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Political Leadership and Populism

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CHAPTER 25

POPULISM AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

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1 Introduction

Like so many terms commonly used in the social sciences, populism is an essentially contested concept. While many scholars employ the concept of populism to refer (exclusively) to radical right parties in Europe, such as the Northern League in Italy or Austria’s Freedom Party, others use the term to allude to radical social movements, such as the Occupy Wall Street and Tea Party movements in the United States. At the same time, populism is widely used in Latin America to draw attention not only to a ‘dangerous’ type of economic development, characterized by the implementation of an unsustainable type of redistributive policies, but also to the formation of multi-class constituencies by powerful leaders exploiting anti-elitist sentiments. Moreover, populism has become a popular term used in political and public debates to taint political opponents; and sometimes to claim democratic credentials.

This short overview of different ways in which the concept of populism is employed reveals that defining populism is anything but simple. Nevertheless, many scholars argue that, above and beyond its diverse manifestations, a defining attribute of populism is its reliance on leaders able to mobilize the masses and/or conduct their parties with the aim of enacting radical reforms. From Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez to Dutch politician Geert Wilders, populism seems always guided by a strong person. After all, by talking like ‘the common people’, populist actors have the ability to present themselves as the voice of a (silent) majority, whose ideas and interests are not being addressed by the establishment.

Although most manifestations of populism do give rise to usually flamboyant and strong political leaders, the link between political leadership and populism is not straightforward. In fact, it would be erroneous to equate populism with charismatic or strong leadership. In this chapter we will try to shed light on this complex relationship, arguing, in the main, that neither charismatic nor strong leadership is inherent to populism. While it is true that these elements are relevant in most manifestations of populism, we maintain that populism is first and foremost a Manichean world view or ideology that assumes that society is characterized by a distinction between ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’. While this ideology has often been professed, most successfully, by charismatic or strong political leaders, it is inherently about the belief of different groups in society and not a type of political leadership for society.

This chapter consists of six sections. We begin by offering an overview of the most common conceptual approaches that have been developed in the scholarly debate. Here we examine in particular the place that leadership plays in the definitions of populism, before developing our own conceptual approach. In the following section we present some historical and contemporary examples of the relationship between populism and leadership. We then argue that charismatic leadership is a facilitator rather that a defining feature of populism and analyse the conceptions of democracy that populist actors and constituencies tend to favour. We subsequently deal with the complex relationship between populism, leadership, and gender, focusing in particular on the Latin American phenomenon of caudilismo. Finally, we pay attention to the oft-ignored phenomenon of leaderless populism, which is particularly common in the USA. We close the chapter with a short conclusion.

2 Defining Populism

Before we offer an overview of different concepts of populism, two caveats are in order. First, presenting and discussing all the definitions of populism that have been developed in the scholarly debate would be a titanic effort. The problem is not only the multitude of definitions at hand, but also the fact that most scholars tend to employ the notion of populism because of its rhetorical force rather than its analytical leverage. Second, given that almost all concepts of populism have been developed by scholars specializing in a particular case (for example, Peronism) and/or region (for example, Western Europe or North America), the existing definitions usually do not ‘travel’ well when it comes to studying populism in different places and times. It is only recently that scholarship has paid attention to this problem and tried to develop a concept able to grasp the common core of all manifestations of populism. With these caveats in mind, we will refer to the four most common conceptual approaches, according to which populism is defined as a discourse, a pathology, a style, or a strategy.

When we talk about populism as a discourse, we are dealing with a conceptual approach that emphasizes that populism should be defined as a set of ideas. From this angle, populism is first and foremost a mental map that holds that powerful elites are acting against the interests of the people. Take, for instance, the position of Michael Kazin (1995: 1), a well-known scholar on US populism, who defines the latter as ‘a language
whose speakers conceive of ordinary people as a noble assemblage not bounded narrowly by class, view their elite opponents as self-serving and undemocratic, and seek to mobilize the former against the latter. As this quotation shows, the discursive approach conceives of populism as a particular interpretation about the nature of the political world, in which the 'common people' are being exploited by the establishment.

