speakers in the United States voiced a profound outrage with elites who ignored, corrupted, and/or betrayed the corer ideal of American democracy: rule by the common people who expected their fellow citizens to advance by diligence, practical intelligence, and a faith in God alone. (Kazin, 1998: 2).*

In such an atmosphere, The People’s Party has founded and participated in the elections. However, they couldn’t achieve to expand their influence throughout the whole country, only gained regional success and lacked a national political presence (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017: 23). These agrarian movements in the US were one of the defining populist movements in the late 19th century (Mudde, 2004).

Although agrarian populist movements failed in the US, populism has evolved into a new political discourse during Cold War. Right-wing movements have used its divisive nature and defined a new “the people vs the elites” dichotomy based on their anti-communist attitude. For them, “the real people” were the common and patriotic Americans from the heartland, whereas “the elites” were people who have un-American socialist ideas and lived in the coastal areas (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 24). Especially this language was mutually influencing McCarthyism during that time and generated new and hostile interpretations of populism (Canovan, 1981:47). Even after the Soviet Union weakened and became a lesser threat, populist discourse continued to be mainstream and used by Republican politicians rather than being a whole different identity as in the late 19th century. For instance, Nixon was not an ideologically populist but popularized the term “silent majority” as a reference to the real American people figuratively (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 24). Mudde and Kaltwasser explain this transformation in the US as:

*While the main “enemy within” of right-wing populists has changed somewhat through time—for instance, the communists in the 1950s were replaced by the civil rights movement in the 1960s and the “activist judges” in the 1970s—the main socioeconomic and, even more important, sociocultural grievances have remained remarkably constant: “our way of life” is attacked by the “liberal elite” who use an oppressive (federal) state and a far too expensive and expansive welfare state to stifle the initiative and values of the people while providing “special privileges” to non-deserving minorities. This discourse has informed all major right-wing populist campaigns in North America, from the more racist AIP of Wallace of the 1960s to the more neoliberal Reform Parties of Perot and Manning of the 1990s. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 25).*

Another early example of populism had appeared in Russia. The emergence of populist movements in Russia begins in the end of 19th century, during Tsarist era. Russian populists called Narodniks appeared as a response to hardship of the peasantry, the commercialization of agriculture and landlords, and they demanded democratic reforms (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 32). As oppose to what happened in the US, Russian populists were a group of intellectuals who contrasted themselves with the people rather than being a coalition of different farmer/peasant alliances (Canovan, 1981: 60). Although the peasantry made up the majority of the population, Russian populism was not a movement of “the people” because it was difficult to organize and recruit people during Tsarist regime (Canovan, 1981: 60-61). The aim of populists was

an ideal society based on peasant traditions and they hoped to achieve a popular revolution (Canovan, 1981: 60). During that time, populism interacted with the socialists but they had slight differences. Canovan explains this interaction as:

*They (populists) aimed at a form of agrarian socialism based on a federation of peasant communes, and they deliberately stressed social goals rather than political ones, believing that liberal hopes of a constitution were irrelevant to the needs of the peasantry. Lacking any clear political strategy, they relied on hopes of a peasant revolution on the one hand, and on spectacular but counterproductive acts of terrorism on the other. Unlike the Marxists, they had no theory of historical determinism, but instead a great deal of faith in the power of dedicated and high-minded individuals to change the course of history. Where Marxism emphasized science, objectivity, and discipline, the characteristic atmosphere of Russian populism was profoundly romantic. (Canovan, 1981: 83).*

Although populists have foreseen a revolution, socialists succeeded to manage the situation and establishing communist Russia. However, there's a difference between the expectations of Marxists and populists. Marxism predicted a proletariat revolution after countries transformed into capitalist industrial societies but populists were expecting a peasant revolution, which is happened in that case. We see populism in Russia again after the Soviet Union collapsed. These early populist movements in the US and Russia had an impact on European nations. Mudde & Kaltwasser pointed out that as:

*While the Narodniki failed in Russia, they inspired many of the agrarian movements that existed in Eastern Europe in the early 20th century. These movements shared an agrarian populism quite similar to the Populists in North America, in which the peasant was considered to be the main source of morality and agricultural life, the foundation of society. They vehemently opposed the urban elite and the centralizing tendencies and materialist basis of capitalism, arguing instead for the preservation of small family farms and for self-governance. The agrarian populists were popular in the rural areas of Eastern Europe but remained largely excluded from political power in the authoritarian states that were run by an elite of landowners and the military. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 33).*

While populism remained silent in Europe during the Cold War, we see it on the rise in Latin America during this period. Populism has more variants in this region and merges with different ideologies, so we could see both right and left-wing examples of populism. Similar to other regions, the demands for civil and economic rights as a result of migrations from rural to urban gave rise to political movements. According to Mudde & Kaltwasser, Latin American populism had three waves; the first wave started with the Great Depression in 1929 and lasted until the 1960s, the



second wave started in the early 1990s but was shorter and less prolific, and the third wave started at the end of 1990s and continues today. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 28-31). During the first wave, economic and social inequalities, and demands for political and social rights played a higher role. Since those countries have democracy, they were able to reflect their frustration in the elections. This shows us that populism is a natural part of democracy that can arise at any time when an opportunity comes. In this period, successful parties positioned themselves beyond the left and right divisions. Juan Peron in Argentina, Getulio Vargas in Brazil, and Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador were examples of those types of populists in the first wave. To sum, those leaders constructed political language that prioritized "the people" rather than the "working class" and used Americanismo ideology, which means that all Latin Americans have a common identity and oppose imperial powers. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 29). They had corporatist tendencies that encourages the integration of excluded sectors unless they submit their loyalty to the leader. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 29). So, those who oppose the government in various economic sectors declared as a national oligarchy, "the elites", in alliance with imperialists against the country's industrialization. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 29). This shows that those leaders were not radical socialists although socialism and communism were getting popular during this time. I'm going to explain other populist waves in Latin America in the next chapter.

What we see in this era's populism is that economic inequality and internal migrations let populism to be effective within the political domain. Populism helps for those socioeconomic groups that newly emerged after the industrial revolution and its consequences. Those demands from this people which had been ignored by the system became visible with populism, it creates political awareness. So, this shows that populism can emerge as a reaction against the system in democracies. While the division between "the people" and "the elites" was making by the populists, the rural areas are prioritized. So, we can say that populism benefits from class conflict. However, populism transforms and goes beyond just belonging to this group as time goes on. The change in the concept of class also has an effect on this transformation. As we are going to explain in the next section, the class not only refers economic conditions but also includes social status and civil rights in post-modern era.

### **2.2.2. Populism in the Post-Modern Era (1990's – Today)**

When it comes to the 21st century, we see populist movements from both right and left-wing ideologies in the US. One of them is Occupy Wall Street movement which has opposed government bailouts and their support of Wall Street, and directly targeted those bankers and financial groups within them while using that populist slogan; “we are the 99%, they are 1%”. They brought up the issues to the stage which constitute the core of neoliberalism such as political and economic inequality and inspired left-wing populist movements that emerged in Europe such as Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain (Judis, 2016: 48). The movement had no leader, was not a single, united entity, and had varying demands; so it makes them only an angry reaction towards the system. Thus, protests ended by the time and couldn't form into a comprehensive political organization.

Another one is the Tea Party which is also based on the same opposition to Wall Street and corruption within the government. They criticized unfair tax rates and careless government spending after the 2008 economic crisis when the Obama government decided to help homeowners and introduced his plan for national health insurance. However, the movement's discourse mostly appeals to the right-wingers and libertarians which makes them more exclusionary. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 26). It has never been a unified organization but instead consisted many of local groups that were independent and gathered through social media (Judis, 2016: 44). They established their rhetoric based on the “makers” and “takers” dichotomy but rather preferred to call it “productive” and “unproductive” as the People's Party did. For them; bankers, land speculators, gamblers, and immigrants were unproductive parts of the society (Judis, 2016: 45). In the following years, they blend into the Republican Party and their activities ended. However, there are still people who identify themselves as a part of the Tea Party movement.

