Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda

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In recent years, populism has attracted considerable interest from social scientists and political commentators (Panizza 2005, Bale et al. 2011, Mudde 2004, Berezin 2013, Rovira Kaltwasser 2013), despite the fact that, "[t]he mercurial nature of populism has often exasperated those attempting to take it seriously" (Stanley 2008, 108). Indeed, the term 'populism' is both widely used and widely contested (Roberts 2006; Barr 2009).[1] It has been defined based on political, economic, social, and discursive features (Weyland 2001, 1) and analyzed from myriad theoretical perspectives—including structuralism, post-structuralism, modernization theory, social movement theory, party politics, political psychology, political economy, and democratic theory—and a variety of methodological approaches, such as archival research, discourse analysis, and formal modeling (Acemoglu et al. 2011, Ionescu and Gellner 1969, Canovan 2002, Hawkins 2009, Goodliffe 2012, Postel 2007). As observed by Wiles, "to each his own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds" (Wiles, in Iunescu and Gellner 1969, p. 166).

This literature review aims at exploring how these various academic axes can sharpen

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[1] As observed by Moffitt and Tormey (2013, 2), "it is an axiomatic feature of literature on the topic to acknowledge the contested nature of populism [...], and more recently the literature has reached a whole new level of meta-reflexivity, where it is posited that it has become common to *acknowledge the acknowledgement* of this fact."

1

each other, thus promoting our theoretical understanding of the concept and opening new methodological pathways for the study of populist politics. A comprehensive discussion of the research on the topic is timely and warranted, considering the role of populist politics in contemporary democracies. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to reassess the literature on populist politics not only because of the prevalence of the concept in recent social science research, but also because "populism does leave an imprint on important political phenomena" (Hawkins 2010, 49). Populist politics can reshape repertoires of political mobilization, especially in the forms of mass social movements and socially engaged party organizations (Madrid 2006, Subramanian 2007, Hawkins 2010, Jansen 2011). The ability of populist politics to galvanize new forms of political engagement is especially important in an era of decline in formal political participation such as turnout and party membership (see also Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 197). At the same time, in unconsolidated democracies populism may erode democratic institutions and usher competitive authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Loxton, 2012). Populism is also closely related to political polarization, and under some conditions may push party systems to the verge of collapse (Pappas 2013). In addition, populist politics play a constitutive role in political realignments, in which moral boundaries between groups are redrawn and categories of 'us' and 'them' emerge (Laclau 2005, Fella and Ruzza 2013).[2]

We aim to contribute to the recent efforts to construct a broader framework for analyzing populism, one that closely considers variations across time and place and is attentive to both the dynamic and stable features of populist politics. The timeframe of the research we survey spans from the late 19th century to the present day, and its geographical focus ranges from Eastern

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[2] On the effects of such cultural categories on policy-making, see Steensland 2008.

Europe and Latin America to the Anglo-American democracies.[3] In order to emphasize broad theoretical questions, we prioritize overarching theoretical issues that emerge from the literature over specific nuances of individual cases of populist politics. We begin with a discussion of the different definitions and approaches to the study of populism and compare their theoretical assumptions as well as their methodological implications. Next, we examine the relationship between populism and democracy, as well as the ideological variation in populist claims. Finally, we conclude by suggesting possible directions for future research on populism as a form of moral politics.

The Multifaceted Nature of Populism: The Challenge of Defining the Concept

Most scholars agree that "populism worships the people" (Ionescu and Gellner 1969, 4). However, there is not much consensus beyond this tautology. In one of the first attempts to conduct an extensive comparative analysis of the concept, Gellner and Ionescu write (1969, 1):

> There can, at present, be no doubt about the *importance* of populism. But no one is quite clear just what it *is*. As a doctrine or as a movement, it is elusive and protean. It bobs up everywhere, but in many and contradictory shapes. Does it have any underlying unity? Or does one name cover a multitude of unconnected tendencies?

The challenge of defining populism is at least partially due to the fact that the term has been used to describe political movements, parties, ideologies, and leaders across geographical, historical, and ideological contexts. Indeed, "there is general agreement in the comparative literature that populism is confrontational, chameleonic, culture-bound and context-dependent" (Arter 2010, 490); the challenge, then, is to understand how culture and context shape populist politics and how populism in turn affects political change.

First, populism, in its various forms, is prevalent across countries and regions. For

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[3] Another relevant case, which we do not discuss in details in this literature review, is populist politics in India. For more on this topic, see Subramanian 1999 and 2007.

instance, Gellner and Ionescu's seminal volume (1969) discusses cases from North America, Latin American, Russia, Eastern Europe, and Africa. In an important recent contribution, Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012) consider the relations between populism and democracy in Eastern and Western Europe, Canada, and Latin America. Next to cross-national comparisons, others point to the transnational dimension of the phenomenon and the ways in which populist rhetorical frameworks have been diffused and adapted across countries (Sawer and Laycock 2009). Secondly, populist politics have emerged in different historical periods: scholars distinguish between different waves of populism, beginning with the farmers' movements in Russia and the US in the late 19th century, through the emergence of Latin American populism in the mid-20th century, and the recent resurgence of populism in Europe, the Unites States, and Latin America (Taggart 2000, Jagers and Walgrave 2007, Roberts 2010, Levitsky and Roberts 2011, Rosenthal and Trost 2012). Other works also show significant variations in the form and degree of populist politics within the same polity or region over time (for the US, see Kazin 1995 and Hofstadter 1964; for France, Remond 1966 and Goodliffe 2012; for Latin America, Roberts 2010).

Populism cuts not just across geographical borders and historical eras, but also ideological cleavages (Kaltwasser 2013). In Europe, an exclusionary right-wing variant of populism emerged in the 1980s—and has intensified since—targeting mostly immigrants and national minorities (Ignazi 1993, Betz 1994, Koopmans 1996, Betz and Immerfall 1998, Kitschelt and McGann 1995, Norris 2005, Carter 2005, Ivarsflaten 2008, Mudde 2007, Art 2011, Berezin 2013). In Latin America, on the other hand, populism in recent years has been mostly associated with an inclusionary vision of society, bringing together diverse ethnic identities into shared political frameworks (Madrid 2008, Levitsky and Roberts 2011). In the United States, populism has been associated with a variety of economic ideologies and political parties, from

4

the Populist Party of the late 19th century and the New Left of the 1960s, through Southern segregationism, to present-day Republican orthodoxy of free-market economics (Kazin 1995, Lowndes 2008).

