Right-wing Populism in a Global Perspective: The Necessity for an Integrative Theory

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Abstract

This chapter not only presents a critical review of the contemporary academic literature regarding the "social nature" (basic characteristics), "social manifestations," and "social nurtures" (determining factors, roots, bases, and impacts) of Right-Wing Populism (RWP), but also initiates a conversation to pursue a new consolidative line of theorization of RWP. It starts by addressing the existing

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theoretical shortcomings in social scientific contributions to global studies of populism, highlighting theoretical inconsistencies and gaps in the literature. These, as argued, distort the potentials for constructing encompassing conceptual frameworks necessary to theorize the rise of new RWP in the current context of global social change. The resultant critical review is structured around three main aspects of studying RWP in the recent literature: (1) conceptual inconsistencies around its social nature; (2) disagreements on the "social manifestations" of RWP as a social phenomenon or form; and (3) divisions around explaining the "nurtures" of RWP that have given (a global) rise to RWP and have influenced its evolution in multiple forms. In concluding, the chapter will make general recommendations on how to develop an integrative theoretical framework with the capacity to both address the unnecessary conceptual inconsistencies and divisions, and to synthesize the currently unrelated explanatory efforts at the macro-, meso-, and microlevels.

Keywords

Right-wing Populism · Ethnocentric nationalism · Radical right · Integrative social theory · Authoritarian neoliberalism · Post-globalism

1 Introduction

This chapter draws attention to the challenges of theorizing right-wing populism (RWP) in social sciences through a critical-comparative review and mapping of the literature on this subject. The ultimate aim is to initiate a productive conversation on how to overcome these challenges. As a contribution to the debate, we will also discuss and make recommendations on the ways an integrative approach can be pursued for addressing the theoretical complexities and difficulties revealed by the review.

The literature on RWP has been fast-growing, particularly since the upsurge in anti-globalist responses to the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the "Brexit" and the rise of Trump(ism), also in the return of right-wing authoritarianism to power in Latin America post-Pink Tide and the electoral victories of radical nationalists in most Eastern European countries, as well as in few large economies in the "global South" (e.g., Brazil, India, and the Philippines), and even in the European Parliament. Associated with the escalation of the radical right movements that have reinvented themselves to gain more popular bases by toning down their radical rhetoric (e.g., *Front National* in France), longstanding centrist political parties in many countries have also witnessed a significant further shift toward more ethnocentric and nationalist standings in both rhetoric and policy (e.g., Britain, China, France, Greece, Israel, South Africa, and Turkey). This global shift in politics has resulted in a sudden growth in scholarly efforts to explain the changes. However, and for several reasons explained below, as a result, the literature has become more diversified, complicated, and thus ambiguous. This poses challenges for researchers interested in

developing broad theoretical frameworks to grasp the totality and paradoxes of the global shift.

Our review exposes major cleavages in the literature that are formed generally around three axes. The first axis of discord relates to the *conceptual approaches* to characterize the core *nature* of the phenomenon, which appear to be highly diverse despite some significant overlaps. A range of alternative concepts have been used in the literature to refer to an arrangement of phenomena that are closely related or sufficiently commensurable (if not almost identical). This long list includes terms like "radical right," "far-right," "(new) populism," "right populism," "plutocratic populism," "ethnonationalist populism," "ultra-nationalism," "ethnocentrism," "authoritarian neoliberalism," "illiberalism," "nativism," "neo-fascism," and "racial supremacy." We do not suggest that the differences between these notions – no matter how subtle they may be in some cases – should be overlooked. Rather, we argue that a focus on those sections of the literature that have directly used the concept of "RWP" provides a primary intellectual base that can be further extended, applied, and assessed when dealing with the alternative terminologies in other sectors of the literature. Nevertheless, the review of the literature remains challenging when we narrow the scope of the review only to a single term like RWP even in its varied uses, a variation that seems to emerge in the different approaches of analysts and authors to what characterizes "populism." Thus, even in focusing on RWP specifically to make the argument manageable still leaves its own challenges that are delineated later in this chapter.

The second axis of controversy and division among scholars originates from the ways RWP is described regarding its *social manifestations* – i.e., the various ways in which RWP has manifested in different domains of social reality, and how its strains are classified or distinguished. This is partly determined by the various scholars' disciplinary backgrounds. For instance, political scientists typically concentrate on the phenomenon's manifestations as a *political force,* and so analyze it in terms of party politics, illiberal democracy, elections, and so on (Vormann & Weinman, 2021). In contrast, sociocultural studies theorize RWP mostly as a cultural shift, emphasizing social value systems, ideologies, identity politics, and political culture (Cover, 2020; Norocel et al., 2020), and political sociologists theorize RWP as a social movement, drawing on social movement theories (Jansen, 2011; Kincaid, 2017; Rydgren, 2004). Disputes are present even within each disciplinary account. For instance, questions are raised by political scientists about the "thinness" or "thickness" of populism as an ideology among those who focus on its ideational aspects (an aspect which will be explored in detail in the next section on "the nature" of RWP).

The third axis of division is exhibited in the causal explanations of RWP that we coin here as the *social nurtures* of RWP, i.e., the theories that locate RWP in path dependencies (the sociohistorical origins, contextual factors, and social bases of the trajectories of the evolution and impacts of RWP over time). In this axis, some authors highlight macro-social factors such as the failures or contradictions of globalization, particularly neoliberal globalism or a global legitimacy crisis of liberal democracy (O'Byrne, 2019), while others emphasize meso- and micro-social

psychological factors such as the impact of socioeconomic deprivations, collective resentment, or authoritarian personalities, (TenHouten, 2020).

This chapter is structured into three sections, around the three axes, respectively, to explore and explain the sources of divisions. Through this, we will argue that despite divisions it is both possible and indeed necessary for social scientists to develop encompassing yet flexible schemes for the theorization of RWP, which can then be adapted, assessed, and revisited for different cases and contexts according to their specificities. In conclusion, the chapter will make general recommendations on how best to develop an integrative theoretical framework with the capacity to address any unnecessary conceptual inconsistencies and divisions that exist and to synthesize the currently unrelated explanatory efforts at the macro-, meso-, and microlevels.