Not only movements but also politicians like Bernie Sanders as a left-winger or Donald Trump as a right-winger are referred to as populists during this period by scholars due to their campaign promises, speeches, and usage of the language. Trump was using the term “silent majority” to refer to the public as Nixon did, and portrayed himself as their leader against the establishment, the media, and the elites which he

thought of as public enemies. From time to time, he chose to communicate with the public directly via his Twitter account rather than using formal declarations. On the other hand, Sanders emphasized the importance of a social state, so he promised Medicare for all, a better minimum wage per hour, and more taxes on rich people. His arguments created a political division between “the %99 percent and the %1 percent” since he constantly attacked billionaires. That’s why his demands and political approaches align with American populist tradition.

When we look at Russia, their regime changed from communism to democracy after the Soviet Union collapsed at the end of 1991. A couple of years later Vladimir Putin has elected. His governing style shows an example of how populist politics works as he divides both internal and external politics into two groups. He constructed a discourse that is called “nashism”, which means “our folks”, in which he classified his supporters as “the people”. (The Guardian, 17/11/2016). Among those two groups one of them is honest, trustworthy, patriot Russians that support him and the other is the West that constantly puts pressure on the Russian people by funding opposition movements within the country, through economic and political embargoes, also through militarily expanding North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In Europe, populism became relevant again in the 1990s when there was no longer a Soviet threat and European integration was accelerating. Populism was absent during the Cold War since half of Europe was under Soviet influence and the other half was rebuilding democracies based on moderation due to fear of fascism and communism. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 34). Populist parties emerged as a reaction to immigration, economic crisis, and expanding EU project which caused changes in European society. At this point, populist concerns did not stem from the economic transformation of society as it happened before but were mostly affected by cultural and political changes. Anti-immigration, nativist point of view, and opposition to European integration created the backbone of many right-wing populist movements in Europe. Besides that, the economic crisis in 2008 hit some countries like Spain and Greece and raised concerns about the economy. Left-wing populist movements, like Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, have emerged as a response to rising unemployment rates and to failing economies. They were similar to the Occupy

movement but each actor had its own specific enemies and terminology. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 37).

When it comes to Latin America, we should focus on the second and third waves of populism in this region as we explained the first one in the previous section. The second wave of populism in Latin America short lived. Populism emerged in the early 90s in those countries which suffered economically at the end of the 80s. Carlos Menem in Argentina, Collor de Mello in Brazil, and Alberto Fujimori in Peru succeeded in the elections. These leaders were able to win by blaming the elites for the situation of the country and applied neoliberal economic policies, such as cooperation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in order to eliminate hyperinflation. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 30). They framed the corrupt elites as the "political class" which supports a strong state and opposes the development of the free market, and they put aside Americanismo and its emphasis on anti-imperialism. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 31).

As opposed to the second one, the third and current wave leaders were radical socialists. Hugo Chavez in Venezuela, Evo Morales in Bolivia, Rafael Correa in Ecuador, and Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua came to the power. They used Americanismo and anti-imperialist rhetoric as the first wave did, however, they applied socialist policies during their governments. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 31). Economically, they opposed the free market and aimed for a new development model that will help the poor but they could not solve the socioeconomic inequality. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 31) Socially, they combined socialist and populist ideas and created an inclusionary concept of "the people" which contains all excluded and discriminated people. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 32). Therefore, they prioritized those groups' needs. Lastly, the third-wave populists believed that the system is rigged against the people. That's why they had to give those powers back to the people by changing the constitution, however, it ended up limitations for the opposition and free competition against the government even though they diminished the old elites. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017: 32).

As we can see, populism can emerge almost everywhere around the world. However, each one of them could have different characteristics and reasons. Not only the reasons help them to rise but also the tools they can use are important too. What

we see in this era is that populism increased its inclusiveness. It has both appealed to more parts of society and did it more effectively with help of technology. There were new mechanisms established for leaders to reach the audience unmediated. Another thing is populism can be seen on both the right and left-wing. In both eras, populism did not belong to just one ideological camp. Unlike the previous period, not internal but external immigration has affected the popularity of populism. For this reason, we can say that regional problems contributed to populism. As I mentioned, technology played a role in populism as an environmental factor. So, in the following section, I am going to try to explain how environmental changes could have an impact on populist movements and how these movements benefited from those changes.

### **2.3. DIFFERENCES AND CONTINUITIES BETWEEN MODERN AND POST-MODERN POPULISM**

It is difficult to explain politics without the impact of technological advancements. We can see that mass communication tools are quite useful when it comes to winning elections and during the management of a country. When we consider the milestones that changed society both in economic and social terms like Industrial Revolution or Information Age, we can argue that populism was mutually influencing communication systems, and had carried different dynamics in both eras. With the help of previous pieces of information that I have shown about the theoretical and historical transformation of populism, I'm going to explain what type of conclusions we can reach when we compare the past and present populist movements.

In the early stages of populism, we observe that populism was mostly keen on the economic demands of peasants and workers. Demands for land reform, concerns about unemployment due to mechanization of agriculture and urbanization, expectations of better life standards after social states were established and rising concerns about changing way of life created the backbone of populism. Although the mentality of "us vs others" in a moralistic domain remained, only the subjects of it have changed through time. When we look at different examples of populism during that time, I think we can argue that populism has highly benefitted from the class struggle but mostly used social and moralistic topics as their main discourse rather

than relying on the economics as socialists did. Social movements and leaders have all targeted this section of society as we can see in rural movements in the US, in Russian intelligentsia's demands, or in Latin American leaders that prioritized those people's rights and organizational capacity. They were distrustful and skeptical toward the system, and their language was antagonistic and based on moral accusations towards others who already be a part of the system or were upper class. Even though they have associated media with "the others" most of the time, they didn't hesitate to use their own media platforms when they got an advantage. Moffitt explains this love/hate relationship like this:

*On one hand, populists tend to target the media as a tool of "the elite" that is used to discredit them, marginalize "common sense" opinions and mislead "the people". On the other hand, populists are often very opportunistic about their media opportunities, willing to align themselves with tabloid and "low" forms of media to reach "the people", blurring the line between politics and entertainment in the process. (Moffitt, 2016: 87).*

However, mass media was not influential as it is today, and was very costly to maintain so its effect to increase populist influence was limited in the early era. Also, the entertainment part of the Moffitt's analysis mostly applies today as it plays a significant part in daily life after TV and internet became widespread.