Another option is to define populism as a pathology, or, to be more specific, as a democratic malformation or disease. Often described in medical and psychological language, populism is seen as a dangerous political force that not only criticizes the existence of an inevitable gap between the governors and the governed, but also proposes irresponsible and even authoritarian solutions to overcome the problems that democracies tend to face. In this vein, Pierre Rosanvallon (2008: 265) argues that populism 'is a perversive inversion of the ideals and procedures of democracy', because it uses the notion of populist sovereignty and the principle of majority rule to attack the ideas, institutions, and practices of political representation. According to this view, the emergence of populism is directly related to the health of the democratic system.

A third conceptual approach, which is widespread in both the social sciences and the media, refers to populism as a particular political style, which helps politicians and parties to stay in tune with their constituencies by appealing to emotional clues, employing spin doctors, and proposing simplistic solutions to complex problems. According to this view, Tony Blair and his New Labour project in the UK are a prime example of contemporary populist leadership, since his government not only relied on plebiscitarian techniques of winning support from the electorate, but also exerted a massive top-down intervention within the Labour Party to avoid criticisms to the policies implemented by the Prime Minister (Mair 2002). Allegedly, this populist style of politics is becoming increasingly widespread in contemporary democracies, because it seems impossible to please the voters and win elections without showing a minimal degree of opportunism and demagogy.

Finally, some have argued that populism alludes not to a particular style of politics, but rather to a deliberate strategy employed by skilful political actors. For example, Kurt Weyland (2001: 14) defines populism as 'a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, institutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers: he developed this concept with the aim of explaining the prevalence of populism in Latin America, a region where many leaders win elections because of their capacity directly to mobilize the people, rather than by obtaining the support of political parties. Seen in this light, populism is a strategy that permits the rise of political entrepreneurs, who are able to form a coalition of a number of very heterogeneous social groups that blame the establishment for the country's social ills.

What do these different definitions tell us about the relationship between populism and leadership? At least the last two conceptual approaches assume that populism is directly linked to flamboyant and strong figures. In fact, those who define populism as a style or strategy are prone to argue that it is impossible to think of populism without strong leaders, in terms of their ability both to catch the attention of the people and to control the political organization behind them. This is particularly evident in the conceptualization of populism as a strategy, because here the idea is that a political actor develops a well-thought-out plan with the aim of seducing the electorate and bypassing the institutions that are at odds with his will. Interestingly, this idea also appears in the definition of populism as a pathology, although in a more indirect manner: the populist disease is usually incarnated by a strong leader, whose rise to power might well lead to the fall of democracy.

The link between populism and leadership is also present in the case of the discursive approach, since many are of the opinion that populism should be considered as an artificially constructed set of ideas, which is employed by political actors and/or organic intellectuals to manipulate society. It is worth noting, however, that not all scholars who adhere to the discursive approach share the idea that populism is an ideology constructed from above by strong and charismatic leaders. As Kirk Hawkins (2010) has pointed out, many people believe in the populist discourse and often have good reasons for doing so. Put in another way, under certain circumstances there is a real demand for populism, so that the leader is not the creator but rather the vehicle for the promotion and establishment of the populist set of ideas.

In line with the discursive approach, but in contrast to other definitions within this approach, we propose a minimal concept of populism, which fosters cross-regional and cross-temporal studies of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). Populism is defined as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic camps, "the pure people" and "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 is capable of avoiding the two main problems in comparative populism studies: conceptual travelling (that is, the application of concepts to new cases) and conceptual stretching (that is, the distortion that occurs when a concept does not fit the new cases). Indeed, most populist leaders and movements identified in the mainstream literature meet our definition.

By conceiving of populism as a 'thin-centered' ideology, we follow Michael Freedman's approach (1996), which is helpful for understanding the oft-alleged malleability of the concept. Indeed, populism should be seen as a Manichean world view that maintains a parasitic relationship with other concepts and ideologies. This is why populism can be both right-wing and left-wing. Populism has three core concepts: the people, the elite, and the general will. While the concepts of 'the people' and 'the elite' function like empty vessels that can be filled in various ways (that is, different manifestations of populism have different views regarding who does belong and does not belong to both the people and the elite), the notion of 'the general will' alludes to the very idea that all individuals as a whole unify their wills and are able to identify a common interest (Canovan 2005).