2 The Distinct Nature of RWP: Conceptual Confusions and Terminological Inconsistencies

Sources of the conceptual and terminological ambiguities around what fundamentally constitutes RWP in the literature are varied. Above all, are the following three. First, the lack of consent around the term "populism" seems to have affected the characterization of the *nature* of RWP. Up until the 1950s, the term "populism" was used predominantly in referring to (self-claimed populist) agrarian movements in North America of the late nineteenth century (Fuentes, 2020; Moffitt, 2017). Since then, the use of the term "populism" has grown widely and diversely in political discourses and scholarly debates. The recent increase in the use of "populism" in both media and academia to refer only to the radical right nationalist movements, however, has muddied the waters more greatly (Betz, 2018). While associating "radical right" with "populism" to improve terminological clarity can help increase precision in terms of ideological direction (right vs. left), it does not necessarily eliminate ambiguity. As such, it will be helpful here to briefly discuss the phenomenon of "populism" as the defining element of RWP.

Due to a significant lack of ideological structure, as discussed later in this chapter, populist movements manifest elusive, manipulative, and paradoxical features. Indeed, the incoherence of reality is the second source of conceptual ambiguity in the literature. As Fuentes (2020, p. 49) explains: "One of the paradoxical characteristics of these movements lies in the fact that . . . its anti-elitist, anti-status quo, or anti-establishment nature is embodied by an elite that speaks on behalf of the people." Moreover, the recent global rise of new (mostly radical right) populist movements in different regions and the emergence of coalitions and transnational networks of mutual support in itself is a phenomenon that requires social scientists to go beyond their "academic ghettoization" and separate case studies (Moffitt, 2017, p. 4). However, despite the subjective ambiguities in existing theoretical attempts and the absence of an "objective" or singular reality – "objective fuzziness" – it is still possible to focus on the most common denominators to create some level of conceptual certainty necessary for constructing middle-range theories.

Populism is widely conceptualized as a sociopolitical phenomenon that assumes an idealized, harmonious population of like-minded ordinary citizens whose popular preferences must be given priority in policy processes. This phenomenon in itself can potentially be a step forward in a democratic society where the elite or the ruling class are out of touch, especially when populism appears in the form of grassroots movements to keep the elite and powerful in check, or to demand the protection and satisfaction of basic rights and needs (security, welfare, employment, housing, and so on) for a significant segment of the population. Most colorful examples of such populist functions can be found in the cases of anti-colonialist revolutionary mass movements in the "third world" in the past century. Populism furthermore frequently appears as a movement to defend the national sovereignty of a nation against foreign economic or political interventions through imbalanced trade agreements or loosely regulated international transactions, such as the anti-free trade, anti-corporate movements of the 1990s in Latin America.

Many populist movements tend to use conventional democratic means such as elections to influence politics, and some movements may even maintain some level of democracy after gaining power in promoting fairer redistribution of resources toward disadvantaged social strata. However, populism does not appear as a rather well-articulated doctrine with few detectable rigid ideological principles, an issue referred to as the "ideological thinness" of populism. More specifically, in the case of RWP, populism often emerges in the form of popular rhetoric that taps into a population's anger or fear and advocates quick fixes without a proper understanding of the root causes of major social problems and the complexities of social institutions; stark examples are the populist responses to the complex refugee crisis in Europe and Brexit in the UK. It is therefore more apt to develop simplistic understandings of society and its social ills. For example, it is often easier for the less-educated, anxious, and/or forgotten sections of a population to become enchanted by those political discourses that blame a culturally weak or racially different minority group for economic problems and to demonize the malfunctioning government institutions (under the general title of "establishment"), rather than questioning the unjust capitalist relations that have promoted a highly destructive competitive individualistic condition in the first place (Colgan & Keohane, 2017; Viviani, 2017).

Populism, contrary to what Isaiah Berlin believes, is not a "Cinderella's shoe" (Berlin, 2013 [1967]); due to its ideological thinness, it can fit many kinds of feet. Radical right populists, depending on the context, may draw on a mixture of quasi-socialist, conservative, racist, or even liberal ideals in order to gain support. They may evolve into an extreme form known as "fascism," which gained global momentum in the early twentieth century. There thus are justified concerns that history may repeat itself in this century (Campani, 2015; Peters, 2020).

Indeed, many of the recent efforts to outline the key characteristics of populism draw more on right-wing political tendencies (de la Torre, 2015; Finchelstein, 2014). Several core features that are generally attributed to RWP movements in the literature are:

1. Disrespect of political and cultural pluralism, manifested in their view of the people as a subject with a unitary will and/or historical origin, and conception of political rivals as enemies or the proxies of enemies (Müller, 2016).
2. An understanding of the leader(s) as a "charismatic embodiment" of the desires of the imagined nation.
3. Strong dismissal of independent legislative and judicial branches of government (if especially they are structured based on liberal/pluralist values and/or human rights) or more generally the rejection of "the separation of powers" principle.
4. Ethnocentric or exclusionist type of nationalism.
5. Pragmatist attachment to a vertical form of the electoral democratic structure where elections are seen as only the means for winning power and holding to it; in other words, electoral processes are considered legitimate only when they lead to the desired outcome.

We believe that identifying RWP by this cluster of features can potentially reduce conceptual confusion. As Fuchs explains, RWP is often associated with tendencies that conceive of "the people" as an "undifferentiated unity," and appeal to "popular prejudices" in denying class conflicts or reducing them to "crude and simplified antagonisms" (Fuchs, 2018, p. 781). Right-wing populist political culture can therefore often be directed toward undervaluing diversity and promoting a consecrated image of the nation mixed with a nostalgic craving for a return to a fantasized golden age in the past.

