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Populism: An Ideational Approach

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Abstract and Keywords

Populism is an essentially contested concept, given that scholars even contest the essence and usefulness of the concept, while a disturbingly high number of scholars use the concept without ever defining it. Though it is still far too early to speak of an emerging consensus, it is undoubtedly fair to say that the ideational approach to populism is the most broadly used in the field today. This chapter outlines the ideational approach to populism, presents the author's own ideological definition, discusses its key concepts (ideology, the people, the elite, and the general will), and highlights its main strengths— i.e. distinguishability, categorizability, travelability, and versatility—compared to other approaches.

Keywords: populism, ideology, ideational approach, comparative politics, democracy

Introduction

MOST concepts in the social sciences are contested, but few are what W. B. Gallie has called essentially contested concepts, i.e. "concepts the proper use of which inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users" (1955–6: 169).[1] Populism is undoubtedly an essentially contested concept, given that scholars even contest the essence and usefulness of the concept. While a disturbingly high number of scholars use the concept without ever defining it, others have defined populism as a type of political discourse, ideology, leadership, movement, phenomenon, strategy, style, syndrome, et cetera (e.g. Ionescu and Gellner, 1969). The debate over the true meaning of populism is not just a consequence of the multidisciplinary nature of the research, which

includes studies in art history, criminology, economics, education, history, political science, and sociology. Even within one single discipline, like political science, scholars disagree fundamentally about the essence and usefulness of the concept of populism.

But though it has been defined in many different ways, the ideational approach has almost always been at least part of the study of populism. As Ernesto Laclau already observed at the end of the 1970s:

> We can single out four basic approaches to an interpretation of populism. Three of them consider it *simultaneously* as a movement and as an ideology. A fourth reduces it to a purely ideological phenomenon. (1977: 144)

The importance of ideas (and even ideology) can be seen in most studies of the first populist movements, i.e. the Russian *narodniki* (e.g. Karaömerlioglu, 1996; Pipes, 1960) and the US Populists (e.g. Ferkiss, 1957; Kazin, 1995), and in the early studies of generic (p. 28) populism (e.g. Canovan, 1981; Ionescu and Gellner, 1969). And while today organizational definitions remain popular, in studies of Latin American populism in particular (Weyland, 2001), even these studies often include explicitly ideational elements as well (e.g. Roberts, 1995).

In recent years (purely) ideational approaches to populism have gained popularity, particularly within comparative politics. Most notably, a majority of scholars of European populism employ explicitly or implicitly ideational definitions (e.g. Abts and Rummens, 2007; Rooduijn, 2013; Stanley, 2008). But ideational definitions have been successfully employed in studies of non-European populism too. They are even making serious inroads in the well-established study of Latin American populism (e.g. Hawkins, 2009; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). Though it is still far too early to speak of an emerging consensus, it is undoubtedly fair to say that the ideational approach to populism is the most broadly used in the field today.

In the next section I will outline the ideational approach to populism, present my own ideological definition, and discuss its key concepts (ideology, the people, the elite, and the general will). This is followed by a section that highlights the main strengths of the approach—i.e. *distinguishability, categorizability, travelability*, and *versatility*—and a section that compares it to other approaches. The chapter is finished with a short conclusion.

An Ideational Approach to Populism

The argument that ideational definitions of populism date back to the first studies of populism, and have recently become most popular in the field, requires some explanation and qualification. In addition to the many studies that explicitly define populism as an ideology, numerous studies do not include clear definitions, but nevertheless employ implicitly ideational understandings of populism. For example, in one of the first books on the topic, *Errors of Populism*, Hermon Craven, while never explicitly defining the concept, aims to correct "the teachings of Populism as set forth by representative party leaders" (1896: 4). Other early authors include (an undefined) populism in lists of one or more established ideologies, such as anarchism and socialism (e.g. McCormick, 1898; Platt, 1896).

Until the 1960s much of the academic literature that used the term populism was single country studies, most notably of the United States. Authors would use the term exclusively as a descriptor of a specific movement, particularly the US Populist movement and US People's Party, leaving the concept of populism largely undefined and mostly useless outside of that particular geographical and historical context. The consequences of this disparate study of populism were painfully clear in the seminal edited volume *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics* (Ionescu and Gellner, 1969), which featured a bewildering range of definitions of populism. Among them, however, was also probably the first attempt at a generic definition of populism as an ideology (McRae, 1969). Since (p. 29) then, many scholars have defined populism as a set of ideas, but few have provided comprehensive discussions on the topic (though see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013a; Rensmann, 2006; Stanley, 2008).

