



Explaining Populism and Autocratization

Abstract In this chapter the most popular explanations that have been proposed for why and how populists succeed are discussed and synthesized into “a populist model of autocratization”. Explanations dealing with (1) globalization, immigration, and policy failures; (2) culture and identity; (3) psychology and human nature; (4) social media and echo chambers; and (5) charismatic leaders and policy entrepreneurs, are included in the analysis. My conclusion is that the populist ideas, beliefs, and values, related to identity and shaped by the populist rhetorical style and discourse frames, play the central role.

Keywords Explaining populism · Autocratic change · Autocratization · Globalization · Immigration · Culture · Identity · Psychology · Human nature · Social media · Charismatic leaders

How can we understand the rise of populism? Why do so many people support the rhetorical style and institutional orientation that populists employ? How do populists promote their autocratic ambitions? These are of course *the* questions to answer for those who favor liberty, liberal democracy, and the open society.

One answer could be the populist political strategies themselves, presented in Chapter 2 above. That the populist rhetoric and framing

to achieve polarization and the creeping autocratization in themselves are sufficient to explain the rise of populism described in the last chapter. There is truth to this, but as we shall see it is not what previous research emphasizes. Also, there is a need to understand *why* populist rhetoric and framing tend to be so effective. In this chapter, some of the most popular explanations in existing research will therefore be presented. These explanations are highly interdisciplinary, drawing on theories and results from many disciplines.

ANALYZING POPULISM AS AUTOCRATIC INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

In a previous book, *Statecraft and Liberal Reforms in Advanced Democracies* (Karlson, 2018), I developed a general theory for how institutional change can be explained and promoted. The theory was based on a synthesis of previous research about institutional change and an extended comparative case study of liberal reforms in Sweden and Australia over the last 30 years. The democratic backsliding and weakening of the open society described in the last chapter are all examples of institutional or policy changes and could thus be analyzed by a similar framework, albeit with changes in a non-liberal direction. This is the approach taken here to structure the analysis.

According to this theory, the process of institutional change starts with changing economic and social conditions that affect voters and other economic and social actors. It could be changes in technologies or trade patterns that affect the jobs and income prospects of different groups in society, or failures of welfare or educational policies, just to mention a few possibilities. These in turn create a demand for new policy ideas for how to handle the consequences of the changing conditions. Such ideas need to be articulated and acted upon by different policy entrepreneurs that interact with and activate power resources and interests, which influence changes in institutions and policies. Next, these changes affect the social and economic conditions of voters, and the cycle of institutional changes continues. I called this “the reform circle”.

Ideas, or in other words beliefs and values, play a key role in the theory. The ability of different policy entrepreneurs to use idea-based strategies to frame or condition how different interests interpret or understand the

changing economic and social conditions, as well as the existing institutions and policies, is decisive for how and in what direction institutions change.

More generally, ideas in terms of beliefs and values matter for how economic and social changes are interpreted. Ideas condition how people and different interests interpret or understand the economic and social conditions, as well as the existing institutions and policies, of their society (Karlson, 2018). As argued by Blyth (2002), ideas serve to reduce uncertainty, facilitate collective action, coalition building, and coordination, and are used as weapons for transforming existing institutions. McCloskey (1985) and Majone (1992), among others, point out the importance of rhetoric in arguing for institutional change. Ideas thus can explain why people—facing the same economic circumstances—still make different choices. Interests and power resources are so to speak ideationally bound.

Notice also that party politics or tactics in the narrower sense has a more limited role in the model. While even different Machiavellian strategies may be decisive to build coalitions and push reforms through parliament, the overall direction of the process of institutional change has other explanations.

In the coming sections, some of the most popular, but partial, explanations of populism in previous research will be synthesized in a similar model to the one presented above. In Fig. 4.1 this populist model of autocratization is presented.

Starting from the left, existing institutions and policies in period 1 cause policy failures or are insufficient to handle changing economic and social conditions, perhaps even creating a crisis of some sort. Or the existing conditions may just become interpreted differently through the framing of populist ideas, beliefs, and values. These economic and social conditions in turn influence not only the interests of different groups or

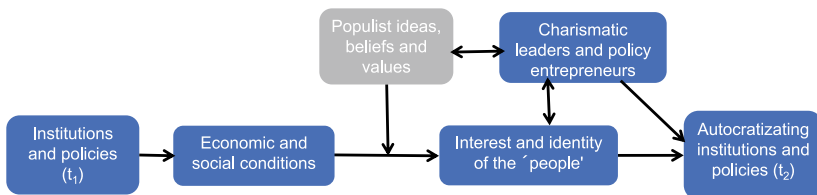


Fig. 4.1 The populist model of autocratization

the population at large, but also their cultural and social identities, which affect the ‘people’ or voter majority, and thus the power resources necessary to change the institutions and policies in period 2 in an autocratic direction. How the voters interpret how such changes in economic and social conditions influence their interests and identities is largely shaped by their ideas, beliefs, and values.

The institutions and policies in period 2, perhaps initially with just small autocratic tendencies, will in turn affect the economic and social conditions, which will affect the interest and identity of the ‘people’, interpreted through the populist ideas, beliefs, and values, that change the institutions in period 3. By this time the populist leaders and their policy entrepreneurs may also have a direct influence on the institutions and policies. And so on, the process continues into something that perhaps may be called a *cycle of autocratization*, quite like the twelve-step program presented in Chapter 2.