When we look at today's populism we can say that the main consideration of populism has changed from economics to other aspects of life due to developments in communication technologies and the widespread of the internet. It goes beyond the economic concerns in this post-truth era in which reality itself is discussed and what was constructed became reality in some cases as in Baudrillard's point of view. A couple of non-economic reasons can be listed. For instance, cultural conflicts increased between locals and immigrants, and it caused xenophobia after mass immigration. Governments became more centralized due to advanced surveillance systems and as a result of recent pandemic measures. People are concerned about losing some of their freedoms. Thus, it makes them more defenseless, vulnerable and open to participating in populist movements meanwhile mainstream media and politicians created a mistrustful environment with constantly changing opinions. In that case, Moffitt criticizes the lack of consideration of the new media in populism literature in terms of mobilization of supporters and top-down communication (Moffitt, 2016: 80). He uses the term "mediatisation" to explain how populism adapts elements of media logic to

politics (Moffitt, 2016: 81). He analyses media and populism interactions in two ways: the first is the influence of media on populist success, and the second is how populist actors use media (Moffitt, 2016: 78). According to him, researchers who embrace populism as an ideology and a discourse are mostly keen on the first topic; those who embrace it as a strategy are mostly interested in the second one (Moffitt, 2016: 78-79). The way that media approaches populism can have both positive and negative consequences, and there is no consensus on this issue. For instance, Mudde, who embraces populism as an ideology, argues that media could be both friend and foe for populists and captures its double-sided nature (2007: 249). The media might cover them as good or bad depending on the topic. Akkerman (2011) finds out mixed results in his work on UK and Netherlands when it comes to media coverage and bias towards populism. He calls media “Janus faced” since they can be both distributors of elite messages and authoritative sources while also being anti-elitist and supportive of populists thanks to their readers and columnists (Akkerman, 2011: 942). Therefore, he defines it as a combination of a relatively strong elitist orientation with a weak undertow of radical anti-elitism (Akkerman, 2011: 942). When it comes to how populists used media, we can see that it is highly beneficial for them to directly reach the unorganized masses. Weyland (2001: 16) argues that radio was playing a major role in the early era but it switched to TVs later, which both were very useful to communicate with people without having formal institutions. Also, he argues that television was more powerful since it can project a leader’s charismatic nature better. I think we can follow up on the idea that the internet is creating an even better atmosphere for them to show their charisma. In that case, we cannot ignore the fact that how mediatisation of politics contributed to populism. Moffit argues that there is some sort of relationship between politics embracing media logic more and more. However, it is difficult to prove direct causation even though we accept media can set the scene for populism or diffuse sentiments that populists can capitalize on. (Moffit, 2016: 81). In that case, Hjarvard (2008) defines mediatisation as the process whereby society to an increasing degree is submitted to or becomes dependent on the media and their logic. I think there is clearly a manipulation aspect that plays a role within that media logic and how it influences people’s perspectives. One of the most obvious examples of that might be the Cambridge Analytica scandal. During that period we

have witnessed how easy it is to analyze the personal data of internet users and to show them targeted ads in order to make them get closer to a specific idea. One of the allegations was about the Brexit campaign which they accused to have a close relationship with Cambridge Analytica to make persuadable voters vote “Leave”. That’s why it is important to elaborate on Brexit and British politics in general to find out the mutual relationship between populism and mediatization of politics.

## **2.4. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, we can argue that populism may use domestic and external problems in favor of itself and can be seen in every country which has democracy. It doesn’t belong to a specific time or region. It creates different consequences depending on the internal and external dynamics of those countries. Populism does not guarantee electoral or political success and does not aim to abolish the democratic system each time. In accordance with academic definitions, we saw that populism existed in different periods of history as ideologically, discursively, and strategically. Therefore, we can claim that populism can be seen in the future since it didn’t lose its’ explanatory value. As long as there is a crisis of system and representation in democracy in the future, populists will emerge in order to take advantage of the anger and frustration of the people. Meanwhile, we can also argue that technological and societal changes affected the efficiency of populism. The problems it brought up when it first emerged, the way they expressed these problems, and the organizations they established while expressing them have changed. That’s why we can argue that every part of the society that is involved in politics can use populism because the term can adapt itself to current political developments. This also shows that populism does not have unchangeable, strict economic and social doctrine because it can use solutions from both the right wing and left wing. As I argued before, populism does not always have devastating consequences for the democratic system and all types of politicians and movements can benefit from it. In order to deepen this claim and show that variants of populism can exist in daily politics but not just one group, I am going to examine British politics and the Brexit case. The example of Brexit shows us how a society’s historical memory can come to light with populism and play a crucial role in a country’s future, and how



populists can influence politics without even being in charge of a country. Meanwhile, those parties that populism influenced were not aimed to abolish the system.

In the next section, my main goal is to make it clear that populism is beyond being a buzzword that signifies irrationalism and anti-democracy with the example of British politics. It can explain current events, has been in the history, and benefits from them. Thus, we can understand what populism is and what is not clearly when we look deeply into these examples.



## **THIRD CHAPTER**

### **POPULIST INFLUENCE ON CURRENT UK POLITICS**

#### **3.1. INTRODUCTION**

In this section, I am going to show the projection of the theoretical approaches I have explained before, the historical process, and changing conditions of populism in British politics. As a country that populist zeitgeist affected, I am going to be looking for the answers to some questions such as how much the British politics was being populist during this time, how many leaders and parties decided to shift their policies close to populism, and what kind of approaches did they use while doing that. Meanwhile, I am going to demonstrate the historical roots of those policies and the current conditions that allow populism to rise. There are a couple of reasons to choose the UK as an example. The first reason is the UK's democratic traditions. It is one of the oldest and most well-settled democracies in the world. British parliament contains parties from a variety of ideologies. So, it will show us that strong democratic tradition, check and balance systems and inclusive democracy can prevent populism to become a danger to the democratic system. Those types of democracies can host such movements, politicians, and discourses within their political domain. The second reason is Brexit. It was one of the acceleration points for the rise of populism during that time. Many debates suggest that “Remain” and “Leave” campaigns benefited from populism. So, it would contribute while explaining populism. As I argued before, populism refers to the frustration of the people towards the system. In this case, the British people had this against the EU policy of the country. Thus, populists emerged to use this gap and put this issue in the main political debates.

In this chapter, I am going to examine British politics in this way; firstly I am going to demonstrate Euroscepticism in the UK history as a supportive element for Brexit. Basically, Euroscepticism means a political position involving criticism of any kind of pro-European or pan-European idea like the EU. So, it can be used by populist politicians especially when they blame the EU for economic and social issues. Previous governments had made some decisions accordingly with this idea of

Euroscepticism. Therefore, that collective memory of British society was useful for populism while creating "the other". Afterward, I am going to examine political parties' opinions about Euroscepticism. I am going to evaluate their support or opposition to Brexit within this framework. By analyzing their election campaign promises before and after Brexit, I am going to show how much they were affected by populism during this period. Thus, we can understand whether they consulted populism ideologically, discursively, or strategically. Eventually, Brexit entered British politics and resulted with the impact of populism. Whether the consequences of Brexit made Britain better or worse is a subject of another study. What matters for us here is that populism brought a movement to success on their terms.

In the end, what I wanted to achieve here is to show how political parties and politicians embraced populism more or less in one of the well-functioning democracies in the world. Thus, we will be able to identify what populism is, when populism becomes a threat to democracies, and how effective populism is while explaining political events. Basically, the following chapter argues that populism does not always have devastating consequences for democracies by showing British politics as an example. Populism goes along with as a part of democracy and its danger depends on countries' internal dynamics and systemic structure.

### **3.2. BREXIT AND POPULISM IN BRITISH POLITICS**

Euroscepticism of the UK had already been there since they first joined the EU (former the European Community) and they have always been an "awkward partner" within the union as Stephen George (1998) stated. That skepticism is not a thing that recently developed based on internal and global events but can go wider and deeper, and could be traced back to the idea of British Exceptionalism, British Nationalism, and the impact of World War II on the national consciousness (Corbett, 2016: 12). There was a concern that involvement in a supranational European integration might threaten the national sovereignty which had been gained with a great effort of the whole nation after World War II (Forster, 2002: 17). Besides that, both right and left of the political spectrum highlighted the desirability of British leadership in Europe which was contended that British exceptionalism and Britain's global responsibilities,

such as the Commonwealth, required them to lead Europe (Forster, 2002: 18). Indeed, the fact that the integration process in Europe is heading towards a supranational structure by taking the name of “European Union” after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 shows that those concerns about identity and sovereignty were not just fallacious. Britain’s non-participation in the Eurozone and Schengen Area can be shown as solid evidence of that skepticism against further integration models. That’s why it is necessary to consider the cultural and economic background of British Euroscepticism when it comes to analyzing the influence of populist movements which led the country to Brexit. (Corbett, 2016: 12-13).