In addition to those who define populism explicitly as an ideology, there are many scholars who use an ideational approach, even if they shy away from using the term ideology. Many scholars, for example, follow the late Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau (1977; 2005) in defining populism essentially as a type of political "discourse" (e.g. Howarth, 2005; Stavrakakis, 2004). Others define populism as a "language" (e.g. Kazin, 2005), "mode of identification" (e.g. Panizza, 2005b), "political frame" (e.g. Lee, 2006), or "political style" (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014). Whatever the specific term scholars within the ideational approach use, all consider populism to be, first and foremost, about ideas in general, and ideas about "the people" and "the elite" in particular.

The Definition

In his famous chapter "A syndrome, not a doctrine: some elementary theses on populism," Peter Wiles wrote: "Its ideology is loose, and attempts to define it exactly arouse derision and hostility" (1969: 167). While this might still be true to some extent, Margaret Canovan's seminal book *Populism* (1981) has significantly decreased the derision and hostility. Ironically, while Canovan argues that there is no one thing called populism, she

also identified the key ideological features that are central to most (ideational) definitions in the field.

My own definition of populism includes most of these features. It defines populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people" (Mudde 2004: 543). This definition includes four "core concepts," which are both central to and constitutive of the populist ideology (Ball, 1999: 391) and require more detailed discussions: ideology, the people, the elite, and general will. Before I discuss these four core concepts, however, an investigation of the essence of the populist division, *morality*, is in order.

Several ideologies are based upon a fundamental opposition between the people and the elite. However, whereas in socialism this opposition is based on the concept of class (Marx and Engels, 1998 [1848]) and in nationalism on the concept of nation (e.g. Hobsbawn, 1990), in populism the opposition is based on the concept of morality. Even within their own nation populists see a fundamental opposition between "the people" and "the elite." And while they may have different socio-economic interests, this is not because of class, a concept that populism deems at best secondary, but because of morality.

The essence of the people is their purity, in the sense that they are "authentic," while the elite are corrupt, because they are not authentic. Purity and authenticity are not (p. 30) defined in (essentially) ethnic or racial terms, but in moral terms. It is about "doing the right thing," which means doing what is right for all the people. This is possible, because populism considers "the people" to be a homogeneous category. By determining the main opposition to be between the *pure* people and the *corrupt* elite, populism presupposes that the elite comes from the same group as the people, but have willingly chosen to betray them, by putting the special interests and inauthentic morals of the elite over those of the people. Because the distinction is based on morality and not class or nation, millionaires like Silvio Berlusconi (Italy) or ethnic minorities like Alberto Fujimori (Peru) can be considered more authentic representatives of the people than leaders with a more common socio-economic status or a majority ethnic background (see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

Ideology

The most important, as well as the most controversial, concept in the ideational approach is ideology. Just like populism, "(i)deology is a word that evokes strong emotional responses" (Freeden, 2003: 1). Much of the debate about the usefulness of the concept of ideology is, ironically perhaps, ideological. The term ideology is used here in an inclusive way, i.e. as "a body of normative and normative-related ideas about the nature of man and

society as well as the organization and purposes of society" (Sainsbury, 1980: 8). Ideologies, as Michael Freeden (2003: 2) has convincingly argued, "map the political and social worlds for us."

More specifically, populism is a "thin" or "thin-centered" ideology (e.g. Abts and Rummens, 2007; Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). Thin or thin-centered ideologies do not possess the same level of intellectual refinement and consistency as "thick" or "full" ideologies, such as socialism or liberalism.[2] Instead, they exhibit "a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts" (Freeden, 1998: 750). Consequently, thin ideologies have a more limited ambition and scope than thick ideologies; they do not formulate "a broad menu of solutions to major socio-political issues" (Freeden, 2003: 96). For example, while populism speaks to the main division in society (between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite"), and offers general advice for the best way to conduct politics (i.e. in line with "the general will of the people"), it offers few specific views on political institutional or socio-economic issues.[3]

Reflecting the larger academic community to a large extent, various populism scholars within the ideational approach have serious practical and (meta-)theoretical problems with the term ideology. Although often using almost identical definitions in terms of substance, they explicitly reject the term ideology. Instead, some provide no alternative term (e.g. Hakhverdian and Koop, 2007; Linden, 2008), while others prefer to define populism as essentially claims-making (Bonikowski and Gidron, 2016), a communication style (e.g. Jagers and Walgrave, 2007), discourse (e.g. Lowndes, 2008; Panizza, 2005a), (discursive) frame (e.g. Aslanidis, 2016; Caiani and Della Porta, 2011), political appeal (e.g. Deegan-Krause and Haughton, 2009), political argument (e.g. Bimes and Mulroy, 2004), (p. 31) political style (e.g. Moffitt, 2016; Moffitt and Tormey, 2014), or rhetoric (e.g. de la Torre, 2010; Kazin, 1995). Many of these authors have a general theoretical aversion to the use of the concept of ideology, arguing that it is too inflexible and monolithic (e.g. Caiani and Della Porta, 2011) or, in line with rational choice theory, that political actors always, in the end, act strategically.