Other widely attributed features such as the anti-establishment tendency, as explained below, are not unique to RWP and thus should not be used to distinguish it from other types of movements (whether populist or non-populist) that evidence the same characteristic. As noted, being anti-establishment, as well as anti-elitist, is often widely attributed to RWP. However, these characteristics are not exclusive to the right-wing populist agenda since they are also commonly shared among the so-called *left*-populist political movements (Laclau, 1979) and parties as well as many other marginalized *non*-populist groups. Mansbridge and Macedo (2019) argue that anti-elitism is the most common feature across this spectrum. Moreover, alliances and policy orientation overlaps can be found between the radical right populist movements and some sections of the major center-right parties, for example, between Brexiters and the Conservative Party in the UK and the Tea party and the Republican party in the USA.

The reason that we here focus only on RWP, as opposed to Left-Wing Populism (LWP), is more than due to the manageability and coherency of argument. While we agree that the ideological thinness of "populism" as a discourse or political style enables it to flexibly borrow *from*, or to be borrowed *by*, other ideologies (and therefore we can think of both the right and the left versions) we are not comfortable with treating many new (/neo-) socialist (/leftist) movements in the same way simply because they have gained a *popular* social base or pursued a *popular* anti-elitist cause. As manifested in history multiple times, the left is indeed as susceptible as the right to be influenced by ethno-nationalist or authoritarian values. However, there are significantly different features that determine many of the new movements on the

left, making the universal application of the term populism problematic. Thus, to include the literature on LWP in this review – due to the problematic attribution of a loosely defined notion of "populism" to many examples that are profoundly different to RWP and thus require different theoretical frameworks – would add to conceptual confusion.

For instance, many of these new (neo-) socialist movements are ethnically or culturally more inclusive and more genuinely committed to grassroots democracy with "popular" social bases that are very different to those on the right. Therefore, simply holding an anti-establishment position and a popular base of support does not entitle a movement to be characterized as populist if they do not also evidence a strong racially, culturally, or ideologically homogenizing way of idealizing their own identity and the identity of the ruling class. Recent examples of left-wing movements have emerged in Latin America in the 2000s (such as the Pink Tide), and more recently in Greece (SYRIZA), Spain (Podemos), and Europe-wide (DiEM25). There are also many relatively radical left-wing movements (like the Progressive International, Party of the European Left, Left Party in Germany, and Movement for Socialism in Bolivia) with some key defining elements of general populism such as the admiration of "the people" against a delegitimized elite, but without the preference of "the general will" over any rights and representation in their ideology (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, for a detailed description of these three key elements). Moreover, in the so-called age of rising right-wing populism, most of these movements are either in decline or face significant barriers, which itself indicates a substantively different underlying dynamism. Their "popular" bases are far more diverse, constituted predominantly by the young, educated, female, immigrant, ethnic minorities, and a precariat class where their perception of the establishment is not fixed nor mixed with anti-intellectualism or conspiracy theories. Thus, even broadening the concept of "populism," to include socialist or radical democratic movements simply because of their emphasis on "the people" as against the elite, makes it more confusing, less rigorous, and less useful.

As emphasized, the choice of terminology is defined by what the investigators consider as the nature of the phenomenon (i.e., the first axis of controversy in the literature). However, the difficulty is not only about the *definition* of populism. Concerning the sociohistorical bases, historical roots, and dynamism (i.e., the third axis) that govern the rise and demise of these oppositional movements, there are enough significant differences to question the plausibility of developing a theoretical approach equally applicable to both sides of the spectrum. For example, "welfare chauvinism" (of say, the Danish People's Party in Denmark and the French National Front) can be distinguished from the above-mentioned new popular socialist orientations to the extent that the pursuit of welfare provisions is seen to be restricted to citizens and denied to immigrants or other social groups, thus constituting a type of right-wing state nationalism with its unique historical roots and dynamics.

The third source of conceptual plurality (including the unnecessary confusions) is comprised of the disparities among scholars and researchers in terms of the social values that underpin their theoretical approaches, as well as the ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions that guide their studies of the subject.

The differences in such meta-theoretical standings determine what aspects of RWP are highlighted, from what angle, and with what normative position the phenomenon is approached or subjectively evaluated. For instance, while there is a tendency to equate RWP with political authoritarianism or suppressive communitarianism (Crewe & Sanders, 2020; Germani, 2019), reducing RWP to authoritarianism can be confusing (McKay et al., 2020; Riedel, 2017). Authoritarianism sees the ultimate source of legitimacy to lie in a leader's authority and it is from there that legitimacy cascades down to those submitted to this supremacy. In contrast, right-wing populists place legitimacy in "the people" and its fetishized source of uniting identity. Leaders are normally perceived as the embodiment of this identity. RWP, therefore, remains dependent on quasi-democratic mechanisms that directly transfer this legitimacy from the masses upward to the leaders. Their relationship with democracy, though, under certain radicalizing conditions, can devolve further into antidemocratic violent reactions (e.g., Trumpists' violent insurgency post-2020 election), authoritarianism in power, or even further into an extreme version of it (i.e., totalitarianism or fascism).

3 The *Multifaceted and Multiscalar* Manifestations of RWP

In what major social forms is RWP manifested? Responses to this question vary across the literature. RWP is widely understood as a social construct, a mode of political practice (Bart & Noam, 2016), a discourse, a grassroots social movement, or a constellation of closely related top-down political movements interested in party politics and power concentration, and finally a discursive and stylistic repertoire (Brubaker, 2017). RWP has also been conceptualized in many ways: as a social attitude, a set of social norms and values, a style of thought or a political style (Moffitt, 2017), a political current, a strategy of politicization of the rift between society and politics (Viviani, 2017), and a historical moment or process (Riveros, 2018). RWP can be all the above and thus is a multifaceted phenomenon.