Finally, it is worth indicating that elitism and pluralism are the two direct opposites of this conceptualization of populism. Elitism shares populism's Manichean distinction between 'the elite' and 'the people', but assumes that the elite is intellectually and morally superior to the dangerous and vulgar people. Pluralism takes for granted that societies are composed of different individuals and groups, but is sceptical about the existence
of 'a unified will of the people'. These two direct opposites of populism—elitism and pluralism—are helpful to draw clear boundaries and foster empirical research. By way of illustration, although certain scholars have argued that Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, and Gerhard Schröder should be seen as populist actors (e.g. de Beus 2009), the definition advanced here contradicts this statement. After all, these leaders might have behaved opportunistically in certain occasions, but they supported pluralism and did not attack the establishment.

3 POPULISM AND LEADERSHIP IN TIME AND PLACE

Throughout time and space, populism has manifested itself in many different guises, not least in terms of political leadership. The two first populist movements, the Russian Narodniki and the US Populists, were very different, but both were characterized by the absence of a dominant leader (e.g. Taggart 2000). The Narodniki were essentially a small collective of urban intellectuals who moved to rural areas to be among 'the true people' (that is, the peasants), while the American Populists were a loose collection of mostly peasants who, in part, found political expression in the short-lived People's Party (1891–1908). Tellingly, rather than putting up one of its own leaders, the American Populists endorsed William Jennings Bryan as a 'fusion' candidate of both the People's Party and the Democratic Party for the presidential elections in 1896.

While no major populist leaders or movements have reappeared in Russia since the fall of the Narodniki, itself a fairly marginal phenomenon, populism has shown a remarkable capacity to re-emerge and take very different shapes in the USA. As Michael Kazin (1995) has pointed out, populist ideas are an important element of the American political culture, which have been used by many political actors across the twentieth century. However, at least since the mid-twentieth century, conservatives have been much more proactive than progressives in attacking 'the corrupt elite' and mobilizing 'the pure people'. A similar development can be noticed in Canada, where left-wing populism played an important role between the 1930s and 1960s, but since then right-wing populism has become predominant (Laycock 2005).

By contrast, European populism is a relatively new phenomenon, which has appeared only after the fall of the Berlin Wall in many countries. Before the 1980s there were probably only two very clear examples of populism in Europe: on the one hand, the populist peasant movements that appeared in several parts of Eastern Europe and the Balkans in the inter-war years, and, on the other hand, the populist movement led by Pierre Poujade in France in the 1950s. Both examples were different with regard to political leadership. While the Eastern European populist peasant movements relied on strong grass-roots networks, Poujade's populist movement was heavily dependent on his own figure.

Compared to the rest of the world, Latin America is probably the region with the richest tradition of populist leaders, movements, and parties. In fact, the scholarship of Latin American politics has identified three waves of populism in the region: classic populism of the 1930s and 1960s (for example, Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina and José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador), neo-liberal populism of the 1990s (for example, Alberto Fujimori in Peru and Fernando Collor de Mello in Brazil), and radical leftist populism since the beginning of the new millennium (for example, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela and Evo Morales in Bolivia). Although all these cases have employed the populist ideology, they show important variations concerning who belongs to 'the pure people' and who to 'the corrupt elite'. At the same time, these different populist experiences have supported not only divergent policy proposals, but also leftist and rightist political projects (de la Torre 2010).