Other populism scholars have no theoretical problems with the concept of ideology, but reject the term specifically for the case of populism. They argue that while populists use a populist *discourse*, they do not really believe in it—often in sharp contrast to their nationalism and xenophobia, which are considered to be genuine ideological features (e.g. Mammone, 2009). Uwe Backes and Eckhard Jesse (1998: 24) literally describe populism as "a concept to gain power" (*Machteroberungskonzept*). This argument is somewhat similar to the front-stage versus back-stage discussion in the literature on extreme right parties (Van Donselaar, 1991: 16–17), which also assumes that these particular politicians are insincere. But whereas right-wing extremists are alleged to say less than they really believe in, populists are supposed to say more. In essence, populists are accused of saying whatever the people want to hear in an opportunistic attempt to gain popularity.

Clearly, it is unscientific to simply presume that *certain* politicians lie—or, to put it more neutrally, act purely strategically—and others do not. The authenticity of their populism should be an empirical question rather than a theoretical assumption. After all, it can be established empirically. For example, if the ideology of so-called populist actors includes key elitist or pluralist features too, it can be concluded that populism is at best a relatively weak ideological feature. Similarly, if a populist comes to power and either drops her or his populist ideology or implements clearly anti-populist measures, one can convincingly argue that her or his populism was merely a strategic tool to gain power. However, given that few populists ever gain the necessary power to fully implement the policies they want, the distinction between ideology and discourse/strategy is fairly irrelevant in most empirical studies of "real existing populism" (see also Havlík and Pinková, 2012: 20).[4]

In the end, whether or not populism is defined as a full ideology rather than a looser set of ideas, centered around the fundamental opposition between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite," is in most cases of secondary importance to the research question and often impossible to determine empirically. In essence, the various definitions within the ideational approach share a clear core, which both holds them together and sets them apart from other approaches to populism.

The People

The key core concept of populism is, obviously, "the people." Even the other core concepts, "the elite" and the "general will," take their meaning from it—as being its opposite and its expression, respectively.

Much attention and criticism in the literature has been directed at the concept of the people. Many authors have argued that the people do not really exist and are a mere (p. 32) construction of the populists. This is certainly true, but this has also been convincingly argued of core concepts of other ideologies, like class (e.g. Sartori, 1990) and nation (e.g. Brubaker, 1996). Obviously, history has taught us that the fact that core concepts of main ideologies are based on "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) has not made them less relevant in actual politics and societies.

What sets the people apart from class or nation, according to some critics, is that it has no real content at all. This critique is largely a response to Laclau's influential work on populism, which refers to the concept of the people (and therefore also the elite) as "empty signifiers" (Laclau, 1977). But while the signifier is certainly very flexible, in my ideological approach it is not completely empty: first of all, as populism is essentially based on a *moral* divide, the people are "pure"; and while purity is a fairly vague term, and the specific understanding is undoubtedly culturally determined, it does provide some content to the signifier.

Moreover, as Paul Taggart has implicitly suggested with his concept of "the heartland," despite also referring to "the 'empty heart' of populism" (2000: 4), the concept of the people refers to "an idealized conception of the community" (2004: 274). This means that, at least if populists want to become politically relevant, they will have to define the people in terms of some of the key features of the self-identification of the targeted community. For instance, no American populist will describe the people as atheist and no West European populist will define the people as Muslim. In other words, the populist's perception of the people is usually related to the self-perception (or self-idealization) of the targeted people.

Some authors have distinguished different meanings of the people (e.g. Canovan, 2005; Hermet, 1989). They point out that individual populists have referred to the people in terms of the working class, the common people, and the nation. The reason for this differentiation is external to populism, however. In the real world most populists combine populism with (features of) one or more other ideologies. So, while populism merely defines the people as pure, the accompanying "host" ideology can add an additional dimension—such as class in the case of "social populism" (e.g. March, 2011) and nation in "national populism" (e.g. Taguieff, 1995).

The Elite

Although the elite is the anti-thesis of the people, it has received much less theoretical attention in the populism literature. Many scholars seem to imply that the elite is simply defined *ex negativo*. While this is true in theory, it does not always hold in practice. Theoretically, populism distinguishes the people and the elite on the basis of just one dimension, i.e. morality. This pits the *pure* people against the *corrupt* elite—or, in Manichean terms, the *good* people versus the *evil* elite (e.g. Hawkins, 2009). In practice, populists combine populism with other ideologies and apply different meanings to the people. Populists using class or commonness in their definition of the people will normally also use these criteria for the elite. For example, American conservative (p. 33) populists pit the common people against the "latte-drinking, sushi-eating, Volvo-driving, *New York Times*-reading, Hollywood-loving" liberal elite (in Nicholson and Segura 2012: 369).