Each of these descriptors may have strong implications for the theorization of the phenomenon. For example, Moffitt (2017) considers RWP a globalizing "political style" with common *features* that can be found across different contexts. RWP, according to Moffitt, is not a genuine ideology because it relies much less on stable *principles*. He makes the argument for considering RWP as a political style rather than other commonly used conceptions of it such as a "thin ideology," or a social ideational phenomenon (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017), a political strategy, a political logic, or a discourse/rhetoric. It is a "style" since, for populists, the way the message *is delivered* is more important than the message *itself*. It therefore cannot always exclusively represent a potential threat to formal or electoral democracy as it partially depends on such mechanisms to gain and maintain power but may pose a potentially serious threat to those democracies that safeguard individual and minority rights (Müller, 2016).

Despite the lack of consensus, more engaging conversations of RWP around its social manifestations, especially across different scholarly traditions, are needed.

RWP manifests itself in various ways; the point is that no one way should be treated as a universally primary feature or be reduced to another in our analyses. Manifestations of RWP can be in the forms of electoral support and behavior, social activism, discourse, ideology, social grievances, attitudinal qualities, normative and value systems, psychological appeal, cultural practices, party politics, and political style. RWP is intrinsically multifaceted and a focus on any one facet does not necessarily require the exclusion of others.

There thus remain many important questions that have not received adequate attention or are the subject of disputed answers. For instance, can we differentiate between sociocultural populism, political populism, economic populism, and even ecological populism? How nationalist, internationalist, imperialist, authoritarian, neocolonialist, neoliberal, or libertarian can these movements be? Is RWP a legitimate or understandable outburst of anger or reaction toward the failures of globalism or neoliberalism, or a manipulated move toward a more authoritarian version of neoliberalism? Is this a movement to protect and serve material interests? Whose interests exist at the movement's elite level, and whose interests exist at the movement's grassroots level? Or is this a movement to release accumulated social anxieties in the form of social resentment? What are the inconsistencies between the movement's rhetoric, frames, and practices? And, is the movement to protect the interests of the national capital, in alliance with conservative politicians, against the global capital in a growingly polarized world? In the remainder of this section, we argue that the *multifaceted* manifestations of RWP necessitate integrative theorization.

As we have explained so far (right-wing) populism in its most general sense refers to shifted values and mobilized collective actions toward the political, cultural, and economic entitlements and preferences of the populace (the so-called "*the people*") against those particular social groups or communities whose identities or interests are perceived to differ from the widely idealized image of a typical countryperson. In the case of RWP, these targeted groups include not only sectors of the (liberal) elite, government, globalist corporations, foreign powers (except those who can be strategic allies), but also intellectuals, mainstream and alternative progressive media, secular scientific bodies, ethnic and religious minorities, immigrants, and refugees. As discussed profoundly in many parts of the literature, (right-wing) populism, as a thin ideology, does not always materialize in society as a well-articulated doctrine or a coherent group attitude with several detectable rigid guiding principles.

An established tradition in the literature argues that RWP commonly "emerges" in the form of macroscale movements and popular rhetoric that taps into a population's collective emotions at the micro- and meso-levels and advocates quick solutions without a proper understanding of the root causes of the problems and the complexities of social institutions (Aslanidis, 2016; Neuner & Wratil, 2020; Stanley, 2008). RWP constantly draws on anger, frustration, and resentment of the social groups abandoned by centrist politics to construct enemies to its cause, invoking peoples' fears and using these imagined enemies to scapegoat the structural flaws of the system.

When seen from this perspective, the major macro-, meso-, and micro-manifestations of RWP must be taken into account and the interrelations between the mechanisms that connect these manifestations be theorized and investigated. However, there are significant chasms in the literature between the macro-, meso-, and microlevel descriptions of the nature of the phenomenon. This multiscalar nature of the phenomenon corresponds also to the multilevel processes and path dependencies, or what we call the nurtures of RWP.

4 The Distinct Nurtures of RWP: On the Plausibility of Developing Integrative Theoretical Frameworks

By "the nurtures" of RWP we mean not only the determining factors and sociohistorical roots that nurture (i.e., give rise to, and influence) RWP including its *multifarious social bases,* but also whatever is nurtured by RWP, e.g., its impacts on, and relationships with, democracy, politics, global forces, and societies. The idea that we pursue here is that the deep entanglement of the "nurtures" of RWP, from macro- to microlevels, necessitates the development of integrative approaches to theorizing the process and phenomenon. The following subsections will argue for this necessity in detail through a critical assessment of both the promises and problems of the main analytical traditions at the macro-sociological level and offer suggestions on how best to pursue an approach of integrative theorization while maintaining some flexibility.

4.1 Regarding the *Multifarious and Intersectional Social Bases* of RWP

A growing section of the literature attempts to feature the social bases of RWP in different contexts. Comparisons indicate some level of commonality. The questions that are often asked are: (1) What are the driving forces of right-wing populism?; and (2) What social agents mobilize resources and where are the social bases of these movements? The issue of social class appears to be central to both. Is the base comprised of a new social class with false class consciousness (i.e., unable to understand that their support of RWP contradicts their class interest at least in the long run (Hacker & Pierson, 2020)), or, does it consist of a multitude of social bases with underlying consolidating factors? We can typically classify the grassroots supporters of populist parties into three main categories.

First, there are those who devotedly vote for and support populist parties and movements with which they share almost similar social values and political causes. These people are normally more ideologically committed and active in promoting right-wing populism and stay faithful for a long period. The main driving factors for these supporters are their core social values, political beliefs, and ideologies that are shaped historically over a long period as a result of their social status or social origin. In the case of Trump's populist support, this includes Tea Party supporters, members

of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), neo-fascist, racist, and white supremacist advocates, and similar groups (Crowson & Brandes, 2017). There is therefore a multi-temporal dimension to RWP in how the allegiance of these individuals and groups to the right-wing populist movement/leader comes about as a momentary materialization of a long-term allegiance to values.