In addition to these differences, one commonality among all forms of Latin American populism is the relevance of strong and powerful leaders, often referred to as caudillos in the academic and public debate. While populist movements and parties do exist in the region, individual leaders tend to play a key role, monopolizing power and portraying themselves as the incarnation of the 'unified will of the people'. In many cases the official party is nothing more than a shell, completely dependent upon and subjugated to the populist leader. A good example is former Peruvian president, Alberto Fujimori, who won three consecutive presidential elections by building a new party organization for each electoral cycle, showing that 'there could be no Fujimorismo without Fujimori' (Roberts 2006: 93). The few notable exceptions, in which populist parties outlive their original leader, include the Peronist Justicialist Party (PJ) in Argentina and the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) of Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre in Peru.

The predominance of populist leaders with subservient movements also seems prevalent in the new democracies in Africa and Asia (Mizuno and Phongpaichit 2009). A prime example is the former Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, whose Thais Loves Thais (TRT) party was officially disbanded in 2007, after Shinawatra himself had been ousted and exiled by a military coup. Since then, the unofficial successor, the For Thais Party (PTP), run by his sister Yingluck, has been his personal vehicle for indirect political power in Thailand. Similar successful populist politicians exist in Africa, most notably Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni and Zambian President Michael Sata. In just a few cases, populist leaders have emerged within established (non-populist) political parties, such as South African President Jacob Zuma (ANC), South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun (MDP), and Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian (DPP).

In most contemporary Western democracies, with the notable exception of the United States, populism finds its most prominent expressions in political parties, often built around a prominent leader. In many cases these dominant leaders are also (among) the party founders, such as Pauline Hanson and One Nation in Australia, Jean-Marie Le Pen and the National Front (FN) in France, Silvio Berlusconi and Forza Italia in Italy, and Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom (PVV) in the Netherlands. However, while particularly founding leaders tend to dominate populist parties, many such parties have
either outlived their founding leader or never had an overarching leader. For example, the Belgian Flemish Interest (VB) literally outlived its founder Karel Dillen, while the leader of the Danish People's Party (DFP), Pia Kjærsgaard, is certainly important to the party's success, but she is not particularly dominant. In some cases a populist politician will take over an existing political party, changing not only the ideology of the party, but also its style of leadership. For instance, Jörg Haider transformed the Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) into a populist radical right party with a dominant leader, as happened with the Swiss People's Party (SVP) under Christoph Blocher (e.g. Mudde 2007).

In summary, an elective affinity between populism and a strong leader seems to exist. However, the former can exist without the latter. Indeed, sometimes populist leaders have been quite successful in terms of winning elections and changing the political agenda, but their very existence will become superfluous, since a new political cleavage comes to the fore: populism versus anti-populism. For instance, the rise of Perón in Argentina gave rise to a new political cleavage, which is orthogonal to the left–right distinction (Ostiguy 2009). Not by coincidence, Argentina has seen the appearance of populist presidents supporting right-wing (Carlos Menem) and left-wing (Néstor and then Christina Kirchner) governments since the return to democracy in 1983. This means that under certain circumstances the rise of populist actors can contribute not only to the breakdown, but also to the realignment and reconfiguration, of the party system.

4 Charismatic Leadership and Populist Democracy

Charismatic leadership is a fiercely contested topic in the social sciences in general, and in the study of populism in particular. Many accounts of populism emphasize the importance of charismatic leaders (e.g. Weyland 2001), even within Europe, where populist leaders often function within relatively well-organized political parties (e.g. Taggart 1995). Yet several other scholars of European populism argue that ideology (or discourse) is at least as important as personality, and some even denounce the whole concept of charisma as imprecise or even tautological (e.g. Van der Brug, Fennema, and Tillie 2005).

In a strict Weberian interpretation, charismatic leadership refers to 'the authority of the extraordinary and personal gift of grace (charisma), the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership' (Weber 1992: 5). Weber believed that charismatic leadership would thrive particularly in times of crisis, when people would seek refuge in the specific characteristics of certain individuals, often political outsiders, rather than in the traditional sources of authority (that is, custom and statute). Weber's theory of charismatic leadership has strongly influenced scholarship on populism, although this is not often explicitly acknowledged. One of the more developed theoretical accounts in this tradition is José Pedro Zúquete's study of 'missionary politics', which sees Europe's contemporary populist radical right parties as 'sacred defenders of their communities, driven toward a holy mission and composed of a devoted followership around a charismatic leader' (Zúquete 2007: 233).