But this is not always the case with populists who combine populism and nationalism. In fact, most nativist populists distinguish different groups on the basis of their nativism and their populism. Ethnic minorities and immigrants, for example, are primarily excluded from the people (i.e. the nation) on the basis of *ethnic* rather than moral criteria—a consequence of nativism rather than populism. At the same time, the (cultural, economic, political) elite are primarily excluded on the basis of *moral* rather than ethnic criteria—based on populism rather than nativism. Even when nativist populists primarily attack the elite for putting the interests of ethnic minorities over those of the "native" majority, the rejection of the elite is first and foremost moral, not ethnic (e.g. Mudde, 2007: chapter 3). An exception to this relatively general rule can be found in Latin American "ethnopopulism," which more fully merges nativism and populism (e.g. Madrid, 2008).

For example, Bolivian president Evo Morales has regularly pitted the indigenous pure people against the mestizo corrupt elite (e.g. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Ramirez, 2009).

General Will

Essential to populist politics is the concept of a general will, closely linked to the homogenous interpretation of the people. Based on a kind of vulgar Rousseauian argument, populists argue that politics should follow the general will of the people. After all, as the people are pure and homogeneous, and all internal divisions are rejected as artificial or irrelevant, they have the same interests and preferences. The belief in a general will of the people is linked to two important concepts in the populist ideology: common sense and special interests.

Populists often claim to base their policies on common sense, i.e. the result of the honest and logical priorities of the (common) people (e.g. Betz, 1998; Ridge, 1973). Anyone who opposes common sense is, by definition, devious and part of the corrupt elite. By arguing to propose "common sense solutions" to complex problems, populists often implicitly also argue that the elite creates problems and is out of touch with the people. Moreover, they can present themselves as the voice of the people (*vox populi*), expressing *its* general will, and as non- or reluctantly political (Taggart, 2000). After all, common sense solutions are neither ideological nor partisan, they follow "logically" from the general will.

Whereas the populist's common sense solutions follow the general will of (all) the people, the elite's proposed solutions are representations of "special interests" (Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 1999). Given that populism considers the people as homogeneous, any *group* of people is seen as either artificially created or irrelevant for politics. Hence, every call for policies that benefit specific groups, even if it is to remove existing inequalities (Sawer, 2004), is denounced as "special interest politics." More broadly, the elite is (p. 34) painted as the voice of special interests, in opposition to the populists, who are the genuine voice of the people.

Strengths of the Approach

The main strengths of the ideational approach in general, and of the specific definition of populism presented here in particular, are: (1) it sets clear boundaries, i.e. there is a "non-populism" (*distinguishability*); (2) it allows for the construction of logical taxonomies (*categorizability*); (3) it enables cross-national and cross-regional "travel" (*travelability*); and (4) it can be applied at different levels of analysis (*versatility*). I will illustrate the various strengths by drawing upon both theoretical arguments and empirical studies.

Distinguishability

One of the main reasons that some scholars have rejected the concept of populism is that it is believed to be too vague. The argument is that the distinction between populists and non-populists is made politically, and that most definitions are too general or vague to apply in a scientific manner. This critique has also been raised against the definition mentioned above, among others by journal reviewers, but it is unfounded. Following Giovanni Sartori (1970: 1039), who argues that the key to any concept is "the logic of either-or," this definition of populism is able to distinguish populists from non-populists. In fact, there are two clear opposites of populism: elitism and pluralism.

Unlike democracy, which is often seen as "the mirror of populism" (Panniza, 2005a, elitism is the true mirror-image of populism. Most notably, it shares with populism the Manichean division between the two antagonistic and homogeneous groups, the people and the elite. Consequently, both elitism and populism reject essential aspects of liberal democracy, particularly the politics of compromise. After all, compromise can only lead to the corruption of the pure. But in contrast to populism, elitism considers the elite to be pure and virtuous, and the people to be impure and corrupt. Hence, much elitism is anti-democratic, while democratic elitists only want a minimal role for the people in the political system (e.g. Schumpeter, 1976). Though elitism has lost most of its popularity among the masses, and even among the political elites, in the twentieth century, it had informed most major political ideologies and philosophers until then (from Plato to José Ortega y Gasset).