The second base of support consists of those who assume that a right-wing populist party and its leaders are more capable of representing their concerns and resolving their problems. They are disenfranchised with any existing mainstream political and economic institution (the so-called "establishment") since they may (rightfully or wrongfully) feel neglected or left behind as a result of the economic policy reforms adopted by many countries to promote corporate globalization (Kurer, 2020; McQuarrie, 2017). This base includes Lipset's (1960, p. 170) "declining 'liberal' classes living in declining areas." In the absence of viable, strong, or popular socialist alternatives, racially white, less-educated, male, blue-collar working class (some with past unionist backgrounds) as well as small-city precariat (people suffering from unstable or unpredictable circumstances) are more liable to become enchanted with the idea of nationalist protectionism; as the protection of traditional manufacturing and extractivist manual-labor jobs, against the so-called rival immigrant workers or overseas manual labor employed in offshore jobs (Kurer & Palier, 2019; Ost, 2018). Unlike the first group, they do not essentially endorse ethnocentric values, but to them, their social concerns appear to be more promisingly addressed and acknowledged by right-wing populist movements. This group offers their support mainly for pragmatic reasons during the election seasons. These allies may later either become more loyal or withdraw their backing, depending on how successfully their expectations are satisfied by the populist party and leaders in power or how satisfying the populist performances are either economically or rhetorically (see Fraser, 2017).

The third base consists of those who vote for populist parties for personal, tactical, or emotional reasons unrelated to their political beliefs or values if they persistently hold any. Some people may vote for populist candidates/parties, not necessarily because they have read and agreed with their policies, but rather because they find those populist leaders charismatic. They may support right-wing leaders like Trump who appear to be charismatic for their perceived character, e.g., as "successful businessmen" who can save the nation's economy, despite being politically incorrect or inexperienced in many ways (Lubbers et al., 2002). This popular perception that a self-interested businessman (a capitalist/owner of the means of production) can herald a solution for the masses (the ones exploited for the very success of that capitalist person) in "saving a nation's economy," is a clear example of "false class consciousness" (from a Marxian point of view) that the populist elite exploit. For instance, Mason (2010) argues that the charismatic character of both Sarah Palin (US) and Pauline Hanson (Australia), in combination with the social aspect of women's vulnerability, was one of the prime reasons for their political success. Alternatively, some may choose to vote for right-wing populist parties purely for tactical reasons, such as to avoid voting for anti-nationalist parties, to

disapprove of the government in power (disapproval or protest vote), or to push for a non-centrist party in politics.

It is thus reasonable to differentiate between RWP as a political movement and the (right-wing) "populist support," particularly those who vote populist. This is because many who support right-wing populist agendas through elections may not necessarily be wedded to all populist values and may change their vote in the next round of elections. It is however imperative to understand how populist parties are sometimes able to achieve such a high degree of support, large enough to turn them into strong players or even to pave their way to power. An important point to bear in mind is that both the incentives and the underlying social factors might be different for the populist elite compared to their rank-and-file supporters even though they share the same mindset or political cause.

In discussing the social basis of RWP as one of the nurturing factors, we here have limited our scope to its political domain. However, even within this limited scope, we realize that substantial differences exist between the social, and social psychological, mechanisms behind distinct popular support. While for some socioeconomic factors such as class are influential, for other sectors of the population cultural views and social psychological aspects may play a greater role. As an example, there is enough evidence to show that the bases of support for Trump in both the 2016 and 2020 elections evidence intersections between race, age, gender, religious orientation, educational qualification, residential status, and social class (Frey, 2021). Yet, the literature and journalistic material on this matter generally remain divided between those who stress the preeminence of cultural factors (e.g., identity politics) over socioeconomic factors (class politics), and those who take what might be seen as an opposite position, although interestingly both sides refer to empirical data (Bhambra, 2017). Taking the "intersectionality" of the support base in this case, and other similar cases, may offer a resolution to the above bifurcation and seeming impasse. This is another reason why more integrative but flexible theoretical frameworks are required.

4.2 Regarding the Macrostructural Factors

Alongside the growth in the number of theoretical perspectives and disciplinary approaches to studying (right-wing) populism, the inconsistency in the literature on how to "explain" this contested phenomenon has also grown. Significant efforts have also recently been made to facilitate comparisons across case studies and thereby draw generalizable ideas. However, genuine interdisciplinary works are lacking and the literature remains divided (Abromeit, 2017).

Populism is multifaceted since it emerges and evolves in different interrelated layers: the individual, the collective, the institutional, and the social. Each of these layers has been well studied and theorized. However, little has been done to theorize how these layers are interconnected, how they are related to one another, and how changes in one affect changes in another. The literature can be divided between at least three *strata of explanation*: (1) the macrostructural; where studies of the

socioeconomic, sociohistorical, and political-economic accounts of populist ideologies, movements, and/or politics are located (Judis, 2016); (2) the meso-institutional; where studies of populism as a fundamentally political phenomenon and its interaction with other political forces and social institutions are situated (see Müller, 2016) and the social psychological mechanisms that mediate between the macro- and microdynamics are counted; and (3) the micro psycho-anthropological and psychological, where the emotional and psychological underpinning of populist attitudes and affective support for populist parties are investigated. However, there is not much dialogue or collaboration between accounts located in these three strata. For example, psychological accounts of populist sentiments and behaviors are largely either dismissed or downplayed by the researchers in the first and second strata, and vice versa.

When explaining the (global) rise or spread of right-wing populism as a *macro-social phenomenon* (e.g., in the form of sociopolitical movements), macro-social structural changes, especially the political-economic transformations, appear to be the primary factors (Caiani & Graziano, 2019; Flew, 2020). These factors function in association with other primary sociodemographic determinants (such as age, regional or rural residential status, ethnicity, gender, education, religion, and/or occupation). This association occurs only in a relative sense (e.g., a relative decline in the middle-class and traditional working-class status as compared to lower- or under-class status) and is strengthened in the new context of fast-evolving communication and information landscape (Krämer, 2017; Moffitt, 2017, p. 3).