There were both positive and negative attitudes toward European integration in Britain during the Pax Europeana atmosphere established after the Second World War. Anthony Forster (2002) describes three periods that are important for contemporary Euroscepticism in Britain; the first is the application to join the European Community (the EC) in the 1960s to the first membership referendum in 1975. The second is the Thatcherian period in the 1980s in which Europe is redefined in economic terms and seen as an opportunity for renewal of the economic system, which led Britain to involve in the Single European Act (SEA) later. Third is after the Maastricht Treaty when European integration went deeper and wider in political and economic terms which caused Eurosceptics to gain popularity. Especially that latest period not only caused populist Eurosceptic debates within the UK but also all around Europe which sparked discussions about the future of national identities and deeper integration. What makes the UK detached from other big European countries within the EU is their point of view about national identity. In the studies carried out within the EU to examine the perspective on the national and European identity of the European population, Britain is usually among those countries that mostly identify themselves as more “national” rather than “European” (Eurobarometer 84, 2015). So, the British political class took a skeptical and pragmatic position toward the EU with a focus on mostly the economic costs and benefits of membership (Corbett, 2016: 13). Especially during the Thatcher era, the main principle was the unleashing of individualism and market forces throughout British society with the help of the free-trade zone required by the EC (Gifford, 2008: 85). For that reason, Gifford defines Thatcherism as “a populist reassertion of a conception of the British state and society as a global market society

that was profoundly rooted in a reactionary and authoritarian capitalist individualism”. (Gifford, 2008: 85) Avoiding further integration while being included in the European market shows that this process is seen as an opportunity to transform the British economy from a Fordist understanding of the economy to global neo-liberal economic principles. (Gifford, 2008: 95). During this period, European integration constituted as “the other” of British political order in a populist way and British exceptionalism supported by Euroscepticism was reasserted as a populist ideological discourse (Gifford, 2008: 102).

When we look at the progression of politics which is based on Euroscepticism and British exceptionalism after the '90s, Nicholas Startin (2015) points out these three events; the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the largest EU expansion in 2004, and the global economic crisis in 2008. Those three events have impacts that served different areas of populism in Britain. The expansion of the EU since 2004 created a more competitive environment for low-skilled, low-pay insecure workers in the UK with increasing migration and insufficient response of Conservatives against financial crisis, and it created worse social conditions for older, blue-collar, lower-skilled people as a consequence (Ford and Goodwin, 2014). Besides that, some of the newspapers -such as the Sun, News of the World, and Daily Mail- constantly used hostile rhetoric and blamed the EU for domestic issues which caused Euroscepticism to increase (Startin, 2015: 316). Also, Daily Express, which has relatively fewer readers but is historically opposed to the EU membership, intensely pursued the “Britain out of Europe” campaign in 2010 to the point where they were able to reach 373.000 signatures to make a parliamentary vote in the House of Commons in October 2011 over whether the UK should have a referendum on EU membership (Startin, 2015: 318). The man who's behind this organization and also political editor of Daily Express, Patrick O'Flynn, joined Eurosceptic populist the UK Independence Party (UKIP) in 2013 and was elected in the European election as UKIP MEP (Member of European Parliament) for the UK's Eastern Region later (Startin, 2015: 319). At this point, we can identify the mutual affinity between the media and populist politics. While the media was opening up more space for populist discourse within British politics with its' fanatical attitude, as well as populists were influencing the media and using it for their purpose accordingly. As mentioned before, deeply rooted Euroscepticism within British

politics was making it easy to frame the EU as “the other” of populist discourse for a long time, and so did media followed that path. Moreover, we can say that the media is not seen as an enemy when they supported populist causes.

At this point, we should discuss how traditional British politics were able to respond to people’s unrest which is directed toward the EU. When we look at Conservative Party, although English nationalism suggests “the people” as socially conservative, Thatcher’s Anglo-American nationalism based on internationalist, free-market agenda was conflicting with that socially conservative base (Gifford, 2008). Later on, David Cameron’s desire to pursue more pro-EU, social liberal, and centrist policies within Conservative Party was disturbing their voters and making them open to other political choices (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 186). This conflict within the party caused some of the members, such as Boris Johnson, to adopt a contrarian attitude to the party’s stance during the Brexit process. Meanwhile, the Labour Party government during the ’90s attempted to give Britain a leadership role in Europe and construct a new Anglo-European hegemony based on the special relationship with the US (Gifford, 2008: 140). Although Labour contains a voter base that is closely aligned with English nationalism, especially within their core working-class constituencies in former industrial areas, the transformation of the party to “New Labour” and the impact of the “Third Way” ideology that supports neo-liberal economic policies caused them to push out their blue-collar voters and replaced them with white-collar, public sector workers (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 115-116). Both parties’ decisions created a group of voters called “left-behind” who feel unrepresented in the current political system. Since this group emphasizes national identity based on ethnicity which can pass through culture and ancestry, they opposed what they perceived as a threat to British national identity in terms of politics (the EU integration) and society (immigration) (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 126). At the same time, the economic policies of both parties harmed their economic conditions; thus, those who have been “left behind” by the economic and social transformation of the country were pushed to the margins as the main parties have converged on the center ground (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 270). As a result, those voters who were mostly older, blue-collar workers with little education and few skills had to search for alternative political movements (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 270).

These events created suitable conditions for the foundation of UKIP which is labeled by many as populist, Eurosceptic, and British Nationalist. The emergence of UKIP is one of the reasons that accelerated Euroscepticism and Brexit in the UK. This party is not describable with traditional “left” and “right” notions but reflects a division between a political mainstream dominated by a highly educated, financially secure middle class and a more insecure, precarious working class which feels no more represented in the political area (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 270). UKIP gained an important position among traditional British political parties and achieved some electoral successes. Following years of their establishment in 1993, the party gained third place in 2004, second place in 2009, and first place in 2014 at the European Parliament Elections. The reason for these successes is not only a result of their political position but also Nigel Farage’s charismatic leadership and highly supportive media. Farage was completing the lack of leadership in populist Eurosceptic politics in the UK as it happened in the other countries’ populist movements. Alongside the regular anti-EU propaganda, the media effect also showed itself in the content of the Brexit campaign. According to The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2016), 45 percent of articles had been negative about the EU while 27 percent of them were in favor of “Remain” during campaigns. Moreover, Leave campaigns occurred from different political backgrounds and they engaged in populist anti-establishmentarian rhetoric (Corbett, 2016: 20). The majority of the media and Leave organizations used emotive and “positive” tones that appealed to populism and English nationalism, including the slogan “Vote leave, take control” emphasizing the repatriation of sovereignty to Parliament as direct representatives of “the people” (Corbett, 2016: 20). During this campaign, they did not only use traditional media but also benefited from newer mass media tools, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to communicate with the public directly.

At this point what we see is that Brexit campaigns exceed the ideological limits of parties and are supported by different political spectrums. So it should be asked whether all British politics became populist or was that a temporary trend. In order to find out, it would be appropriate to compare parties’ approaches on key issues like immigration, national identity, or Euroscepticism at the dawn of Brexit in the 2015 elections and the latest parliamentary elections in 2019. Thus, we can understand if

populism inherently changed parties or if it was just a conjunctural trend based on political environment and leadership. Considering the UK has a wide political environment, it would be more accurate to choose those parties which mostly affected the society in general, and specifically the Brexit period and these topics. For this reason, I will only include those five parties: Conservative Party, Labour Party, UKIP, Liberal Democrats, and Scottish National Party (SNP).