Even more fundamentally, pluralism is a direct opposite of populism. Where populism sees the people as essentially homogeneous, pluralism believes them to be internally divided in different groups. And, whereas pluralism appreciates societal divisions and sees politics as "the art of compromise," populism (and elitism) discards societal divisions, denounces social groups as "special interests," and rejects compromise as (p. 35) defeat. By considering the main struggle of politics in moral terms, any compromise with the elite will corrupt the people, making them less or even impure. Unlike elitism, which finds few relevant proponents in contemporary democracies, pluralism is a key feature of liberal democracy and is an essential ideological feature of most political ideologies (including Christian democracy, social democracy, liberalism).

Distinguishability also plays a role at a more concrete level. Many studies define populism in light of a specific actor or movement and apply the concept only to that particular case. While the concept may accurately capture that specific actor/movement, or group of actors/movements, it might also apply to many actors/movements that are not studied and that are not considered populist. In this case the definitions are not so broad that they have no negative cases, but they do include cases that are considered to be both populist and non-populist. A famous historical example is Isaiah Berlin's discussion of the work of Johann Gottfried Herder, in which Berlin defines populism as "the belief in the value of belonging to a group or culture" (in McRae, 1969: 156). A more recent example is the

definition of populism as "the election of a personalistic outsider who mobilizes voters with an anti-establishment appeal" (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013: 107). Finally, this is also an important weakness of the many definitions of populism as a highly emotional and simplistic discourse that is directed at the "gut feelings" of the people (e.g. Bergsdorf, 2000), given that sloganesque politics constitute the core of political campaigning, left, right, and center (Mudde, 2004).

In contrast, the ideational approach of populism has proven to be measurable and able to distinguish populism and non-populism in various empirical studies. This applies to both qualitative and quantitative studies. For example, using a qualitative approach I distinguished between populist and non-populist radical right parties (Mudde, 2007) and Jan Jagers (2006) was able to show empirically that, while several Flemish parties shared *some* populist features, only the VB shared all features, and could therefore be rightly classified as a populist party. In addition, quantitative studies of party ideology have found clear distinctions between populist and non-populist actors (e.g. Hawkins, 2009) as well as more and less populist parties (e.g. Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011).

In short, the ideational approach to populism (presented here) meets one of the most important rules of conceptualization, i.e. being able to distinguish between populism and non-populism (e.g. Sartori, 1970). This sets it apart from some other popular definitions of populism, most notably the (recent) discursive approach of Ernesto Laclau (2005) and Chantal Mouffe (2005) as well as the "campaign approach," in which populism is defined as the use of "common" language and symbols or as overpromising/saying whatever the people want to hear (which would better be termed demagogy).

In addition to meeting the "either-or" criteria of conceptualization, the ideational approach can also be used in empirical studies that want to establish distinctions of a "more-less" nature. Through both qualitative and quantitative analysis we can measure the extent of populism of a political actor or campaign (see what follows). However, in line with the Sartorian understanding of conceptualization, we should *first* establish whether or not an actor is populist *before* we establish, within the subset of populist (p. 36) actors, who is more or less populist. This is not to say that non-populist actors never use populist discourse, but rather that it makes little sense to label political actors who have a clear pluralist ideology but occasionally use a few populist frames in their campaigns a "weak populist."

Categorizability

In her seminal book *Populism* Canovan (1981: 289) presented "a typology with seven compartments, including three types of agrarian populism—'farmers,' 'peasant,' and 'intellectuals'—and four of political populism: populist dictatorship, populist democracy, reactionary populism, and politicians' populism." Paradoxically, she concluded that while different types of populism could be distinguished, populism per se could not.

> And one important reason why the temptation to force all populist phenomena into one category should be resisted, is that the various populisms we have distinguished are not just different varieties of the same kind of thing: they are in many cases different sorts of things, and not directly comparable at all. (1981: 298)

The argument that a concept cannot be defined, but that different types of that concept can nevertheless be distinguished, makes little sense in mainstream social science, which is based on classical concepts (see Sartori, 1970). However, recent scholarship has criticized the rigidity of classical concepts and has suggested the use of more flexible concepts, such as family resemblance and radial or diminished subtypes (e.g. Collier and Mahon, 1993; Goertz, 2005). Some authors have also made this argument with regard to the concept of populism (e.g. Howarth, 2005; Smilov and Krastev, 2008).[5]

Within the paradigm of classical concepts,[6] a taxonomy of populism requires at least two things: (1) a clear definition of populism; and (2) each type of populism should include all features of the concept of populism plus (at least) one other feature (Sartori, 1970). Such a taxonomy entails that populism is the primary, not the secondary, concept. In other words, populism is the classifier, not the qualifier. In the latter case, populism is used as an adjective (i.e. populist), which serves to qualify another (prime) concept.[7] The use of populism as an adjective is very popular in the field, and some authors argue that it is the best or even the only correct use of the concept (e.g. Cammack, 2000; Deegan-Krause, 2009; Leaman, 2004; Sikk, 2009).