Moreover, social psychological factors such as social anxiety, sense of insecurity, resentment, uncertainty, humility, and ressentiment (i.e., the "affects" associated with decreasing "white privileges" in a globalization context) mediate the relationship between macro factors such as economic liberalization and austerity regimes and meso-level or collective sociopolitical actions, such as electoral behaviors and institutional settings, in favor of populist parties, populist protests, and support (Pettigrew, 2016; Rydgren, 2003). Furthermore, the sociohistorical residues of centuries of colonial-settler or patriarchal cultures such as class-racial discrimination, patriotism, misogyny, and racism, alongside personality factors like dogmatism, closed-mindedness (Hosseini & Saha, 2018), social dominance, and authoritarianist personalities play a role in the translation of macrostructural changes and political discourses into personal and group actions and attitudes (Rydgren, 2013).

We now, due to the limited capacity of this chapter, focus on a few key explanations of RWP through macroscale social-scientific lenses. In doing so, we aim to highlight not only the advantages but also the perils of isolating macroanalyses from the two other strata and thereby in the next subsection emphasize the necessity of incorporating explanations from the other two strata.

The macrodynamics analyzed in the literature to explain the nurtures of RWP are mostly related to key social institutional shifts such as changes in democratic institutions due to adopting more authoritarian approaches to governance. The structure of economic activities and the relations between multiple social classes appear to be central. Similarly, political-economic structural shifts, and in particular the socio-ecological crises of capitalism faced at the systemic level and the

challenges they pose to the material foundations of quality of life and the cultural sources of social integrity, are among the essential elements of such theorizations. Another macro factor is the perceived challenges that rapid demographic shifts, such as a sudden increase in the intake of foreign workers and flows of mass refugee immigration, pose to the social homogeneity of society and national social security in the eyes of the mainstream population, which can then ignite communitarian reactions. In the context of economic austerity, widely adopted as a neoliberal response to economic crises, such collective anxieties can quickly translate into xenophobic responses and demands for welfare chauvinism (Marx & Naumann, 2018).

The literature highlights several interrelated social transformations in the contemporary global settings, which provide the macrostructural causes behind the rise and evolution of populist phenomena. The major factors that are widely discussed are:

1. The economic crisis of capitalism under neoliberal/corporate globalization, economic uncertainties or fluctuations, inequality (especially the "declining middle", particularly the lower middle classes) due to transforming employment structures (Kurer, 2020).
2. The political crises of globalism such as a decline in national sovereignties over internal affairs and economic independence and associated rising global insecurity, terror, and crime (Flew, 2020; Goldstein & Gulotty, 2019).
3. The crisis of liberal democracy in the (post-) neoliberal context in both the "global North" and "global South" (Kaul, 2018; McKay et al., 2020).
4. The crisis of Post-Gulf-War imperialism, contested American dominance, and Western expansionism (Regilme Jr. & Parisot, 2020).
5. The crisis of multiculturalism and Eurocentric cosmopolitanism as value systems in the neoliberal context that gives way to the re-racialization of society, a process that can be traced back to the imagined "orient" (popular orientalism and its new form, Islamophobia) in persisting colonialist mentalities (Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2018).
6. The less-visible authoritarian nature of neoliberal globalism (Tansel, 2017).
7. The spatial, regional, or geographical imbalances of capitalist development and ethnic compositions (McQuarrie, 2017; van Wijk et al., 2020).
8. The rise of a multi-polar international capitalist system, especially the more recently heightened conflicts between the old poles (the West) and the new poles (China and Russia), the 2022 Ukraine crisis being the latest stark example.

As discussed previously, these broad global shifts influence the social relationships between different sectors of society. A key factor is the change in socioeconomic status as perhaps the most discussed element in the literature. But there are also other related factors and their characterizations, such as age, regional, or rural residential status, ethnicity (white), gender (male), education (lower), and occupation (industrial). These factors are highly intertwined and thus require theories of intersectionality, originated by intersectional feminists (Dietze et al., 2020), to be incorporated.

Since the early 1980s, many countries began to adopt economic liberalization policies according to which they had to open their economies to more free trade, flows of capital, foreign investment, information, and immigration. However, these changes, despite their association with cycles of greater economic growth captured in indices like GDP, have also increased social divides within and between countries (Chase-Dunn, 2020; Hosseini et al., 2020). Countries have adopted a policy focus to facilitate investment in areas in which they had a greater advantage over others.

Such policies create disparities between different sectors and regions of an economy. Some industries have gained greater leverage (high-tech industries and the finance sector) while others witnessed a decline in regional economies of advanced capitalist societies. Most importantly the manufacturing sector in the USA, UK, and Australia has been increasingly offshored to other countries with cheaper labor and resources, and weaker safety standards and environmental regulations. Relatedly, white-collar, information, financial, and advanced producer services have grown rapidly in urban areas in these countries. As the result of this globalization (increased interconnection and integration) between economies, metropolitan areas have flourished economically while nonmetropolitan rural and old industrial zones have suffered from these changes (Harvey, 2005).

Governments have generally changed their roles from the protectors, planners, and regulators of the economy to the facilitators of free-market activities. The growing sense of relative deprivation among the ex-beneficiaries of the nationally planned economies of the pre-neoliberal era, who increasingly have found themselves abandoned by the new globalist economic changes and centrist parties, is theorized as a major socioeconomic factor behind the rise of RWP (see Rooduijn & Burgoon, 2017). The relative deprivation was arguably not painful enough in the advanced capitalist societies of the 1980s and 1990s to instigate mass support for RWP, as the global economy, despite some challenges, could still cater for the hardworking, heavily indebted working classes in the "global North." The 2008 global financial crisis (GFC) however, accelerated the rate of financialization and thus the decline of the manufacturing sector in these countries, resulting in higher levels of relative deprivation (Jetten et al., 2015).