Various electoral studies have shown the importance of individual leaders for the electoral success of populist parties, giving way to terms such as 'leffekt Le Pen' (Plenel and Rollat 1984) and the 'Haider Phenomenon' (Sully 1997). The question is whether this is proof for the charismatic leadership thesis, which in the strict Weberian interpretation refers to a personal bond between the leader and his or her followers. In other words, do these voters indeed merely follow the populist leader, or do they support the broader party ideology as well? Given the fact that many of these parties have exceptionally loyal supporters, and both the FN and FPÖ seem to have been able to hang on to most of their supporters despite a change in leadership, classic charismatic leadership seems less important than is often stated.

Some scholars have argued that charismatic leadership can be institutionalized within political parties, leading to 'charismatic parties' rather than mere charismatic leaders (Pedahzur and Bricha 2002). Given the existing diversity in organizational structures within the populist party family, it would go too far to argue that populist parties are by definition charismatic parties, however. Others have focused on the internal rather than the external effects of charismatic leadership, arguing that certain populist leaders have 'coterie charisma', which ties an inner core of activists to a specific leader (Eatwell 2002). This would enable this 'charismatic' leader to overcome internal divisions within a broader movement. Examples of populist leaders with this coterie charisma would be FN-leader Jean-Marie Le Pen and Vladimir Zhironovsky, leader of the ill-named Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR).

In addition, scholars have argued that populist leaders promote the formation of a particular political regime, which should be called 'populist democracy' (e.g. Mair 2002). Allegedly, this model of democracy is characterized by a strong and charismatic leader, who is able to represent 'the unified will of the people', and, in consequence, should govern without power restrictions. Otherwise stated, since the leader embodies the interests of the majority, no institution should constrain him. To a certain extent, this type of democracy is quite similar to the model of 'leader democracy' advanced by András Körössényi (2005). After all, both populist and leader democracy share a basic assumption: politics is primarily about the conflict between rival elites, who continuously try to shape and produce the electoral preferences of the people themselves. Hence, the people is seen as a passive entity that is activated and mobilized from above.

Not all manifestations of populism, however, show sympathy for 'leader' or 'populist' democracy. By way of illustration, whereas in certain cases populism coexists with grass-roots networks that are quite autonomous and limit the room of manoeuvre of the chief executive (for example, Evo Morales in Bolivia), there are other examples in which populism follows a top-down dynamic and the leader can govern almost without constraints (for example, Hugo Chávez in Venezuela). In this sense, rather than supporting a specific model of democracy, those who adhere to populism tend to favour
majoritarian and participatory conceptions of democracy, and are prone to disdain deliberative and liberal conceptions of democracy (Rovira Kaltwasser forthcoming). Moreover, most manifestations of populism have a difficult relationship with electoral and egalitarian conceptions of democracy, since populist constituencies and leaders are prone to depict their foes as illegitimate actors, who should not have the right to participate in elections or have access to public resources. After all, populism is above all a moral set of ideas.

5 Populism, Caudillismo, and Gender

Latin American populism has often been analysed through the lens of caudillismo, a generic term with roots in the Latin caput (head), which is normally employed to allude to a particular type of politics characterized by a strong leader, who not only exercises a power that is independent of any office and free on any constraint, but who also tends to develop patron–client relationships (Lynch 1992). Factors like deep economic crises or the existence of a political vacuum favour the rise of caudillos, who, helped by their charisma, attempt to keep political forces under control by promoting allegiance to the person of the leader. Moreover, the notion of caudillismo emphasizes that the leader depicts himself as a masculine and potentially violent figure. Hence, by using sexual symbols and vulgar language, the caudillo seeks to idolize the values of ‘the common people’.