Indeed, it is hard to find a common ideological denominator that connects the various ostensibly populist movements, particularly when the classification of political actors relies on the expansive lay understanding of the concept. Examining how the term populism is used in British media, Bale et al. (2011) find that "any political actor who is in the news frequently for a substantial amount of time probably runs the risk of being labeled 'populist' sooner or later" (p. 121); the list of political actors labeled 'populist' in the British press in 2007 includes politicians as different as Jacob Zuma of South Africa, then-British Prim Minister Gordon Brown, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, former Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, and the American conservative presidential-candidate Mike Huckabee. It is hard to think of anything these leaders share in common, aside from the "populist" label bestowed upon them by journalists.

Despite these difficulties, it is possible to arrive at a systematic understanding of populism that clearly identifies the key features of the phenomenon and allows for a more principled comparison of populist politics across contexts. With that goal in mind, we focus on three main conceptual approaches that emerge out of the political science and sociology literature on the topic; they define populism, respectively, as an ideology, a discursive style, and a form of political mobilization (see also Moffitt and Tormey 2013, Pauwels 2011).

Populism as an Ideology

An influential definition of populism as an ideology was suggested by Cas Mudde in a series of studies that focus primarily on European right-wing populist parties:

[populism is] a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004, 543).

Populism here is first and foremost a set of ideas characterized by an antagonism between the people and the elite, as well as the primacy of popular sovereignty, whereby the virtuous general will is placed in opposition to the moral corruption of elite actors.

Building on the work of political theorist Michael Freeden (1996, 2003), ideology is defined here as a bundle of loosely interrelated ideas. For Freeden, ideologies are not comprehensive systems of thought rooted in political theory, but are rather conceived of as "interpretive frameworks that emerge as a result of the practice of putting ideas to work in language as concepts" (Stanley 2008, 98). Thin-centered ideologies are those that do not provide answers to all the major socio-political questions, and could therefore be compatible with other, more extensively developed political belief systems, such as socialism or liberalism. Because populism is defined by Mudde as a thin-centered ideology, it can be found across ideological cleavages, fused with either left- or right-wing appeals: "which ideological features attach to populism depend upon the socio-political context within which the populist actors mobilize" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011, 2).

Mudde's ideational approach had been influential in political science research on populism, especially among those who focus on European populist right-wing parties (Mudde 2007, Hawkins 2010, Pauwles 2011, and Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012, Stanley 2008, Rooduijn et al. 2012). One example is Pankowski's (2010) analysis of Polish populism. Pankowski considers ideologies as 'mental frameworks' that help actors interpret political reality and guide political action. He adopts Mudde's definition of populism, yet also stresses the importance of cultural resources in a given population such as shared repertoires and organizational templates, and

more generally "the traditions that legitimize particular aspects of political actions" (p. 6).

Pankowski (2010) argues that "populist movements have been successful where they manage to make a connection with a culture of the 'common sense' ordinariness". In the Polish case, for instance, such taken-for-granted 'truths' include the claim that 'all Poles are Catholics'. With this argument, Pankowski brings into the discussion of populism as an ideology also the role of traditional conceptions of the nation as sources for populist mobilization.

Defining populism as an ideology has particular implications for the way in which research on the topic is carried out. If populism is seen first and foremost as a bundle of ideas, it follows that empirical studies should primarily direct their attention to the programmatic statements made by political actors, treating the latter as the primary units of analysis. Most research in this tradition therefore focuses on party literature, either in the form of public manifestoes or internal party publications, in order to then classify the political actors who produce the literature (i.e., the parties or their leaders) as either populist or not. The study of the partisan texts is usually implemented through qualitative content analysis (Mudde 2007, Arter 2010, Pankowski 2010), though there have been recent efforts to employ computational text analysis as well (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2012). Given that the close reading of party materials is labor intensive, most studies in this tradition focus on specific country cases or engage in small-sample cross-national comparisons.

Populism as a Discursive Style

An alternative approach defines populism as a discursive style rather than an ideology. Analyzing populist politics in Latin America, de la Torre (2000, 4; cited in Barr 2009) defines populism as a "rhetoric that constructs politics as the moral and ethical struggle between el pueblo [the people] and the oligarchy". Adopting a comparative perspective that looks at cases of

populism across time and place, Hawkins (2009, 2010) conceptualizes populism as a Manichaean discourse that assigns a binary moral dimension to political conflicts.[4] In the same spirit, Kazin (1995), in his historical analysis of American populism, defines populism as a language used by those who claim to speak for the majority of Americans. Similarly to Mudde's definition of populism as a thin-centered ideology, Kazin argues that the political style of American populism is built on the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them'. Yet for Kazin, populism is not an ideology that captures the core beliefs of particular political actors but rather a mode of political expression that is employed selectively and strategically by both right and left, liberals and conservatives.

Despite the clear similarities between the ideational and discursive approaches, the nuanced differences between them carry significant theoretical and methodological implications and push researchers toward different modes of empirical inquiry. The most important implications concern the units of analysis and measurement scales employed in the study of populism: considering populism as a discursive style lends itself to its operationalization as a gradational property of specific instances of political expression (Bos et al. 2013) rather than an essential attribute of political parties or political leaders that can be captured by a simple populist/non-populist dichotomy. Since political actors can shape and re-shape their rhetorical style more easily than their official ideology, this definition makes it possible to more closely trace variations in levels and types of populist politics within and between political actors (Hawkins 2009, Pauwels 2011).

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[4] Hawkins defines discourse as combining elements of both ideology and rhetoric, and "is manifested in distinct linguistic forms and content that have real political consequences" (p. 1045). For Hawkins (2010), discourse and worldviews are inextricably linked. Populism is defined as "a worldview and is expressed as a discourse" (2010, 10); yet "unlike ideology, populism is a latent set of ideas that lacks significant exposition and contrast with other discourses and is usually low on policy specifics" (p. 1045).