The literature suggests that the widely adopted reductions in corporate tax rates and the taxation of upper middle classes have been encouraged by neoliberal policies to improve economic growth and investment (Kostigen, 2011). This has however adversely affected state revenues (many becoming more dependent on debt than tax income) and capacities to fund public services and social security programs necessary for maintaining a level of equality (Ostry et al., 2016). The reduction in social spending means that those sectors of society that have witnessed a decline in their socioeconomic status as the result of changes under economic globalization, can hardly be compensated or even retrained and redeployed in the newly emerging sectors.

The economic/capitalist globalization processes accelerated under neoliberal and free trade regimes faced a financial "crash" in 2008. The crisis shook the debt-dependent social status of many middle-class families, including many who had initially benefitted from earlier waves of economic liberalization. Governments

generally responded to the crisis by cutting public spending under austerity measures, increasing their public debt to be repaid by their citizens in generations to come, and quantitative easing to increase the money supply with the effect of saving the "too big to fail" enterprises, most of them being the same corporations responsible for the crisis in the first place (Patomäki, 2009). Judis (2016) defines the new (right-wing) populism as discontent with neoliberal policy and a sign of a society in the crisis that arises under particular political-economic conditions, i.e., the failure of neoliberalism. Indeed, the 2008 GFC discredited neoliberalism in the eyes of many, including some of its previous advocates. However, the rising populist parties in both the "global North" and "global South" reveal a much stronger willingness, compared to social democratic forces, to politicize their criticisms of central elements of neoliberal economics, such as free trade and to embrace more protectionist measures (Judis, 2016).

As a result of the growing social divide within globalized economies, the middle class has shrunk in size (Kurer, 2020). Since then, members of the middle class find themselves unable to fulfill their dreams. Interestingly, however, it is largely the middle-class white men (in the global North), with lower educational levels and employed in weakened manufacturing sectors, who are most attracted to populist movements (McQuarrie, 2017; Rydgren, 2013). While younger generations in metropolitan areas, immigrant workers, and women of color have suffered more severely from economic globalization, they are less attracted to RWP. This can be explained by considering the impact of greater education and contact/experience of other cultures/societies through traveling, living in cosmopolitan urban areas, experiencing ethnic marginalization, and access to a broader range of news and information sources.

In sum, RWP gives disenchanted masses simple answers – such as blaming "the immigrants" – to complex socioeconomic problems. Limited access to better quality (higher) education, counter-cosmopolitan worldviews developed as the result of lower engagement with the outside world, and a lack of detailed knowledge about the complex root causes of their socioeconomic decline, make individuals more prone to adopt right-wing populist sentiments and reasoning. Here again, socioeconomic status, though in close relation with other sources of social division/s, comes into the equation as one of the primary factors driving an individual's alignment with collective RWP movements. Education, communication, and knowledge (social consciousness) require resources, of which many community members in non-metropolitan areas and deindustrialized urban spaces are often deprived.

5 Discussion: Indicative Insights into an Integrative Theory of RWP

As Jonathan H. Turner (2010, p. viii) reminds us, "the social universe unfolds at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels; and although these are analytical distinctions, they denote how the social world is actually structured." RWP, like any other transformative movement, is manifested at all levels – from the affective-psychological

realm to collective-behavioral to communal-organizational to political-institutional domains and even intersocietal relations and conflicts. Scholarly accounts of the macrodynamics of RWP are useful in demonstrating how RWP at the macro-level can be understood in terms of forces like the shifts in (inter)national systemic relations in politics, economy, and culture, in associations with changes in social stratifications and hierarchies.

Understanding the macrodynamics of RWP is likely to provide us with a general overview applicable to multiple specific contexts because such factors have been commonly experienced under the effects of the globalization of capitalism, neoliberalism, and modernity. But such understandings fail to explicate why and how different groups, communities, and individuals within the same settings and/or exposed to the same macro-forces encounter populism differently. Further, it is essential to understand why the groups or individuals that experience the same emotional strain, as a result of the same macroscale shifts, and even may belong to the same social categories, do not necessarily always react by supporting RWP. Sociological explanations of the macrodynamics of RWP are inadequate as they do not illuminate how macrostructural changes translate into individual and group behaviors and attitudes (i.e., the so-called "downward causation"), and vice versa. They, therefore, need to be complemented with studies of emotional and social psychological mechanisms, as well as studies of collective actions and movements.

An example of the above is that there is no robust correlation between unemployment or low welfare provision and popular support for populist parties. Meanwhile, populist parties do not incessantly or ubiquitously derive their support from those negatively affected by economic liberalization or globalization; not all the male blue-collar workers of any given deindustrialized area (categorically or continuously) support RWP (Kiss et al., 2020; Walley, 2017). Macrostructural accounts alone cannot explain all the variations in right-wing voting. Inconsistencies in the structural approach require us to bring the mediating psychological, collective, and attitudinal factors into the picture. Among the most reliable attitudinal factors attributed in the literature to the right-wing populist upsurge in politics are anti-immigrant attitudes, perceptions of ethnic threat, in-group favoritism, authoritarian personality, general political orientation and past party preferences, and political distrust and dissatisfaction.

5.1 An Integrative Way Forward

We now narrow our argument to some key aspects of RWP to elaborate how the three strata are intertwined and thus how an integrative effort can begin to unravel the complexity of the phenomenon. In many micro accounts of rising right-wing populism, individual and collective disillusionment with democratic institutions is considered to be one of the major social psychological factors. Attention to these microlevel characteristics could bring us closer to explanations of why some people are right-wing populists, while others are not. But they are still inadequate given that disillusionment or resentment does not exclusively lead to a right-wing populist

backlash. A response can manifest itself in many forms: from political apathy and disenfranchisement to violent insurgency, and from limited justice activisms (like the Occupy movements and Black Lives Matter movements) to the sudden outbursts of street protests and mass uprisings. For disillusionment to be translated into a *sustainable* political movement with *long-term* impacts on inter/national politics in the populist direction, the involvement of mediating meso-level mechanisms is required. Among these mechanisms are the dissident political parties and groupings that can facilitate the translation of collective resentment into electoral behaviors that can then result in the formation of new political discourses and meso-level institutional changes.