Most studies of populism do not address populism in general, but a specific type of populism. Examples include, among many more, authoritarian populism (Hall, 1985), civic populism (Boyte, 2003), presidential populism (Bimes and Mulroy, 2004), reactionary populism (Ziai, 2004), Republican populism (Shogan, 2007), and xenophobic populism (e.g. DeAngelis, 2003). The popularity of the use of "populism with adjectives" reflects undoubtedly the fact that populism is a relatively narrow ideology, which rarely exists by itself. Populist actors almost always combine populism with other ideological features (e.g. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013b; Taggart, 2000). As discussed in the preceding, this is not uncommon for thin-centered ideologies.

(p. 37) In the case of populism, a combination with other collectivist ideologies, thin or thick, is most logical. Today, most relevant populist actors combine the ideology with nationalism (e.g. populist radical right parties in Europe, see Mudde, 2007) or socialism (left-wing populism in Latin America, see Remmer, 2012). In fact, populism is so often combined with nationalism that some authors argue that nationalism is a defining feature of populism (e.g. Collier and Collier, 1991), or vice versa (e.g. Mansfield and Snyder, 2002). But populism can also be combined with individualist ideologies, such as (neo)liberalism, as we have recently seen in Europe (Betz, 1994; Pauwels, 2010) and Latin America (Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1999).

While these cases of "populism with adjectives" provide more precise identifications of the particular object of study, they often do little to relate them to the broader phenomenon and study of populism. The best way to achieve this is to construct a proper typology, i.e. one that distinguishes different types on the basis of one or more dimensions, connecting them in a clear and consistent manner. Ideally, typologies are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive; in other words, they are able to accommodate each case, and each case only fits one type (e.g. Collier et al., 2008; Elman, 2005; Sartori, 1970).

The ideational approach is particularly suited to construct typologies of populism; in particular those that can be used in line with Sartori's famous ladder of abstraction (Sartori, 1970). The one most often used in the literature, which is of a purely *ideological* nature, distinguishes between left-wing populism and right-wing populism. Unfortunately, this typology is seldom theoretically developed, and most studies focus only on right-wing populism, merely implying the existence of a left-wing populism (for an exception, see Hartleb, 2004). At a theoretical level, the best distinction between left and right is probably put forward by Norbert Bobbio (1996), who discriminates on the basis of the relative propensity toward egalitarianism. Concretely, left-wing populism mostly combines populism with some form of socialism (e.g. March, 2011; Remmer, 2012), while right-wing populism mainly constitutes combinations of populism and neoliberalism and/ or nationalism (e.g. Betz, 1994).

Another explicitly ideological typology distinguishes exclusionary and inclusionary populism. This typology is based on the main *effects* of the particular ideologies of populist actors, which are often combinations of populism and other ideological features. Following the pioneering work of Dani Filc (2010), we can distinguish between three dimensions of exclusion/inclusion: material, political, and symbolic (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013b). The material dimension refers to the distribution of state resources, both monetary and non-monetary, to specific groups in society. In political terms, exclusion and inclusion refer essentially to the two key dimensions of democracy identified by Robert Dahl (1971; 1989): political participation and public contestation (see, in more detail, Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). The symbolic dimension essentially alludes to the ingroup-outgroup differentiation of populism, i.e. setting the boundaries of "the people" and, *ex negativo*, "the elite."

Interestingly, the most popular distinction in the literature on Latin American populism, which is (still) dominated by organizational definitions (e.g. Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 2001), is also essentially ideological—even if it is often portrayed in terms of *economic policy* rather than political ideology. Whereas (classical) populism (p. 38) supported a specific redistributive economic program (import-substituting industrialization or ISI), so-called neopopulism combines populism with neoliberal economic policies (e.g. Philip, 2000; Weyland, 1999), and contemporary left populism with more or less socialist economic policies (e.g. Arnson and de la Torre, 2013).

Travelability

The essence of the "travelling problem" (Sartori, 1970: 1033) is that many definitions are geographically or temporally specific. This is also a major problem in the study of populism, which is highly segregated in terms of disciplines and regions of study. Some studies define populism so specifically that the concept applies only to one case. This is particularly prevalent in historical studies of American populism, both its historical and contemporary variants. Some Latin American studies are similarly idiosyncratic. For example, Héctor Díaz-Polanco and Stephen Gorman (1982: 42) define populism as "the ideology and program of the modern neoindigenistas."