### **3.3. POLITICAL PARTIES' PROMISES ON BREXIT AND BEYOND**

#### **3.3.1. Conservative Party**

The process that led the UK out of the EU started when Conservatives promised an EU referendum (Brexit) during the 2015 elections campaign. As a result of the election, the party has achieved the installation of a majority single-party government and had to execute this promise. However, when we look at the party's manifesto in 2015, it can be seen that there was no hard Eurosceptic, anti-EU stance but rather contains lots of promises for better deals with the EU. We can even detect those promises on topics that populists mostly benefited from, such as immigration. They promised that by saying "we will negotiate new rules with the EU, so that people will have to be earning here for a number of years before they can claim benefits, including the tax credits that top up low wages" (Conservative, 2015: 29-30) or "we will negotiate with the EU to introduce stronger powers to deport criminals and stop them coming back, and tougher and longer re-entry bans for all those who abuse free movement" (Conservative, 2015: 30). However, they were still reflecting some of the inherent Eurosceptic perspectives of the British people, and they declared how they see the EU by saying:

*We are clear about what we want from Europe. We say: yes to the Single Market. Yes to turbo-charging free trade. Yes to working together where we are stronger together than alone. Yes to a family of nation states, all part of a European Union – but whose, interests, crucially, are guaranteed whether inside the Euro or out. No to 'ever closer union.' No to a constant flow of power to Brussels. No to unnecessary interference. And no, of course, to the Euro, to participation in Eurozone bail-outs or notions like a European Army. (Conservative, 2015: 72).*



So, it is clear that they were not portraying the EU as “the other” in a populist way when it comes to blaming somewhere for the country’s problems. They were trying to find an alternative way to the key issues. For instance, conservatives’ approach toward national identity was relying on the English language rather than culture and ancestry. Contrary to divisive populist belief, they were promoting integration by stating this on the manifesto:

*Being able to speak English is a fundamental part of integrating into our society. We have introduced tough new language tests for migrants and ensured councils reduce spending on translation services. Next, we will legislate to ensure that every public sector worker operating in a customer-facing role must speak fluent English. And to encourage better integration into our society, we will also require those coming to Britain on a family visa with only Basic English to become more fluent over time, with new language tests for those seeking a visa extension. (Conservative, 2015: 31).*

Not only that, they used photos of the minorities living in the country throughout the pages. This indicates that Conservatives’ approach to immigration and national identity was not in a nativist nationalistic way, and they were not blaming them categorically for any issue. Besides that, we can detect other policies which are far from the classical conservative viewpoint such as support of green energy politics (Conservative, 2015: 56) and LGBT rights (Conservative, 2015: 46). This shows that Conservative Party had been moving away from the right wing to more centrist policies. Also, Conservatives were targeting Labour Party throughout the manifesto but not using populist divisive language shows that there were no intentions of being populist in that sense.

David Cameron was the one who is responsible for that slight axis shift of the Conservative Party. Unlike others, he didn’t target the core Conservative votes, pursued a more socially liberal agenda, and wanted the Conservatives to be more inclusive which would address issues like climate change and gay marriage, and increase the number of women and minorities within the party. (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 70-71). Thus, those conservative voters who were discontented with these policies became more open to other parties’ influences. (Ford and Goodwin, 2014: 71). His leadership was enough to win the election but not enough to hold the conservative base together against the Eurosceptic populist wave. Even he stated after Brexit that he was a victim of populism and it cost for his job (The Guardian, 09/12/2016). However, his rhetoric was containing populist elements from time to time. His idea of

“Big Society” was aiming to reduce bureaucracy to transfer power from state to society, which shows that it was used to build a narrative around “the people” (Alexandre-Collier, 2016: 119). His “rhetorical populism” was an attempt to absorb the radical agenda of Eurosceptic and anti-immigration parties (Alexandre-Collier, 2016: 125). In this case, we can say that populism was not ideologically driven but opportunistically used for the sake of political interests.

When it comes to the elections of 2019 when Brexit was already accepted by the public but not done bureaucratically, Boris Johnson who previously supported the “Leave” campaign as a conservative took the office. The main slogan of the manifesto of that era, “Get Brexit Done”, portrays the frustration of the people. Previous negotiative attitude was completely changed towards the EU by stating that “There will be no political alignment with the EU. We will keep the UK out of the single market, out of any form of customs union, and end the role of the European Court of Justice.” (Conservative, 2019: 5). Although they were stricter about leaving the EU, it was not a total axis shift. In some cases, they were suggesting cross-party consensus for issues (Conservative, 2019: 12). It shows that they had no intentions to divide society into two camps and portray their political opponents as evil. There were still some social liberal approaches such as support of clean energy (Conservative, 2019: 55) and LGBT rights (Conservative, 2019: 20-53) that were inherited from previous governments. Also, as presented in the 2015 manifesto, minorities were represented in the images, and immigration was praised by saying “Our society has been enriched by immigration and we will always recognize the contribution of those who have helped build our public services, businesses, culture and communities.” (Conservative, 2019: 22). All these show that the party was not changed inherently and turned into a full populist party but only Brexit policies were radically changed. However, the character of Boris Johnson is debatable. Some refer to him as a populist (Corbett, 2016:15) or a liberal-conservative populist demagogue by emphasizing his witty and funny language (Berend, 2020: 7). His informal attitude and funny character help him to be portrayed as “one of the people”. In some cases, his rhetoric shifts to a populist way. For instance, he claimed that “the elites want to remain in Europe to keep hold of power” during the Brexit campaign (Independent, 25/04/2016) and after the referendum, he was arguing that Brexit delay would be seen by the people as an elite conspiracy to

thwart Brexit (Express, 18/01/2019). It can be said that his charismatic leadership perfectly matches his populist discourse on the issue of Brexit. So, we can argue that Conservative Party is not an ideologically populist aligned but leaders like Boris Johnson can use populist rhetoric in order to achieve political success.

### **3.3.2. Labour Party**

The manifesto of 2015 starts with straightforward populist sentences against Conservative Party: “Their view is that economic success depends just on a few at the top. They have been giving power to large unaccountable firms rather than to people...” (Labour, 2015: 11) and they continued with this direction by stating that:

*We can continue with a Conservative plan based on the view that success comes only from a privileged few at the top. Or we can change direction, begin to return power to people and build an economy together in which everyone can contribute to a shared and enduring prosperity. (Labour, 2015: 12).*

Not only that, but they were also targeting a variety of entities by saying “... too much power is concentrated in too few hands. Those who make decisions on behalf of others, whether they are in Westminster, the European Union, in business, the media, or the public sector, are too often unaccountable.” (Labour, 2015: 82) “Our governing mission is to break out of the traditional top-down, Westminster knows the best approach, and devolve power and decision making to people and their local communities. (Labour, 2015: 82). As it can be seen, those sentences clearly contain basic populist elements by dividing the political area between “a few vs the people”. The most common populist idea of “giving back power to the people” implies that the current democratic system is flawed and only they can help the people. Blaming political parties and establishments for acting against the will of people with bad intentions and power hunger provides very basic populist principles. However, it can be expected from a leftist party to claim that they were the voice of the people. Leftism inherently has an antagonistic point of view in politics but it doesn’t make them immune to populism. They create a populist dichotomy not over culture and identity as right-wing parties did, but over economic classes. Because they were supporting immigration and promoting integration (Labour, 2015: 66-67) but using populist language on economic topics. What creates some sort of contradiction here is their

stance on Brexit and how they appealed to white-collar workers rather than blue-collar workers even though they criticized businesses and top classes. Believing that membership of the EU is central to the prosperity and security of the country (Labour, 2015: 101) while harshly arguing against pro-business, pro-free trade projects -like the EU- creates a weird situation. Nevertheless, they were planning to work to reform the EU policies and retain their membership (Labour, 2015: 15). Labour claims that they are an internationalist party and will strengthen international alliances, particularly NATO and the EU (Labour, 2015: 98). This shows that they are far from having a Eurosceptic British attitude and it might drift away some of their core voters, especially those white, Eurosceptic, blue-collar workers as we mentioned before. However, this doesn't mean that they can't be populist because they don't support Brexit. Labour's axis shift didn't start with Ed Miliband during this time but he continued with the previous approaches even though he criticized them. In one of his speeches he said: "But so too it is right to move on from New Labour because New Labour, despite its great achievements, was too silent about the responsibilities of those at the top, and, too timid about the accountability of those with power." (Miliband, 2012). Moreover he criticized the political system and how it is out of touch from "the people":