The distinction between populism as ideology and style is captured by Deegan-Krause and Haughton (2009, 822), who argue that understanding populism as characteristic of political talk rather than as an identity of political actors "shifts our assessments from binary opposition—a party is populist or not—to a matter of degree—a party has more populist characteristics or fewer" (see also Rooduijn et al. 2012). Furthermore, the degree of populism that a given political actor employs may vary across contexts and over time, whereas the actor's explicit ideological positions are likely to be more constrained by concerns over credibility. Similarly, Panizza (2005) contends that populism as a discursive concept refers to relatively fluid practices of identification, rather than to individuals or parties. It is a form of politics rather than a stable category of political actors.

Richard Hofstadter's "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (1964), although not framed as a study of populist politics, sheds some light on the properties of populist politics as a discursive style (or in his terms, "a mode of expression" [p. 4] or "rhetoric" [p. 6]).[5] The paranoid style is characterized by heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and apocalyptic conspiratorial worldview. The central feature of the paranoid style is the concern about an all-encompassing conspiracy that threatens to take control of America and change its most foundational values. For Hofstadter, the prominence and persistence of the paranoid style in American politics is at least partially "a product of the rootlessness and heterogeneity of American life and, above all, its peculiar search for secure identity" (p. 51). Although Hofstadter's focus is limited to the United States, similar notions of conspiracy and emergency are apparent in other instances of populism outside the U.S. (Taggart 2000, 103).

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[5] Hofstadter "use[s] the term [paranoid style] much as a historian of art might speak of the baroque or the mannerist style" (p. 4).

On a more abstract theoretical level, Laclau's work (2005; see also Panizza 2005 and Filc 2010 for a discussion of Laclau's theory) has been particularly influential in shaping the discursive approach. For Laclau, the symbolic distinction between 'us' and 'them' that constitutes populist discourse is an instance of relational 'empty signifiers' that can take on varied content, depending on social context. These categories gain their meaning through a process of "identification" (i.e., classification), whereby specific social groups are construed as 'the people' (us) and pitted against oppressive 'others' (them). As explained by Panizza (2005, 3),

> Antagonism is thus a mode of identification in which the relation between its form (the people as signifier) and its content (the people as signified) is given by the very process of naming - that is, of establishing who the enemies of the people (and therefore the people itself) are.

Populism is therefore an anti-status-quo discourse: it is part of a struggle over hegemony and power (see also Filc 2010).

Populism as a Political Strategy

In contrast to ideational and discursive approaches, some scholars advocate for an understanding of populism as a mode of political strategy. This approach, which is particularly prevalent among sociologists and political scientists working on Latin America, comprises three variants that focus on different aspects of political strategy: policy choices, political organization, and forms of mobilization.

In his analysis of the rise of ethno-populism in Latin America, for instance, Madrid (2008, 482) argues that populism takes the form of particular economic policies and repertoires of mass mobilization. He defines populist policies as those aiming at economic redistribution and the nationalization of natural resources, and populist mobilization as consisting of anti-establishment and anti-system appeals. Acemoglu et al. (2011) also focus on policy, and define

populism "as the implementation of policies receiving support from a significant fraction of the population, but ultimately hurting the economic interests of this majority". Populism here applies mostly to pro-redistribution positions, when leaders use populist language in order to signal to ordinary voters that they are not beholden to big economic interests. This largely corresponds with the recent Latin American experience with populism (p. 31):

> The driving force of populist politics is the weakness of democratic institutions, which makes voters believe that politicians, despite their rhetoric, might have a right-wing agenda or may be corruptible or unduly influenced by the elite. Populist policies thus emerge as a way for politicians to signal that they will choose future policies in line with the interests of the median voter.

Of course, this may also work in the opposite direction: right-wing populism may emerge when leaders want to signal to right-wing voters that they do not support left-wing policies.

Some have criticized this approach, arguing that policy-based definitions of populism cannot account for historical variation, as evidenced in the Latin American case by the significant differences between populist protectionist policies of the mid-20th century and the neo-liberal populism of the end of the century (Weyland 2001). An alternative proposed by Weyland (2001, 14) is to instead define populism in terms of political organization:

> populism is best defined as 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.

What matters here then is not the content of policies or the style of discourse employed by political actors, but rather the relationship of those actors toward their constituents.

While this position is able to account for ideological variation, it treats political organization itself as constant across populist movements and parties. Roberts (2006) notes, however, that populist parties in Latin America vary significantly in their type and degree of organization as well, which limits the analytical utility of Weyland's. Instead, Roberts suggests

that populist politics take on four distinct forms produced by the interplay between the degree of organization of civil society (especially, consolidation of strong labor unions) and the degree of organization of the party system (the degree to which populist parties are ready and suited for competing in the electoral arena). High partisan and civil society organization leads to organic populism; high partisan organization and low civil society organizations gives rise to partisan populism; high civil society organization and weak partisan structures is associated with labor populism; and low levels of organization in both dimensions is linked with electoral populism. The relative strength of civil society and the party system is mostly a result of timing (e.g., the mid-20th century wave of Latin American populism versus the later rise or neo-liberal populism) and the degree of conflict with entrenched elites.

Analyzing the turn to the left in Latin American politics, Levitsky and Roberts (2011, 6-7) also disassociate populism from specific policy initiatives. They define populism as a "top-down political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders who challenge established political or economic elites on behalf of an ill-defined *pueblo*" (see also Roberts 2010). They stress that populist appeals are ideologically flexible: "the programmatic content of populist appeals has varied considerably across cases and over time […] Unlike the Left, then, populism should not be defined in programmatic of ideological terms". Even though there is some overlap between left-wing political actors and populism, there are also non-populist leftists and non-leftist populists.

Those who define populism as a form of political organization typically place an emphasis on the identity of the political leaders and their relation to other political actors. Taggart, for instance, argues that populist parties are characterized by a centralized organizational structure headed by a strong charismatic leader (Taggart 1995; see also Pauwels

2011). In particular, because of its "lack of key values," populism is "particularly liable to the politics of personality" (Taggart 2000, p. 101). Similarly, employing a comparative research design that covers both European and Latin American case, Pappas (2012, 2) claims that populist leadership "offers a key analytical variable in both understanding populism and assessing its successes, or failures". Looking at cases as diverse as the Netherlands and Peru, he argues that "populism obtains when a certain political entrepreneur is able to polarize politics by creating a cleavage based on the interaction between "the people" versus some establishment, thus forging a mass political movement".