Most definitions of populism are not idiosyncratic, but neither provide "*empirical* universals" (Sartori, 1970: 1035). Some authors define populism in such a way that it is closely linked to a specific period. An extreme example is offered by Edward Gibson (1997: 340), who defines populism as "denoting parties that incorporated labor during the historical and developmental period mentioned above." Slightly less specific, but still very restrictive, is Lenin's definition of populism as the anti-capitalist protest of "small immediate producers" (Walicki, 1969: 65). Other definitions have strongly national or regional characteristics. Finally, several definitions have a combination of regional and temporal specifics. In all cases, the travelability of the concept is restricted to specific geographical areas or historic periods.

The ideational approach has been successfully applied in studies of populism all across the globe. First and foremost, it is increasingly dominating studies of European populism, particularly in empirical political science. The proposed definition has been used in various studies of both left- and right-wing populism in Europe (e.g. March, 2011; Mudde, 2007). In addition, very similar ideational and ideological definitions inform most other studies of European populism (e.g. Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Stanley, 2008) and a growing group of studies of Latin American populism, in particular following the influential work of Kirk Hawkins (2009; 2010).

Most importantly, from the perspective of travelability, the ideational approach has been used effectively in the few truly comparative cross-regional studies in the field (e.g. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013b). The best example of this is the edited volume *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012), which includes eight case studies by a total of ten political scientists (excluding the editors) using this exact definition, from Eastern Europe, North America, South America, and Western Europe.

(p. 39) Versatility

Versatility is the last major strength of the ideational approach. Most approaches of populism can only be applied to a limited group of political actors, i.e. political elites.

They reduce populism to a purely supply-side factor of politics. In other words, populism is something that is adopted by leaders, parties, or states. It does not exist at the mass level, i.e. as an attitude of the individual.

The ideational approach has been applied in a broad variety of empirical studies of populism at the elite and the mass level. As is the case for most other approaches of populism, the bulk of the work is qualitative and aimed at the elite level, i.e. political leaders, movements, and parties (e.g. Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2008; March, 2011; Mudde, 2007; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). But the ideational approach has also been used in quantitative studies of political elites (e.g. Cranmer, 2011; Jagers and Walgrave, 2007; Vasilopoulou et al., 2014). The most influential such study is Kirk Hawkin's (2009; 2010) analysis of presidential speeches in Latin America, which has recently been expanded to include East and West European cases. The ideological definition presented here was also successfully applied in various quantitative content analyses of party literature in the West European context (e.g. Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011).

Importantly, the ideational approach of populism is (so far) unique in its applicability to quantitative studies at the mass level. The first empirical study of populist attitudes at the mass level was published more than forty-five years ago (Axelrod, 1967). It used an ideational approach of populism, although the operationalization was very specific in both geographical and temporal terms. In the last couple of years several new studies have applied ideational definitions very similar to the one presented here to gauge the spread of populist attitudes at the individual level (e.g. Akkerman et al., 2015; Hawkins et al., 2012; Stanley, 2011).

The important advantage of this versatility is that it enables the integration of very different types of populism studies. For example, we can now study whether people with populist attitudes disproportionately support populist parties (e.g. Akkerman et al., 2015), whether countries with more successful populist parties also have more populist citizens, or whether populist attitudes relate strongly to nationalist and socialist attitudes. In other words, the ideational approach allows us to study both the supply-side and the demand-side of populist politics.

Comparing the Approaches

In this last section I will shortly compare the ideational approach to three other influential approaches: Ernesto Laclau's (original) discursive approach, Kurt Weyland's organizational approach, and Pierre Ostiguy's performative (or cultural) approach. My ambition is not to be comprehensive or exhaustive in the comparison, but rather to (p. 40) highlight the most fundamental differences between the ideological approach and

the main alternatives, to enable scholars of populism to make a more informed choice for their specific study.

Ernesto Laclau is often considered the doyen of populism studies and his influential, but highly complex, discursive approach, laid out in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (1977), continues to inform many studies of populism today (e.g. Azzarello, 2011; Palonen, 2009; Stavrakakis, 2004; Žižek, 2006). Essentially, Laclau sees populism as a discursive strategy of political elites to provide meaning to the term "the people" (and "the elite") to maximize popular support. As he considers the concept of the people as an "empty signifier," it can be filled with any specific content. The fundamental distinction with the ideational approach presented here is that Laclau's approach is essentially a highly abstract, normative, universal theory in which "the people" has no specific content. In contrast, most of those who adhere to the ideational approach define populism in a specific manner, in which the key opposition is moral, and it is empirically oriented, positivist, and aimed at developing mid-range theoretical levels.[8]