As parts of the literature argue, regarding the issue of resentment as a motive, many of the far-right movements like the Tea Party in America have been renowned for supporting social hierarchy or social inequality in general (Rosenthal, 2020). Consequently, the growing popularity of right-wing populist parties is most likely influential on those groups that share conservative values but also have experienced a relative decline in their status due to the new shifts in the (neoliberal) economy (Swank & Betz, 2003). Right-wing populist groups tend to oversimplify complex problems as an effective tactic to communicate with less-educated groups and to blame bigger issues on already marginalized communities, to restore the traditional social hierarchies around race, gender, sexual orientations, and so on. This has led to racial hysteria among older generations living in regional areas and among the less-educated working-class Americans. The social bases of many populist parties however have been fast expanding into metropolitan areas, thanks to underfunded public education systems. Further, new communication technologies have rekindled traditional discriminatory beliefs through innovative means (Ranieri, 2016).

It is therefore important to know why and how the resentment caused by the contradictions in capitalist democratic societies, between an idealized perception of democracy and of the inability of an economic system to deliver those promises, translates into a communitarian or radical right-wing backlash rather than a more progressive response.

The question of why some people support radical right movements rather than progressive socialist movements must be answered by focusing on their "character structure" as a mediating factor. This would require us, as Fuchs (2018) argues, to draw on critical psychology combined with political economy and ideology critique. Similarly, Abromeit (2017) argues that Frankfurt School Critical Theorists pioneered an interdisciplinary approach that can be adapted today to develop a more comprehensive explanation of RWP. Critical Theory combines the critique of capitalism, critical social psychology, and media and discourse analyses, as well as political theory. For instance, according to Franz L. Neumann (Neumann & Marcuse, 1957), one of the associates of the Frankfurt School, destructive collective anxiety generates large-scale support for far-right movements when six conditions coincide: destructive competition, social alienation, the alienation of labor, political alienation, psychological alienation and persecutory anxiety, and finally the institutionalization of anxiety. Indeed, both the rise and demise of neoliberalism can be seen as the main

source of the realization of these six preconditions of today's politics of anxiety (Fuchs, 2017, 2018).

It is reasonable to believe, as macro-sociological accounts tell us, that the inability of the State in reducing social inequalities and fulfilling the dreams of the middle-class has played a decisive role as a cause in the context of rising RWP in America. However, the disillusioned white male working class people of the rust belt states who allegedly showed their anger and anxiety for losing their status by voting for the populist candidate (Trump), could equally have voted for Bernie Sanders (as a social democrat who presented a greater capacity to address such social concerns in his campaign) had he been supported and nominated by his own party's establishment in the 2016 election. Seemingly, the lack of a strong alternative to a populist solution from the Left side of politics was a significant factor in this context. In the case of Greece's SYRIZA, for example, where the left alternative gained momentum in 2015, right-wing populism did not appear strong. This clearly indicates how meso-level mechanisms like party politics can make a difference and mediate the translation of microlevel processes to macro-level ones.

6 Conclusion

In this exploratory chapter, we set out to bring the study of RWP, as a concept, a movement phenomenon, a set of loosely articulated ideological discourses, and as a composition of attitudinal, affective, and behavioral characteristics, into the field of social inquiry. In so doing, we have demonstrated the multilevel nature and interrelated nurtures of right-wing populism, and the importance of developing integrative frameworks of inquiry based on a more precisely defined notion of RWP that would make studies not only more commensurable but also more complementary. We see RWP as a multilevel phenomenon manifested in the structural, institutional, and social psychological levels of society.

We, therefore, differentiate between a universal "grand theory" of everything (called right-wing populist) and an integrative theorization of RWP. We consider the latter a realistic solution to the challenges of studying the phenomenon and overcoming unproductive chasms in the literature. We agree with Wodak (2015) that the contingency of different contexts, where populist resurgence occurs, disallows any single overarching explanation. However, this does not automatically prohibit the possibility of developing a *flexible* integrative theoretical framework using pragmatically selective methodological approaches that, when applied in different contexts, allow for differences and contingencies to be included in the equation. This framework can be based on what Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) consider to be a minimal definition of right populism that grasps its common features across space and time.

Fortuitously, while many sociologists have abandoned grand theory construction, integrative efforts to create meta-theoretical frameworks for multilevel analyses have been expanding (Knorr-Cetina & Cicourel, 2014). There is no one single way of meta-theorization. The integrative approach, however, can provide us with many

exemplars; from classical theories in sociology, to mid-twentieth century efforts like the Frankfurt School, to more contemporary ones like Giddens' structuration theory, Luhmann's social system theory, Actor-Network Theory, Emergence theory (Sawyer, 2001), and Hosseini's constructuralism (2011, 2012). Developing such integrative frameworks, therefore, remains an open, yet inevitable, quest for those committed to non-reductionist approaches. Only when we can study RWP in this way, will it become an important and highly relevant part of growing interdisciplinary endeavors in understanding further this very important modern social phenomenon.

7 Cross-References

- Social change in the smart cities era: revisiting tensions between technocracy and populism
- Emotions as Societal Responses in the Age of Globalization
- Modern Right-wing activism in Japan
- Social Movements and Social Change in the Early 21st Century
- The Necessity for an Integrative Theory of Right-Wing Populism in the 21st Century
- Remove your knee from my neck: A radical call to collapse the politics of race through the Black Lives Matter Movement in the USA and beyond
- The rise of post-populist conservatism in Turkey: an initial glance
- Neoliberal Globalization, Class Conflict, and Social Change

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