While the personality characteristics of political leaders are frequently cited in studies of populism, some warn against treating this criterion as sufficient or even necessary in operationalizing populism. Barr (2009), for instance, points to the fact that next to important charismatic populist leaders, "there have been notable non-charismatic populist leaders as well," with Peru's Alberto Fujimori being one example (2009, 40); consequently, even if charismatic leadership is often associated with populism, it is not a constitutive element of it. Rather, Barr stresses the linkage between populist movements and their supporters, arguing that "once populists have taken power, they tend to use clientelism in addition to plebiscitarian linkages" (2009, 42). Bringing together political style and strategy, Barr (2009, 38) defines populism as

> reflect[ing] the specific combination of appeals, location and linkages that suggests a correction based on enhanced accountability rather than increased participation. More specifically, it is a mass movement led by an outsider or maverick seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitarian linkages".

Whereas those who define populism as an ideology or style focus on the message that is communicated, Barr (2009) stresses the importance of the position of the sender within the broader political context. He argues that the typical populist leader tends to cast him or herself as an outsider "who gains political prominence not through or in association with an established,

competitive party, but as a political independent or in association with new or newly competitive parties" (see also Pappas 2012).

Jansen (2011) shifts the focus from parties to more general patterns of political mobilization, including that of social movements. He argues that instead of considering populism as a stable ideology, we should see it as a political project "that can be undertaken by challengers and incumbents of various stripes in pursuit of a wide range of social, political and economic agendas" (p. 77). His definition consists of two dimensions: mobilization and discourse. Jansen defines populist mobilization as "any sustained, large-scale political project that mobilizes ordinarily marginalized social sectors into publicly visible and contentious political action, while articulating an anti-elite, nationalist rhetoric that valorizes ordinary people" (p. 82). Populist discourse "posits the natural social unity and inherent virtuousness of 'the people'" (p. 84). At the same time, it posits the people in antagonistic relationship with the anti-popular 'elite'. As can be seen from Jansen's analysis, the three approaches – populism as ideology, discursive style and political strategy – are not mutually exclusive. We therefore now turn to consider the similarities, differences and tensions between them.

Comparing the Three Approaches

The three approaches to the study of populism we discussed above have their differences, but also points of connection and overlap. Pauwles (2011) argues that considering populism as a thin-centered ideology does not exclude the possibility that it features a specific discursive style as well: if the goal of populist leaders is to give back power to the common people, it is not surprising that they use the language of the people. It is also reasonable to expect ideology to impact party organization under some circumstances.

The similarities between the ideational and discursive approaches are particularly

evident, given that both stress the Manichean framework of politics and the distinction between 'us' and them' as a fundamental component of populist rhetoric; some scholars have even treated these definitions as belonging to a single mode of explanation (Pappas 2012; Hawkins 2009, 2010). Yet, there are also important theoretical and methodological differences that lead us to treat these approaches as distinct. Indeed, scholars working in these traditions echo this distinction, often in the course of criticizing one another's definitions of populism. For instance, Kaltwasser and Mudde (2012), whose work employs the ideational approach, criticize Laclau's discursive theory of populism, arguing that it equates populism with all forms of dualistic rhetoric, thus stretching the term beyond its theoretical limits and making it too abstract to be the object of a rigorous empirical analysis. They argue that "Laclau's theory of populism is, on the one hand, extremely abstract, and on the other hand, it proposes a concept of populism that becomes so vague and malleable it loses much of its analytic utility" (Kaltwasser and Mudde 2012 7). Conversely, for proponents of the discursive approach, the exclusive focus on party ideology is overly constraining and essentializing (Panizza 2005). They argue that populism is discursive form that is available to all political actors and not only to those who are classified as populist (though some actors may use populist discourse more often than others). From this perspective, the term populist "should be understood not to signify that […] subjects were populists, in the way they were unionists or socialists, liberal Democrats or conservative Republicans, but rather that all these people employed populism as a flexible mode of persuasion to redefine the people and their adversaries" (Panizza 2005, 8). These critiques demonstrate that despite the surface agreement on the Manichean and anti-elite foundations of populist claims, these two traditions give different ontological status to populism and, consequently, favor different analytical strategies for operationalizing and measuring the phenomenon.

Much as there are theoretical links between the ideological and discursive schools, these two approaches can also be brought into dialogue with the research that treats populism as a form of political strategy. Barr (2009) makes this argument with regard to leadership: if populist ideas are about the will of the people, then populist movements are likely to require strong leadership able to represent the interests of the people and avoid intermediary organizations that may distort those interests. In his analysis of populism and the Israeli Right, Filc (2010) also suggests points of connection between ideology, discourse and political strategy, focusing on the interplay between social inclusion and exclusion in populist politics. If populist politics is about the boundaries between 'us' and 'them', then delineating who belongs to these categories requires a dynamic process of simultaneously excluding and including specific groups within these boundaries. According to Filc, this takes place at three distinct levels: material, symbolic and political. Material inclusion and exclusion takes place through specific policies, such as welfare benefits to previously marginalized constituencies. Symbolic inclusion and exclusion can be shaped through political rhetoric and re-drawing of the social boundaries. Lastly, political inclusion and exclusion can be redefined through a re-organization of party structures, such as membership and representation in partisan bodies.

By pointing to areas of overlap between these approaches we hope to suggest paths for future research and sustained intellectual exchange. Yet, at the same time, it is important to emphasize the theoretical differences between the three traditions, because they carry relevant implications for what populism can explain, how it should be defined, and how it should be studied empirically. These differences, which have been the focus of our review thus far, are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of the three approaches to populism research.