*Let's be honest, politics isn't working. People have lost faith in politicians and politics. And trust is gone. Politics is broken. Its practice, its reputation and its institutions. I'm in it and even I sometimes find it depressing. This generation has a chance - and a huge responsibility - to change our politics. We must seize it and meet the challenge. (Miliband, 2010).*

All these political promises and use of language show us that Labour Party was very populist both ideologically and discursively.

When we look at 2019's Labour Party, we can see that the same populist approaches still continued. As it happened in 2015, the manifesto starts with usual populist sentences: "It is your opportunity to transform our country, so that it works not just for a few, but for all of us." (Labour, 2019: 6) and "The last decade has seen a wealth grab by a privileged few, supported by the Conservatives, at the expense of the majority." (Labour, 2019: 6). In many areas, Labour was blaming Conservatives working for a few, privileged section of society. For instance: "The Conservatives allowed the proceeds of North Sea oil to be squandered on tax cuts for the richest and captured in profits for the few, instead of investing them in our future." (Labour, 2019: 16). Also demonizing them by saying "While Labour wants a society in which people

care for another, the Tories are trying to pitch us against each other.” (Labour, 2019: 72). Not only that, they criticized political system too: “For many people, politics doesn’t work. The Westminster bubble is a world away from their daily lives. The Labour Party was founded to give working-class people a voice in politics.” (Labour, 2019: 81). Although they were criticizing many things about the economy and the system, they were supporting the EU membership as they did in 2015 even to the point where they were promising a second Brexit referendum (Labour, 2019: 90). As they did in 2015, they were supporting immigration and integration too (Labour, 2019: 70-91), which is one of the topics that right-wing populists exploited.

When it comes to the leadership, Jeremy Corbyn was in charge as another left-wing populist. He was even more straightforward populist than his predecessor Ed Miliband. He argued that Conservatives are the elite and the establishment that works for a privileged few. In his speech in 2016 he said:

*Who seriously believes that the Tories could ever stand up to the privileged few? They are the party of the privileged few, funded by the privileged few, for the benefit of the privileged few. They’ve cut taxes for the privileged few sold off our national assets to them, always on the cheap and turned a blind eye to their chronic tax avoidance. They’re so committed to the interests of the very richest they recruited Sir Phillip Green into government as something called an efficiency tsar. Well, government might be a bit more efficient if the super-rich like Sir Phillip actually paid their taxes. (Corbyn, 2016).*

He also criticized the system too and wanted to show only his party represents the will of the people:

*This is the real center of gravity of British politics. We are now the political mainstream. Our manifesto and our policies are popular because that is what most people in our country actually want, not what they’re told they should want. (Corbyn, 2017).*

In the end, we can argue that both Labour Party’s policies and usage of language were very populist, and they should be considered populist during those periods even though they were in favor of the EU membership.

### **3.3.3. United Kingdom Independence Party**

UKIP was one of the most sensational parties during Brexit. The party was founded on the idea of Eurosceptic, nativist, right-wing populism that priorities British

culture and identity. So, the manifesto of 2015 starts with populist sentences as expected:

*On the major issues of the day – immigration, the economy, our health service and living standards – the establishment parties have repeatedly and knowingly raised the expectations of the public, only to let us down, time and time again. In many ways, this is where UKIP came from: a feeling that successive governments were no longer representing the will of the British people. (UKIP, 2015: 3).*

Those were very characteristic populist accusations that specifically portray its opponents as the people who don't care about ordinary people and work with the elites. Also, it implies that the current political system doesn't work in favor of the people. These ideas blend with Euroscepticism in the following sections. As a hard Eurosceptic party, UKIP was blaming the EU for most of the UK's problems like immigration (UKIP, 2015: 12), fishery (UKIP, 2015: 49), agriculture (UKIP, 2015: 47), small businesses (UKIP, 2015: 43), employment and workers' rights (UKIP, 2015: 41) and many others. Even in some cases in which the EU has been sensitive like climate change, they blamed the EU's inefficiency and supported coal energy rather than renewables (UKIP, 2015: 39). Also, they openly rejected multiculturalism and stated that they don't want any sort of integration contrary to the EU's general policy (UKIP, 2015: 61). Their nativist approach can be seen by their image choices as they have never used any minorities in their manifesto. They also never mentioned LGBT rights too, which makes them separated from the other parties altogether. So clearly, they were very committed to taking Britain out of the EU and all their policies were related to that high purpose.

On top of that ideological base, the leadership of the party was at the hands of Nigel Farage. He was filling the charismatic leadership gap of the party and was using populist language that puts other parties, but mostly the EU, as "the other" of populist discourse. His intentions to take Britain out of the EU date back many years earlier. He was one of the very early activists of the party and actively worked towards that purpose. As his party did, he was blaming the EU for many things. For example in 2015 when the migrant crisis happened, he directly targeted not only the EU policies for migration but also the EU expansion that let countries, like Romania and Bulgaria, join the EU (BBC, 27/08/2015). So his Euroscepticism was not only evolved according to current conditions but rooted back in the early stages of the EU. After the Brexit

referendum ended, he told that “This will be a victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, and a victory for decent people.” (Independent, 24/06/2016) perfectly showing his populist point of view on this issue. He continues with these sentences: “We have fought against the multinationals, we have fought against the big merchant banks, we have fought against big politics, and we have fought against lies, corruption, and deceit.” (Independent, 24/06/2016). In that case, it shows whom he has seen as “enemies of the people” and how those “the elites” were acting according to him. Lastly, he reflects his Euroscepticism and opposition to the EU:

*I hope this victory brings down this failed project and leads us to a Europe of sovereign nation states, trading together, being friends together, cooperating together, and let's get rid of the flag, the anthem, Brussels, and all that has gone wrong. (Independent, 24/06/2016).*

Even after the referendum, he continued to criticize MPs for living in a very narrow, little world and disconnected from the public they paid to serve (Express, 08/12/2016). So we can say that both UKIP and its leader were a good examples of populism to see all approaches.