The notion of caudillismo is useful for interpreting the history of Latin America, and, to some extent, also current developments in this world region. However, it should not be equated with populism. While the caudillismo refers to a specific type of leadership, which relies on charisma and clientelism, populism denotes an ideology that assumes that society is characterized by a Manichean distinction between ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite’. Many studies of Latin American populist leaders and parties take for granted that the development of patron–client relationships is a defining attribute of populism. However, clientelism is a political strategy that has been used by Latin American political parties that both do adhere (for example, the Peronist Justicialist Party in contemporary Argentina) and do not adhere (for example, the Independent Democratic Union in contemporary Chile) to the populist ideology.

At the same time, the notion of caudillismo is normally related not only to strong leadership, but also to authoritarianism. In fact, Juan Manuel de Rosas in Argentina (1793–1871), Porfirio Díaz in Mexico (1830–1915), and even Francisco Franco in Spain (1892–1975) are common examples of caudillos in the scholarly literature. All these leaders can be considered as absolute rulers exercising personal power, and thus anything but democrats. By contrast, populist leaders in Latin America maintain an ambivalent relationship with democracy: while they tend to promote the incorporation of marginalized sectors into society and defend (the realization of) elections, they are also prone to disregard the rules of public contestation, particularly when it comes to tolerating the forces that oppose populism (Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). Consequently, the authoritarianism characteristic of caudillismo is not inherent to populism.

Although it is true that caudillismo and populism should not be conflated, there are some interesting parallels between both phenomena, particularly with regard to gender. Indeed, Latin American populist leaders are predominantly male and they are prone to draw upon masculine models, including the vulgar man, the priest, the father, and the military man. Not by coincidence, as Espina and Rakowski (2010) have recently pointed out, President Chávez projected an image of women as self-sacrificing mothers and housewives nurturing their children and giving birth to a new Venezuela. In summary, Latin American populist leaders commonly have an ambivalent discourse with respect to gender: on the one hand, they tend to favour the idea of justice for everyone regardless of race or gender, and, on the other hand, they tend to defend traditional female and masculine roles.

6 Leaderless Populism

While populism is closely associated with strong political leaders, there is a long tradition of leaderless populism, particularly in the United States. In itself, this makes perfect sense, as populism stresses government by the people, for the people, and is intrinsically suspicious (though not necessarily negative) of political representation. After all, populism is always essentially about getting rid of a corrupt elite that impedes the formation of the general will.

Although the United States has had its share of populist leaders, though often at the state level (such as Governor Huey Long in Louisiana), almost all significant populist movements have been largely leaderless (e.g. Kazin 1995). The Populists of the 1880s emerged spontaneously and were mostly loosely and regionally organized. Lacking a single leader with cross-regional appeal, they supported a relative outsider for the presidential elections of 1896. Similarly, the two key populist movements of today, the right-wing Tea Party and the left-wing Occupy Wall Street, emerged spontaneously and function without a strong leader. While many politicians have tried to become the unofficial leader of the Tea Party, and some factions within the movement have supported certain individual politicians as voices of the Tea Party (most notably former Alaskan governor Sarah Palin), the movement remains leaderless. Similarly, the Occupy Wall Street movement jealously guards its leaderless status, despite criticism that this undermines its political effectiveness.

While leaderless populism is strongest in the United States, it can be found around the world, most notably in more or less spontaneous (and often short-lived) protest movements that attack the (local) elite in the name of the (local) people. Recent examples include the amorphous coalition protesting against the 'stuttgart 21' project in Germany, the so-called White Marches in Belgium, the various anti-austerity-measures protests in
Europe and Israel, and even the spontaneous protest movements that collectively constitute the Arab Spring. In all these cases an important section of the social movement is populist, attacking a corrupt elite in the name of the pure people, but essentially leaderless, in the sense that no one leader (or even group of leaders) speaks for the whole movement. In almost all cases the movements explode on the scene, generate a quick but short-lived buzz, and quickly disappear, giving rise to more organized, and often less populist, organizations.

7 Conclusion

Populism has appeared in different times and places. Allegedly, one of the few commonalities between all the different manifestations of populism is the existence of a charismatic and strong leader, who is able to mobilize the masses and control the political organization behind him. In this chapter we have argued instead that this type of leadership is not a defining attribute of populism. We defined populism as an ideology or world view that assumes that society is characterized by a Manichean division between 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite'. This means that populism is not always constructed from above—that is, by a powerful leader; many societies count a significant number of people who believe in the populist set of ideas, irrespective of the presence of a populist leader.