	Definition of populism	Unit of analysis	Relevant methods	Exemplars
Political ideology	A set of inter-related ideas about the nature of politics and society	Parties and party leaders	Qualitative or automated texts analysis, mostly of partisan literature	Mudde (2004, 2007), Kaltwasser and Mudde (2012)
Political style	A way of making claims about politics; characteristics of discourse.	Texts, speeches, public discourse about politics	Interpretive textual analysis	Kazin (1995), Laclau (2005), Panizza (2005)
Political strategy	A form of mobilization and organization	Parties (with a focus on structures), social movements, leaders	Comparative historical analysis, case studies	Roberts (2006), Wayland (2001), Jansen (2011)

Populism and Democracy

One particularly important area of research among populism scholars concerns the consequences of the phenomenon for democratic governance. In fact, the lay perceptions of populism as toxic for democracy, have played a central role in reinvigorating the academic study of populism in the past decade. For instance, in 2010 the European Union President Herman Van Rompuy declared populism "the biggest danger to Europe," referring to the rise of xenophobic right-wing parties in a number of European Union member states (Kaltwasser and Mudde 2012, 16). Another observer, this time from the academy, considers populism as a 'virus' that infects party systems

across Europe and spreads its 'epidemic effects' (Bartolini 2011).

Yet, in contrast to the overwhelmingly negative view of populism in Europe (which is itself a legacy of the region's sordid history with populist totalitarian politics), some scholars have argued that populism can in fact support inclusionary politics that expand democratic participation to previously marginalized groups, as might be the case with the recent wave of left-wing populism in Latin America. Prompted by these ambiguous arguments, scholars have become increasingly interested in the question of whether populism should be seen as a threat or corrective to democracy (Kaltwasser and Mudde 2012; see also Subramanian 1999 and 2007 for a discussion of the Indian context). This issue has been addressed from the perspectives of democratic theory and empirical research on the impact of populist politics on the quality of democracy.

Writing from the point of view of political theory, Urbinati (1998) stresses that populism is a strategy of rebalancing the distribution of political power among established and emerging social groups. She suggests that the tension between liberal democracy and populism stems from the ways in which these ideologies perceive the relations between representative institutions and the "will of the people." She contends that for populists, the primary task of political institutions is not to serve as systems of checks and balances or as protectors of civil rights, but rather as instrumental tools for translating the majority will into political decisions. Canovan (2002) also focuses on the tensions inherent in the institutional design of democracy: democracy is an ideology and practice of popular participation, but at the same time it requires a complex system of decision-making that is often opaque, leading populist actors to experience deep dissatisfaction with representative institutions. Consequently, populist ideology seeks to redeem this state of affairs with "a claim to legitimacy that rests on the democratic ideology of popular

sovereignty and majority rule"—that is a return to a "true" democracy led by "the people" and not by professional political elites (Canovan 2002, 25).

Whereas Canovan considers populism as the shadow of democracy, Arditi suggests thinking of populism as 'the specter of democracy': "a specter suggests both a visitation, as in the return of Hamlet's father, and something that can haunt us, as in the specter of communism". Arditi (2007) suggests that populism can be seen as "the awkward dinner guest", the one who gets drunk and asks inappropriate questions, which may in fact point to important hidden problems (see also Moffitt 2010). This colorful metaphor nicely captures the duality between populist politics and democracy: populism challenges the common sense of liberal democratic practice and may have ominous implications for liberal democracy; at the same time, populism may serve to identify otherwise overlooked political problems and give marginalized groups a legitimate voice.

The ability of populist politics to enhance the quality of democracy is illustrated by Postel's (2007) analysis of the American Populist Party. Postel explains the rise of the American Populist Party mostly as a response to the economic depression of the late 19th century and the technological innovations in transportation, industrial production, communication, and global trade. The Populist Movement was a coalition of farmers, wage earners, and middle-class activists, who worked together to challenge the harsh economic and political realities of their time. Contrary to some accounts, Postel views the populist resurgence not as a reactionary opposition to modernity or a rejection of democracy but as a struggle for economic reform through increased democratic participation. In fact, Postel argues that the Populist Party was profoundly democratic, mobilizing millions of often-marginalized citizens, even though its ideology left little room for minority rights.

While the position of populism on majority-minority relations is tangential in Postel's account, it is very much the central focus of Kaltwasser's (2013) and Kaltwasser and Mudde's (2012) research, for whom populism is a fundamentally ambivalent phenomenon with varied implications for democracy. Kaltwasser (2013) builds on Dahl's theory of polyarchy in exploring the relations between populism and two key challenges in democratic theory: the definition of the people and the limits of self-government. Populist politics revolve around these two main democratic dilemmas; yet, the ways in which populist leaders answer these questions vary across contexts. While European populists emphasize the ethnic dimension of the people and American populists (namely the Tea Party) focus on immigration and anti-establishment claims, Latin American populists strive to galvanize ethnically and socioeconomically diverse constituencies. Populist responses to the question of self-control are also variable: in Europe, the European Union is seen as a threat to the sovereignty of the people represented by national political institutions; in Latin America it is the old constitutions that are seen as out of step with the people's needs; and in the US, populists idealize (their interpretation of) the constitution and see the government as infringing on their constitutional rights. This sweeping review of populism in three different continents suggests, according to Kaltwasser, that populist politics are not anti-democratic by definition; instead they provide different answers to persistent tensions that have long occupied political theorists.

A similarly nuanced view is presented in an edited volume that focuses on the relations between populism and democracy. In contrast to the common wisdom, Kaltwasser and Mudde (2012) contend that populism is in fact positively related to democracy, because of its focus on representing the will of the people. Among the positive effects of populism, the authors list the representation and mobilization of marginalized groups, the construction of cross-class political

coalitions, and an emphasis on democratic accountability. The relationship between populism and liberal democracy, however, is inherently ambivalent, because populism prioritizes majority rule over other liberal democratic ideals, such as institutional checks and balances, deliberation, and minority rights (see also Pappas 2013). As a result, successful populist appeals risk destabilizing democratic institutions, challenging the separation of power, and eroding trust in unelected governmental bodies. Kaltwasser and Mudde (2012) therefore suggest that populism "can be both a corrective and a threat to democracy" (16), depending on two main contextual factors: the degree of democratic consolidation[6] and whether populists sit in opposition or in government. In consolidated democracies, populism in opposition is expected to have small positive impact on the quality of democracy, whereas populism in government should have a moderate effect on democracy, either positive or negative. In unconsolidated democracies, on the other hand, populism in government is expected to have strong negative effects on democracy while populism in opposition should serve as a corrective to democracy.