After the Brexit referendum passed, UKIP lost its main purpose and its charismatic leader Nigel Farage at the same time. Farage founded Brexit Party after he resigned from UKIP leadership. So he swept all of the UKIP votes in EU parliament elections. However, the party didn't shift its founding principles and continued with the same path. In the 2019 manifesto, they stated their principles by saying: “We are proud to have developed a full common-sense manifesto which combines our founding libertarian principles with populism and authentic conservatism. In particular, we stand for free speech, free markets, financial responsibility and traditional British values.” (UKIP, 2019: 1). They openly admitted their populist approach and continued to elaborate on issues from that perspective. They advocated total withdrawal from the EU without any withdrawal agreement (UKIP, 2019: 3). They were still against immigration rules and never mentioned the integration of the immigrants (UKIP, 2019: 9). The party was promising similar things as they did in 2015 so there was no major change. However, what attracts most of the attention was not their ideology or promises but how leadership change affected the party's strength. The manifesto was looking careless in terms of design and content so they don't even use any images. It shows how the party's stability and quality have been affected after more than ten

years of Farage's leadership ended. The leadership of the party changed every year and Patricia Mountain was acting as interim leader during this manifesto being written. She was far from being a charismatic leader and was not even a moderate leader. In her TV interview about her party's 2019 manifesto she gave a very poor performance, couldn't explain immigration policy, and couldn't remember whether her party have any black candidates or not (Independence, 30/12/2019). Party was lacking leadership and the successors of Farage were not successful to continue previous achievements. In the end, what we can conclude from here is that populism couldn't stand only relying on antagonistic principles but achieved success with a charismatic leader. It supports the idea that populists achieve success with leaders, not through ideology. Also, if we analyze them in the strategical approach of populism, we can argue that the party was founded on a low level of institutionalism and civil society. Because they couldn't stand without a strong leader, the party served only as a registration label for the leader's campaigns and couldn't get a large support from civil society organizations.

#### **3.3.4. Liberal Democrats**

Liberal Democrats, as opposed to the UKIP, is one of the most pro-EU parties among others. Their ideological stance and principles put them away from populism because they are mostly the one who has been accused of being "the elites" since they are closely aligned with the EU. As a non-Eurosceptic party, they believe that their membership in the EU is essential for creating a stronger economy and for projecting influence in the world. (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 147). They were promoting an open border policy as they think it boosts the economy and migrants play a vital role in business and public services (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 33). This support for the immigrants and multiculturalism can be seen in the images used throughout the manifesto since they used pictures of minorities. However, they were also emphasizing the importance to tackle abuse in the immigration system and promised to rebuild confidence in borders and the immigration system (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 118). Nevertheless, they were choosing to integrate them and emphasized the importance of the English language requirement for job seeking within the country (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 127). So, they have no concerns about the erosion of British national



identity which is based on culture and ethnicity. Throughout the manifesto, they didn't use populist words like "the elites", "the establishment" or "a few privileged". Thus, we can conclude that they were not both ideologically and discursively populist at all.

When it comes to leadership, Nick Clegg's language was not much of a populist one. He managed to install a coalition government with Conservative Party and stood up against both populism types coming from Labour and UKIP. He debated with Nigel Farage on TV to become the person who is willing to fight against UKIP's populism (The Guardian, 03/04/2014), and also criticized Labour as calling them "illiberal populist" (Clegg, 2011). Although he acknowledged "the establishment" rhetoric when he identified his party as an "anti-establishment liberal party" (Clegg, 2013), it didn't follow up with a general attitude or a campaign based on populism. Also, both he and his party was opposing Brexit. In this case, he wanted to reverse the populist arguments but argued in the same way by saying that the real elites were the super-wealthy Brexiteers who don't want the UK to have lower wages, and they wanted to escape from the EU's regulations to hindrance their financial aspirations. (The Guardian, 22/06/2017). In the end, I think we can conclude that the party was neither an ideologically populist nor its leader. However, the leader could use some populist language in the heat of politics but it doesn't make them a complete populist. It only shows that the "populist zeitgeist" in general had affected the political language from time to time.

In 2019, they used the "Stop Brexit" slogan for their manifesto. As being the country's hard EU remainer party, they have promised to revoke Article 50, which causes the UK's withdrawal, if they were able to install a majority Liberal Democrat government (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 11). In the Brexit case, they criticized both main approaches coming from Labour and Conservative parties. They stated that Conservatives won't be able to negotiate, it will take a long time and Britain will suffer from that. (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 11). Also, they argued that what Labour wanted is to reopen the Withdrawal Agreement to negotiate a new deal but they will not say whether they want Britain to remain or leave. (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 11). So, they stated directly that "...whether Labour Red or Tory Blue, Brexit is bad for the UK." (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 11). Their hard-line position on the issue shows that they don't share the traditional British Eurosceptic point of view as other parties more or

less have. They were constructing their policies as if they were arch-nemesis of UKIP where one of them blames the EU for every bad thing and the other praises the EU for every good thing happened in the country. As the manifesto continues, we can see that they think it will harm almost everything in the country such as healthcare (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 52), political system (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 83), international security (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 87), economy and innovation (Liberal Democrats, 2019: 18), and many others. They continued their inclusive attitude towards foreigners by promising free English lessons for refugees and asylum seekers to make them integrate better. (Liberal Democrats, 2015: 78). And as they did previously, they continued to use minorities' images in the manifesto to reflect the party's inclusiveness. So, they pursued a similar ideological line as they did before and didn't shift to populism.

When it comes to leadership, the party had Jo Swinson during this time as the first woman to lead the Liberal Democrats. She had been elected just a couple of months before the elections and wasn't as experienced as Nick Clegg. As it happened on UKIP, Liberal Democrats were constantly changing their leaders too each year. Swinson targeted both Labour and Conservative parties, and Farage too, as her party put up on the manifesto. She told that "Nigel Farage might be Brexit by name, but it is very clear that Jeremy Corbyn is Brexit by nature." (The Guardian, 17/09/2019). She also openly described her contrarian position on current political trends by saying "We can defeat nationalism and populism. We can change our politics, stop Brexit and win a brighter future." (The Guardian, 17/09/2019). However, her attempts were not enough to make her party to win the elections; even she lost her seat in the parliament. In the end, we can say that neither she nor her party was populist during this election. They didn't affected by the populist zeitgeist and even stand against that but couldn't be succeeded. It shows that it is possible to maintain a non-populist way within this populism trend in a democratic country.

### **3.3.5. Scottish National Party**

Scottish National Party (SNP) is Scotland's nationalist party which is based on pro-EU and nationalist principles. They supported the independence of Scotland in the

2014 Scottish Independence Referendum which resulted as the rejection of separation. They are not only effective within Scotland but also became the third largest party in the UK parliament after the 2015 elections. The 2015 manifesto starts with some critiques against Westminster. They were arguing that they should get more power within the parliament in order to Scotland's voice to be heard more loudly (SNP, 2015: 3). They were promising to use their influence not only for Scottish people but also for all "ordinary people" across the UK (SNP, 2015: 3). Also, they were targeting the Conservative party by saying that they will never put Tories into power (SNP, 2015: 3). Another interesting promise was their opposition to the new generation of nuclear weapons which they thought the money would be spent on other needs of the country. They promised to scrap the Trident nuclear weapons and to use that money on the investment for childcare, education, and the National Health Service (NHS). (SNP, 2015: 8). As mentioned in the beginning, they were pro-EU, so they opposed withdrawal from the EU because the majority of Scotland voted for Remain (SNP, 2015: 9). Even though they were a nationalist party, they were not against immigration and specifically stated that "diversity is one of Scotland's great strengths" and "those who have come to Scotland from other countries make a significant contribution to economy and society." (SNP, 2015: 9). So it constitutes a contrarian example for the idea that nationalists would stand against immigration or they would support nation states rather than participate in supranational organizations. However, they kept the idea of independent Scotland but didn't put it forward in this election (SNP, 2015: 10).

In 2019, we can see that they still followed almost the same ideas but increased the tone of it. Especially in Brexit case they were harshly criticizing Westminster by saying:

*People are heartily sick of Brexit and the mess at Westminster. But there is no end in sight to the Westminster Brexit chaos. A chaotic, Brexit-obsessed Westminster could decide our future for us. Or we can demand our right as a country to decide our own future. (SNP, 2019: 2).*

They followed up the idea with Scotland's independence after Brexit passed despite Scotland's majority opposing it.