Accordingly, populism exists with various types of leadership and can even be leaderless. This is particularly evident in social movements that employ the populist ideology, such as the Tea Party or Occupy Wall Street. In this case, populism operates as a 'master frame' through which very different groups develop a common identity, but without a visible leader commanding the movement. But it is also true that there are many examples of populism in which a strong leader is key for mobilizing the people and (re)founding political organizations specialized in fostering a direct and unmediated relationship with the electorate (for example, Fujimori in Peru or Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands). In addition, there are cases of strong party organizations supporting a populist leader, who does (not yet) have absolute autonomy when it comes to developing policy proposals and implementing political reforms (for example, the Austrian Freedom Party or the Bolivian Movement for Socialism).

In this chapter we have argued that charisma is not a defining attribute of populism. While it is true that the success of many populist parties and movements is related to the existence of charismatic leaders, the latter are also relevant for non-populist parties and movements. Hence, charisma facilitates the rise of populist ideas, but it also makes the formation of strong populist organizations more difficult. Moreover, there seems to be an elective affinity between strong male leaders and populism. Indeed, the most famous examples of populism are usually related to masculine figures such as José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, and Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. However, the link between male leadership and populism must not be seen as 'sociological law'.

There are cases of populism in which women play an important role, like Pia Kjærsgaard of the Danish People's Party (DFP), Pauline Hanson of One Nation in Australia, and Sarah Palin in the USA.

In summary, the link between political leadership and populism is much more complicated, as much of the literature suggests. Given that populism is an ideology that has appeared in different times and places, a great variety of concrete manifestations of populism exist. This means that the historical and regional context in which populism arises is key for understanding its specific characteristics, including the type of political leadership. Thus, future studies should examine under which conditions populism fosters or hinders the emergence of strong leadership. At the same time, cross-regional research could help to identify subtypes of populism, which not only defend particular conceptions of 'the pure people' and 'the corrupt elite' but also show different leadership styles and approaches to deal with the presence or absence of strong leaders.

Recommended Reading


References

CHAPTER 26
PERFORMATIVE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

JOHN GAFFNEY

1 Introduction

The central concern of this chapter is with the nature of the relationship between a speaker/leader and his or her audience. Throughout the history of rhetorical studies, how a speaker effects outcomes—that is, how he or she persuades an audience—of peers, of judges, of the public—to do something or to agree to something, or punish, or exonerate, or pass legislation, or vote, or go on strike, or rise up, or invade, and so on—has been the principal focus of analysis. We are concerned with, not what the audience does after a speech, but how it feels about the speaker, or rather why it feels the way it does. We want to demonstrate how leaders rhetorically construct a privileged relationship with their audience, and what the performative and cultural conditions of this are (Kane 2001).

In the study of leadership and leadership rhetoric, moreover, there is more research on the conditions, determinants, and background, as well as the outcomes of leadership rhetoric, than on the analysis of rhetoric itself. Yet, in many ways, or rather one way, the rhetoric is all there is, the rhetoric as performance (whether spoken or written, or, indeed, sung or expressed visually); all the rest is the conditions of its coming into being or the consequences of its having been.

It is as if, when analysing a Leonard Cohen song, research focused upon his secular Jewish intellectual background in Montreal in the late 1950s rather than upon the performance of 'the minor fall, the major lift,' the song itself and the singing of the song.

1 Hallelujah (1984). Rhetoric is everywhere. Virtually nothing exists in interpersonal and social interaction without it (Leith 2011). We ourselves do not make a substantive distinction between spoken and written rhetoric, the latter in our view having as much a structure as the former (Booth 1961; Hyman 1962; Williams 1987; Empson 2004; Eagleton 2008; Ramage et al. 2009), but our emphasis will be upon the fundamental role of the author (persona, leader, speaker) of spoken rhetoric.