Levitsky and Loxton (2012, see also Levitsky and Loxton 2013) challenge the overly optimistic view of the democratizing effect of populism. They argue that whereas populism may have positive effects in liberal democracies, in the unconsolidated democracies of Latin America populism serves to inhibit the further development of democratic institutions—even as it facilitates greater political inclusion. There are several reasons for this ambiguous outcome: first, populists are usually outsiders who have no appreciation of the institutions of representative democracy; second, populists believe that they have received a mandate from the people to fight the political establishment; lastly, populist leaders often stand in opposition to the parliament, bureaucracy, and the Supreme Court, and therefore have a strong incentive to weaken these

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[6] A consolidated democracy is defined as "a political regime in which free and fair elections are institutionalized as the mechanism whereby access to political power is determined" (p. 22).

institutions. Consequently, Loxton and Levistky (2012) suggest that populist leaders in unconsolidated democracies may contribute in important ways to the weakening democratic institutions and, in some cases, even to ushering in competitive authoritarianism (Levitsky and Way 2010).

Varieties of Populism: Populist Politics across Ideological Appeals

Even though individual case studies often focus on particular ideological manifestations of populism (typically on the political right in Europe and the political left in Latin America), when read in the aggregate, these studies demonstrate that populism is not intrinsically tied to either left- or right-wing political ideology. In fact, the ideological content can vary both across countries and within the same polity over time.

The variation in the content of 'the populist persuasion' is the central focus of Kazin's (1995) study of the historical transformation of party politics in the United States. For Kazin, American populism is based on four main pillars. The first is the language of Americanism: the United States as a unique nation, where all are equal citizens of a self-governing republic. Secondly, the American 'people' are perceived as a productive and well-intentioned community, set between a corrupt elite, on the one hand, and the undeserving poor, on the other hand. Third, the elite is framed as the perpetual antithesis to the people: condescending, profligate, artificial, effete, manipulative, intellectual, and dependent on the labor of others. Lastly, American populist actors share the belief that "strong *movements*—typically called "crusades", "societies", or "parties" (whether or not they compete in elections)—must gird themselves for combat and not leave the field until the elitist opponent [is] utterly vanquished" (Kazin 1995, 16). Employing this fourfold framework in a broad historical perspective, Kazin (1995) traces the ideological varieties of American populism, from late 19th century farmers, New Deal workers, and Cold

War conservatives to the New Left of the 1960s, the New Right in the South, and the populist conservative movement under the Nixon and Reagan administrations (several recent works begin where Kazin (1995) stops and examine the contemporary role of American anti-statist free-market populism [e.g., Sawer and Laycock, 2009]).

Within the bourgeoning literature on varieties of populism, the Tea Party movement attracts special attention (Rosenthal and Trost 2012, Skocpol and Williamson 2012), with two opposed views emerging regarding its relationship to American populism. One the one hand, skeptics argue that "the present employment of the term [populism] obscures more than it clarifies about the historical roots of the Tea Party" (Postel 2012, 27), due to the fundamental differences between the Tea Party and the American Populist Party of the 19th century. On the other hand, some scholars claim that the Tea Party is only the latest incarnation of American conservative populism, which fuses together xenophobic rhetoric with anti-statism (Lowndes 2012; see also Lowndes 2008). If populism is to be understood as a rhetorical style or thin-centered ideology based on a Manichean, anti-elitist logic and a desire to reclaim political institutions on behalf of "the people," then the Tea Party's political appeals certainly appear to fit under a populist rubric.

Interestingly, there are also variations in populist claims within parties and movements that share a similar official ideology, such as the populist right-wing parties in Europe that have enjoyed widespread electoral success since the 1980s. Employing both quantitative and qualitative text analysis of party manifestoes of six Western European parties commonly defined as right-wing populist (the Schweizerische Volkspartei, French Front National, Lijst Pim Fortuyn, the Vlaams Blok, the Freiheitliche Partei Österreich and Die Republikaner), Raadt et al. (2004) identify four distinct types of appeals to "the people:" ethnic-nationalist, civic,

collectivist, and particularistic. They also distinguish between pragmatic and abstract references to direct democracy, as well as between elite-targeted and intermediaries-targeted rhetoric. Based on the argument that "populism needs to be defined and operationalised more precisely and in a relative manner, providing the opportunity of variation among political parties across time and space," Raadt et al.'s (2004:54) nuanced analysis marks an important step in uncovering multiple forms of populism, with an attention to within-region cross-national variations. At the same time, their work also suggests potential avenues for future research. First, party manifestos are only one of multiple possible units of analysis for populism research; though interesting in their own respect, their relatively small number may constrain the inferences made in the analyses and restrict the universe of available cases. In addition, it is questionable whether populist rhetoric appears only among right-wing parties. By looking only at parties that are known in advance to be right-wing populist, the range of populist claims is limited *a priori* by the research design. There is therefore a need for a broader analysis, which could explore the variety of populist claims along the entire political spectrum. In order to further develop ideas for advancing the study of populist politics, we now turn to discuss some possible directions for future research.

Directions for Future Research

Research on populist politics has been growing in recent years, mostly in political science, but also in sociology (Jansen 2011). In this section, we suggest directions for future studies, with a focus on the analysis of populism as a form of political claims-making—that is, a way of formulating appeals to a mass public using a Manichean logic that opposes the virtuous people to corrupt elites and affiliated out-groups. Such moral appeals—and they are moral because they are predicated on the evaluation of the fundamental worth of entire categories of people—are made by a variety of political actors and are often part and parcel of broader political strategy,

rather than an intrinsic attribute of the political actors themselves. To be sure, some actors may rely on populist rhetoric more often than others and as a result could be labeled as populist, but such classification should be a result of careful empirical observation rather than a priori conceptual definition. Finally, we view the moral politics of populism as endemic to most—if not all—modern democracies, which leads to emphasize comparative and historical approaches to the topic.