*We believe that the best future for Scotland is to be an independent, European nation.", "Scotland voted overwhelmingly to remain in the EU but has been completely ignored by Westminster and our interest have been trampled over throughout the entire process. This is unacceptable. (SNP, 2019: 4).*

In this case, they started to create a dichotomy between Scotland and the central government in Westminster. They used this referendum to justify their desire for independence, an opportunity to divert the Scottish people's anger towards the UK. They emphasized how Brexit destroyed the idea of the United Kingdom as a partnership of equals (SNP, 2019: 6). They argued that the people of Scotland be ignored and the government wasn't working for "the people" so they will always get the government people voted for if they become an independent country (SNP, 2019: 8). So, they slightly shifted their policies to populism as they put Scottish people on "the people" side and the UK government and other political parties on "the others."

When it comes to leadership, we see Nicola Sturgeon as a stable leader who rules the party during both eras and she increased her party's influence. She's not only the leader of the third biggest party in the UK but also the first minister of Scotland since 2014. She was advocating progressive politics, and pro-EU policies and was not using highly populist language. Some academics interpret her anti-austerity policies as a form of left-wing populism (Masseti, 2018). However, there are not much of cases where she was acting like a classic populist. The only time we might accuse her of being populist is when she discussed Scotland's independence since she blames the UK government for not caring about the Scottish people and their will. (BBC, 24/06/2016). Besides that, they might use populism as a strategy in the future to mobilize the Scottish people to support Scotland's independence.

### **3.4. CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, I have analyzed the impact of populism on British politics. Populism got its strength from British Euroscepticism. It influenced political parties mostly discursively but also ideologically and strategically too. Populists brought up the Brexit idea in British politics for a long time and it has been accepted with a referendum. We can make a couple of outcomes from this; populism has always been within British politics and did not emerge just a couple of years ago. Brexit was always on the table since the Single European Act, and one of the enthusiastic supporters of it, Farage and UKIP, has been preparing public opinion and promoting those ideas since the late 90s. At this point, the developments in communication technologies and

holding the EU responsible for the economic and political problems helped the effectiveness of populism. Another factor was decreasing inclusiveness of the democratic system. Although Conservative Party was Eurosceptic in some ways, they were still supporting pro-EU transformations and cooperation with the EU which disturbed some of their voters. Moreover, Labour Party has lost some of its core voters because of its pro-EU position. Thus, populist anti-EU parties took advantage of this situation since major parties in the system were pro-EU and there were no other alternatives. So, this proves that if the inclusiveness of the system decreases, populists gain popularity and support. Another factor that we should consider is the consequences of populism. Although populism has influenced political areas and caused a major change in the UK's future, it could not continue its rising. Populism only gathered people around one topic but it was not enough for them to get in charge of the country. They could not reach the same success in national elections as they did in European elections. So, populists were not able to divide society into two camps morally, could not get unrivaled political power, and could not threaten the UK's democracy. For this reason, we can argue that populism does not always cause a threat to democracies. In this situation, it has only undertaken a functional task which is to put a policy into British politics which has been ignored by the politicians and political parties. However, their growth can't reach the point where they would be able to eliminate political rivals. In this result, both the balance of power in British politics and the well-established check and balance system and the common sense of British society were effective. Although the society was reproachful against the system, this did not result in hostility towards it and they did not want to abolish the system. So, this proves that populism is not capable of destroying the system by itself. There have to be some other elements involved in it.

Basically, we can explain a specific case and British politics in general with this term. Therefore, it proves that populism is not a buzzword and it can be useful for political science. Contrary to general belief, populism sometimes acts as an early warning system that signals the decline of democracy's inclusiveness. Does populism rise as the system corrupts, or does the system corrupt as populism rises? We can only decide on this by examining the dynamics of that country.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I think we can say that populism is a concept that is difficult to define but possible to understand. There were a couple of questions that I wanted to answer within this thesis and one of them was what populism is. As far as I had observed, it was not a well-defined term while used widely in media. It was mostly referred to as a term that signifies irrational and anti-democratic behaviors. Moreover, it was related to Fascism from time to time. Naturally, these many different usages of the term convert it into a buzzword and lose its meaning. So, it has no beneficial usage for us in this way. For this reason, we had to search how it was defined academically in order to find out its accurate meaning. Researches defined populism under three categories; ideological, discursive, and strategical. Accepting just one of these approaches as the correct, perfect definition will not help us but making use of each of them could contribute to our understanding of what populism really is. Each of them explains populism from a different perspective and they weren't making any contradictions. In the end, we found enough support within those approaches for the idea that populism arises from the frustration and anger of the society towards the system when they ignored by it. In this context, what I argue with this thesis is that populism refers to the political reaction of society when the inclusiveness of democracy is flawed. What we refer to today as populists are politicians who benefit from the frustration of the people in order to gain political power or force governments to change certain policies of a country according to their understanding of politics. Consequently, those definitions guided us while we were asking our second question.

My second question was about how accurate those definitions were. If they were accurate, then we can prove that the term is capable to explain current situations and it was actually a useful term. For this reason, it was necessary to search for its historical background and examples of populism in history. Besides that, we can check other claims about its outcomes by looking at the history. Also, we had to consider the world's condition at those times. So, what I argued in my thesis is that populism was mutually influenced by those changes in the world. Not only social and political changes but also technological changes have affected populism. At this point, social

media and communication technologies played a crucial role. Politics became more mediatized and we saw that in politicians' behaviors and their methods of public relations while they were doing their campaigns. In the end, we can understand populism but how about its consequences? Many examples show populism as something that changes countries' systems into authoritarian ones. But was it really populism's fault? So, this led us to our last question.

In order to show that it depends on other factors too, I decided to examine the UK's politics. As I stated before, the reason I chose the UK is that it was well-functioning democracy that has a strong check and balance system, and they were dealing with populism since Brexit in the recent years. So, I have examined political parties and Brexit to show that populism was influencing the whole political area but it was not changing the UK's system or making their conditions worse in terms of anti-democratization of the system. Although populists have won in Brexit, they could not get any more power and those politicians can't gather unrivaled power that will possibly corrupt other parts of the state.

In those countries which have a democratic system, we see that systemic blockages or other discontents of the public that is ignored by the political system can be revealed in this way. The fact that examples of populism can be seen even in well-settled, rich democracies -such as the United Kingdom- shows that populism is not a flaw but a feature of democracy. Moreover, we can see that it is a flexible term that is a natural part of politics, and politicians can use it from time to time according to their political goals. Even if populism does not take over the management of a country, it can pull the country's politics to the populists' path. One of the sharpest examples of that was Brexit. We have witnessed how it was possible with populism to reveal an ignored idea that is rooted within the memory of British society and to change the country's future and all political parties' behaviors. Furthermore, we see that not only the idea itself but also the usage of newly developed technologies and propaganda tools have contributed to this outcome. Therefore, we can conclude that populism is not an archaic term that makes no progress over time, but has the ability to adapt to societal changes. On the other hand, I think it would be wrong to treat populism as something to be feared or something to demonize. Instead, it would be better to be aware of the power gaps populism has grown within and the dynamics that brought it into existence.

Thus, it will help us to prevent the dangers of populism before it became a threat to democracies. As Lord Acton stated: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” Therefore, this should not be forgotten that corruption is related to power and non-populist movements can also be corrupted because of the unbounded power. If populism brings absolute power to a political movement without encountering any obstacles, other dynamics must be taken into account at that point. In fact, paradoxically, demonizing populism and making it "the other" for democracy is also a populist attitude. For this reason, the usefulness of the concept while explaining events in politics is also related to how someone evaluates the term. In the coming days, we can see many examples of populism. As long as democracy exists, populism will exist too. Therefore, understanding the concept of populism essentially means understanding the politics itself.



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