The organizational approach defines populism, fundamentally, as a particular type of popular mobilization, in which leaders relate directly to their followers (e.g. Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 2001). The unmediated relationship between leader and followers can be a result of the lack of a relevant formal organization (e.g. Alberto Fujimori in Peru; see Roberts, 1995) or a choice to circumvent the formal organization (e.g. Tony Blair in the UK; see Mair, 2002). The ideational approach does not deny the importance of leadership or organizational structure, but acknowledges that populism has come in many guises, from leaderless movements like the contemporary Tea Party to well-developed political parties with populist leaders such as the French National Front (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014; 2017). While charismatic leadership is, virtually by definition, an important part of the explanation of popular support for populist actors, it is neither a necessary condition for electoral breakthrough nor a sufficient condition for electoral persistence (Mudde, 2007). Theoretically, the ideological approach suggests that populists are skeptical of both strong leaders and strong organizations, as both can corrupt the power of the people. Empirically, however, populist actors often include charismatic leaders and relatively weak formal organizations. In short, populism has an elective affinity with charismatic leadership and weak formal organizations, but these are not defining features of populism.

Finally, Pierre Ostiguy's (2009) cultural (or "performative") approach defines politics, in part, on the basis of a high-low axis, which essentially refers to the ways in which political actors relate to people. The high-low axis consists of two closely related sub-dimensions: the socio-cultural dimension "encompasses manners, demeanors, ways of speaking and dressing, vocabulary, and tastes displayed in public" and the political-cultural dimension refers to "forms of political leadership and modes of decision-making" (2009: 5–9). Populism is defined as low on both sub-dimensions, which means that populists behave and speak in a popular manner and emphasize strong personalistic leadership. There is

no doubt that populist actors defined by the ideational (p. 41) approach most often fit the low pole of politics on both sub-dimensions. However, this is not always the case (e.g. U.S. People's Party and Pim Fortuyn on the political-cultural dimension).

Conclusion

The ideational approach has gained significant popularity in the study of populism in recent years. As the number of populism studies has exploded, the proportion of scholars using relatively similar definitions of populism has increased rather than decreased. Although the organizational approach to populism retains part of its popularity, most notably in studies of Latin American politics, the ideational approach is increasingly used in studies of populism across the globe. Moreover, the ideational approach has proven to be much more versatile than the other approaches, allowing for the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods as well as research into the demand-side and the supply-side of populist politics.

My specific definition of populism is just one of many very similar definitions within the broader ideational approach, which considers populism essentially as a set of ideas—whether or not they constitute an ideology or "only" a discourse or style is of secondary importance for many research questions. At this stage scholarship of populism would profit from focusing more on the many similarities between various ideational definitions than on (over)emphasizing the few differences. This can foster the development of cumulative knowledge across historical periods and geographical areas, which will further the knowledge of populism in general, and of specific populist actors in particular.

If most of us can agree that populism is essentially a set of ideas, connected to an essential struggle between "the good people" and "the corrupt elite," we should also find common ground on the idea that the cultural paradigm can probably inform the debate on populism much more than the rational choice and institutional approaches that dominate mainstream political science and, although to a lesser degree, sociology. After all, it is the national and political cultures in which populist actors mobilize that provide a better understanding of the conditions under which people come to see political reality through the lenses of populism and that can help us better explain which *type* of populism is successful under which conditions.

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Notes:

(1) An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the workshop "The Concept of Populism," Brighton (UK), June 21, 2013. I want to thank the participants of the workshop, and particularly the editors of the Handbook, for their helpful comments and critiques.

(2) In more recent work Freeden (2003) distinguishes between "macro-ideologies" and "micro-ideologies," which roughly equate to his earlier distinction between "thin" and "thick" ideologies.

(3) In the ideological approach, in sharp contrast to the economic approach (e.g. Acemoglu et al., 2013; Dornbusch and Edwards, 1991; Sachs, 1989), there is no specific economic model of populism. Consequently, as can be seen in Latin America, populism can be combined with both neoliberal and redistributive economic policies (e.g. Roberts, 1995; Weyland, 1999). Similarly, populism can be combined with another thin ideology, like nationalism, and a thick ideology, like socialism.

(4) Empirical studies on the relevance of populism to populists in power have come to opposing conclusions. While some studies show that populism remains a dominant feature in power (e.g. Albertazzi and McDonnell, 2015; Levitsky and Loxton, 2013; Ruzza and Fella, 2009), others argue that it plays little role once populists are in power (e.g. Rooduijn et al., 2014).

(5) Although they don't explicitly use the terminology, Jagers and Walgrave's (2007) four-fold typology of populism is based on a radial concept of populism.

(6) The argumentation for my choice for classical concepts falls well beyond the scope of this paper (but see Mudde, 2007: chapter 1).

(7) Oddly enough, Canovan's taxonomy combines the two: five of the seven are truly types of populism, but two are populist types of other concepts (i.e. populist *dictatorship* and populist *democracy*).

(8) I want to thank Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser and Pierre Ostiguy for helping me better understand Laclau's discursive approach and the main differences with my ideological approach.

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