The proposed agenda for future research focuses on three approaches: large-scale cross-national studies using automated text analysis methods; individual-level research using observational data, such as that produced by survey instruments; and experimental studies that investigate the specific mechanisms that give populist claims their resonance among their target publics. Where possible, we suggest tentative hypotheses that could orient future work.

A Populist Era? In recent years, academics—as well as informed observers in the popular press and politics—have repeatedly argued that we are living in a political era characterized by "a populist Zeitgeist" (Mudde 2004). The contemporaneous success of right-wing populists in Europe, left-wing populists in Latin American, and the American Tea Party indeed suggest that populism is prevalent in contemporary political discourse. Yet to what a degree is this time period different from past instances of populist politics? As argued by scholars that adopt a *longue durée* perspective, populist politics are far from a new phenomenon, even in established democracies (Kazin 1995, Goodliffe 2012), which suggests that some of the claims about contemporary populism may be prone to a presentist bias. The recent availability of digitized datasets of relevant texts, such as speeches, manifestoes, party publications, petitions, newspapers articles, and internet forums, may make it possible to examine this question in a systematic manner. In particular, automated text analysis techniques could lend themselves to a

large-scale examination of such texts in order to determine whether or not a secular positive trend in populist claims-making can in fact be detected.

One intriguing—and empirically testable—hypothesis is that change over time is apparent not in the degree of usage (or lack thereof) of populist claims, but rather in their ideological content and the cultural boundaries they construct between social groups. This is one of Kazin's main arguments regarding the history of populist politics in the United States, and it could be systematically examined both in the American context and in other democracies. For instance, Deegan-Krause and Haughton (2009) analyze populist politics among Slovakian political parties and find that overall levels of populist appeals did not change much since the transition to democracy; however, the types of populist appeals and the identity of those voicing them changed substantially. Parties' use of populist appeals is negatively related to party age and participation in government, but because the party system in Slovakia is fluid and new parties regularly enter the arena, the overall level of populism remains relatively stable. Whereas the authors rely on subjective qualitative data coding and build mostly on their own expertise with Slovakian politics, the availability of large datasets and new tools of automated textual analysis should allow a more general examination of this hypothesis across different countries and time periods (for the use of automated text analysis in the study of populist politics, see Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011, Pauwels 2011).

Populist contagion. Closely related to the notion of a populist 'zeitgeist' is the argument that populist discourse has migrated from the fringes to the core of the political spectrum. From a historical perspective, some scholars argue that in recent years the traditional *cordon sanitaire* has broken down, as mainstream politicians have adopted populist language that was once restricted only to extremists (in the context of European politics, see Berezin 2009 and 2013; in

the American case, the recent discussion of the Tea Party is a case in point [e.g., Rosenthal and Trost 2012]). This claim also bears on the theoretical understanding of the concept of populism: if populism is understood as an anti-hegemonic language used by outsiders who challenge the establishment (Laclau 2005, Barr 2009), then the adoption of populist language by mainstream politics may raise interesting questions concerning the perceived legitimacy and political efficacy of populist claims-making in contemporary polities.

Recent work has begun to systematically examine the question of populist contagion. Spanje (2010), for instance, finds that mainstream European parties tend to adopt the positions of populist parties on issues of immigration (see also van Spanje and van der Brug 2009). In contrast, shifting the focus from policies to discourse, Roodjin et al. (2012) compare party manifestoes in five European countries with populist parties (France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK) and find no evidence that mainstream parties have adopted populist language between the 1990s and 2000s. Revealing as it is, however, the analysis is restricted to party manifestoes, which are more suited for the analysis of party positions than for detecting changes in popular political discourse. It would therefore be useful to consider a broader corpus of political texts, especially those intended for the general public (e.g., speeches, press releases, and media content), in order to gain a more complete understanding of the temporal trends in populist politics across multiple cases.

In that vain, Bale (2013) suggests that populist language, which has long been part of the rhetorical arsenal of mainstream right-wing parties in Britain, has varied over time in response to three main factors: the salience of immigration in public opinion, the personal style of the party leader and whether the party is in government or opposition. The study demonstrates that populist claims have never been fully restricted to the political fringes, and that there appears to

be little evidence for a secular trend of populist contagion from the extremes to the mainstream.

The generalizability of this claim could be examined in other countries, for issues other than immigration and also with respect to mainstream left-wing parties. In particular, the relationship between populist claims and parties' political position—in opposition and government—deserves special attention, given that European populist parties have recently joined governing coalitions (the Netherlands, Austria, and Italy are among the prime examples). This raises the question of whether populists are able to retain their anti-establishment discourse as they become part of the establishment and if so, whether they pursue policies that are in line with their public claims. Furthermore, do opposition parties to populist governing coalitions also adopt populist language, thus giving rise to a spiral of "populist democracy"? According to Pappas (2013), such populist democracies are polarized, "highly unstable systems and cannot enjoy long lives." If, as Pappas suggests, this is the direction in which several East European polities are headed (e.g., Romania and Slovakia), a stronger understanding of the mechanisms at work is required. In the Latin American context, populism has long been associated not just with oppositional movements but also with those in power, as with the cases of Juan Perón or Hugo Chavez (Hawkins 2010). In these cases, the impact of populism on the quality of democracy is still open for debate (Levitsky and Loxton 2012, Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012).

Building and Sustaining Party Coalitions. Whereas most research on processes of dealignment and realignment focuses on voting behavior, there is a place to explore the ways in which populist politics play a part in coalition building and maintenance by drawing moral boundaries between social groups. The cultural construction of social coalitions and new social cleavages may have an impact on electoral politics and subsequent voting behavior, either preceding, facilitating, or consolidating change in voting patterns and political realignments. For

instance, Fella and Ruzza (2013, 40) describe the ways in which Berlusconi's usage of populist

politics transformed old political alliances in Italy:

> The centre-right coalition sought to overcome the traditional left – right cleavage with a
> vertical cleavage that juxtaposed the elites against the 'people'. The centre-right leaders
> advertised themselves as the representatives of the people against corrupt and distant
> elites, committed to outsmarting, replacing and eradicating them. Although the
> untrustworthy elites were characterised differently by FI [Forza Italia, Berlusconi's party]
> and the LN [Lega Nord] they were above all defined as 'political elites'. [7]

Similar processes have been observed in other democracies in which party leaders employ

populist politics, such as Greece and Hungary (Pappas 2013). In the American context, populist

discourse is only one among a variety of mechanisms holding together a conservative coalition

of libertarians and social conservatives (Skocpol and Williamson 2012). However, scholars still

lack a clearer understanding of the conditions under which the cultural construction of new

coalitions becomes possible, and the ways in which cultural categories are translated into

partisan structures.

One testable hypothesis is that populist rhetoric changes in different stages of political

realignment. An emphasis on morally disparaged outgroups (either the elites themselves or other

groups ostensibly supported by the elites) might be useful in the process of coalition

construction, as a tool of bringing together groups with diverse interests but common antipathies

toward specific others, while an emphasis on the in-group (i.e., the virtuous 'people') might play

a larger role in keeping together odd political bedfellows in the same coalition, through stressing

a shared common denominator. If this is so, it suggests that some forms of populist politics are

more appropriate in specific moments, but not in others. Studying the shifting dynamics of

populist politics can shed new light on periodization of 'the political time' (Skowronek 2008), or

the process of coalition building and maintaining.

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[7] For more on right-wing populism in Italy, see Ruzza and Stefano (2009)

Populist politics at the micro-level. Since populism is considered a phenomenon of mass politics, it is mostly studied at the macro-level, with a focus on the mobilization of social movements and political parties and the resulting policy outcomes. It is possible, however, to complement such macro-level analyses with a focus on the micro-level foundations of populist politics. Why are some individuals more susceptible to populist mobilization than others? Without reducing populism to a personality feature, it is possible to ask whether the inclination to positively evaluate populist messages related to any other latent social psychological factors— and if so, how can such factors be uncovered and systematically measured? What are the relevant methodological tools for such research, and how can they be incorporated within the macro-level theoretical frameworks of populist politics?

One possible direction is the analysis of survey data. Hawkins et al. use surveys to measure "populist attitudes, or more specifically, an affinity for populist discourse" (2012, 1-2). In order to capture a populist inclination, they ask whether respondents agree or disagree with statements such as "Politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil" and "The people, not the politicians, should make the most important policy decisions". Looking at survey data collected in the US in 2010, they find that conservatives have stronger populist inclinations than liberals, but also that those with extreme political positions are more populist than those with moderate positions. Age and gender seem to play no role in predicting populist inclinations. These findings raise several intriguing conjectures and promising directions of future research, especially regarding a comparative design of populist attitudes. The difficulty with this approach, however, is that few existing survey data sets—particularly cross-national ones—offer sufficiently nuanced questions to meaningfully capture individual-level populist sentiments. Until such surveys are designed and implemented, populism scholars will be forced to rely on

other more innovative sources of micro-level data.

Bos et al. (2013) suggest one alternative method for exploring micro-level mechanisms by using an experimental design. They focus on the effect of populist rhetoric and style on perceptions of politicians' legitimacy, comparing the effect of populist language on the perceived legitimacy of two political leaders in the Netherlands: Geert Wilders, head of the PVV (a populist right-wing party), and Stef Blok, leader of the VVD (mainstream-right Liberal party). They find that the effect of populist discourse on perceived legitimacy is conditioned on individual-level characteristics: for lower educated and politically cynical respondents, populist style has a positive effect on perceived legitimacy. By using an experimental design, Bos et al. (2013) push forward the analysis of micro-level mechanisms and populist politics; however, their work mostly focuses on differences between mainstream and populist Right-wing parties, rather than more generally exploring affinity to populist messages more generally. It lacks a comparative perspective that may allow generalization of the results, either across ideological dividing lines, countries or over time.

Conclusion

Given that populism does not appear to be waning in contemporary democracies, the phenomenon is likely to fascinate scholars and lay observers for years to come, further contributing to a growing body of research on the topic. As the number and diversity of studies on the topic proliferates, it is particularly important that researchers are as explicit and precise as possible in their definition of populism. Not only is this crucial for the appropriate operationalization of the phenomenon, but it is also a necessary prerequisite for a constructive debate that can bring together findings from across multiple cases and time periods. Indeed, this is what we see as the next—and most productive stage—in the development of populism

research. For too long, scholars working on the topic had retained a myopic focus on specific instances of populist politics, leading to overly broad and insufficiently substantiated generalizations about populism's universal features. It is only recently that the phenomenon has come to be theorized more richly based on the aggregate of case-specific studies. This increasingly comparative approach has made it possible to discover, for instance, that not all cases of populism in modern democracies involve charismatic leadership or protectionist economic policies. The result has been a more nuanced understanding of the central features of populism that recur across diverse settings, time periods, and political ideologies.

In this review we have sought to enumerate such common features by surveying the three dominant approaches to populism scholarship: populism as a thin-centered ideology, as a form of political discourse, and as a political strategy. Whatever the substantive disagreements between these three theoretical camps, we strongly believe that their respective agendas could be furthered considerably by engaging in a more sustained study of the *variation* in populist politics. Using a variety of data sources and methods—whether qualitative or quantitative— future studies should strive to gain a better understanding of how and when the Manichean binary categories that form the core of populist claims-making are constructed by political actors. This raises a wide range of specific research questions, such as: Which groups are included in the category of the virtuous people and which elites (and associated groups) are vilified as morally suspect? How is this classification process shaped by the broader political context (e.g., the position of the populist actors in the political field, the relative consolidation of political coalitions, the ability of mainstream actors to employ populist language)? How does populism and related mobilization strategies diffuse across parties and across countries? What accounts for temporal fluctuations in particular forms of populism within specific countries—and possibly

across democracies in general? Under what circumstances are populist claims viewed as credible

or not by their target audiences and how is political behavior impacted as a result? Finally, what

contextual and individual-level conditions increase the probability that populist claims resonate

with their constituencies, leading to successful political mobilization?

In addressing these questions, scholars will do well to engage in systematic comparisons

between places, over time, and across ideological divides. Only through such comparative work,

will scholars be able to gain insight into the general properties of populism—a crucial feature of

political reality in contemporary democracies.

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