GLOBALIZATION, IMMIGRATION, AND POLICY FAILURES

The most popular explanation for the rise of populism is that different policy failures have caused a deterioration of the economic and social conditions for important groups and voters in our societies. The argument is that these failures and the austerity policy measures taken to handle them have then been exploited by populist parties and policy entrepreneurs.

To argue that changing economic conditions is a cause behind institutional change is a standard way of thinking among economists that goes back to Marx (1867), later followed by prominent scholars of institutional change like North (1981, 1990), Buchanan (1986) and Acemoglu et al. (2005). The common argument used in the case of populism is that globalization, automation, and neoliberal policies have deteriorated the economic and social conditions causing unemployment, insecurity, austerity, inequality, and different crises.

One example is Rodrik (2018, 2021), who argues that the rise of populism is rooted in a desire to reclaim popular democracy and national autonomy, against economic problems caused by international trade, in particular imports from China, and financial globalization. Similarly, Mounk (2018) and Eichengreen (2018) argue that a major factor behind the rise of populism is various economic problems affecting ordinary

voters, and consequently see “fixing the economy” as a primary remedy against populism.

Over the last two or three decades the welfare states of the Western world have indeed started to crumble due to internal contradictions, rent seeking, and deficits (Karlson, 2019). Due to Baumol’s law, the low productivity of many tax-funded services has led to a structural increase in the costs of public welfare that probably is not long-run sustainable (Baumol, 1993; Mahon, 2007). Therefore, in many Western democracies, there is growing discontent with the quality of the publicly provided welfare services, but also with the quality of core state activities such as public order and defense. Even though many voters still are favorably disposed to the welfare state’s goals and ambitions, they simultaneously are critical of its policy outcomes (Lindell & Pelling, 2021; Roosma et al., 2013).

For example, socio-economic groups that earlier voted for the social democratic parties form the basis of the support of some far-right parties (Mudde, 2017). These voters may well long for the return of the traditional welfare state and believe that its benefits are threatened by globalization and immigration.

Similarly rising inequality is often blamed for causing populism. Several scholars (e. g. Milanovic, 2016; Norris & Inglehart, 2019; O’Connor, 2017) have argued that economic inequality is a core factor behind the rise of populism. The arguments are similar to those of Piketty (2014), arguing that financial capitalism causes recurring crises and a higher rate of return on capital than on labor.

Sometimes these kinds of arguments are put in ideational or ideological terms, mirroring the left-wing populist rhetoric style presented in Chapter 2, blaming “neoliberalism”. Hence, deregulations, privatizations, cuts in welfare programs, and free markets are accused of creating imbalances that are said to explain why populism emerges (Cayla, 2021; Kelly & Pike, 2017). It is interesting to note how also leading political scientists like Sheri Berman (2021) and Francis Fukuyama (2022) have adopted this style of argumentation. Especially, Latin American populism is often said to have been caused by “neoliberalism” (Roberts, 1995; Edwards, 2022; Weyland, 1996). On the right, similar kinds of arguments are echoed by Patrick Deneen (2018), Yoram Hazony (2018), and others who claim that liberalism and free markets have depleted the moral and social foundations of our societies.

Nevertheless, it is true that international trade and automation always have both winners and losers—perhaps especially low-skilled workers in manufacturing industries in developed countries (Lakner & Milanovic, 2013). For example, Colantone and Stanig (2018) showed that Chinese import shocks strengthened the support for nationalist and isolationist parties in some Western European countries. Dippel et al. (2015) found that voting for extreme-right parties respond significantly to trade integration with China and Eastern Europe in Germany from 1987 to 2009. Other country-level and subnational European studies give similar results (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022). Similarly, Autor et al. (2021) showed that US congressional districts exposed to increases in import penetration removed moderate representatives from office and replaced them with more extreme candidates.

But structural and technological changes and economic restructuring caused by free trade, capitalism, and market processes are not something new. The same things have happened again and again during the last decades and even centuries. And as Schumpeter (1942 [1994]), Baumol (2002), and many others have shown these processes are at the same time the perhaps most important factors behind economic growth, increasing real wages, welfare, and prosperity for the majority of voters. The same processes have simultaneously contributed to improved health, increased life spans, lower child death rates, etc. for everyone. This is the overall experience of the last centuries in both East and West. There is substantial empirical evidence supporting this (see e.g. Friedman, 2017; North, 1981, 1990, 1994; McCloskey 2006; Rosenberg & Birdzell, 1987). Hence, while this cannot be the major explanation behind the rise of populism, it may well be a decisive factor for groups that are negatively affected.

A problem with these kinds of explanations is also why countries like Austria and France, or the Scandinavian countries with low and almost stable levels of income inequality, massive redistribution, and extensive welfare programs still are affected by populism. It is also puzzling that changes like these would cause rightwing (and not left-wing) populism, which as we have seen is the typical kind of populism in developed countries. Moreover, in many countries like India, Israel, and Poland the large majority of the population has benefitted substantially from globalization, and yet they have all recently elected populist governments.

The same is true concerning the effects of economic or financial crises, causing rising unemployment and usually fiscal austerity. While

the recession in 2008–2009, just like the Euro crisis that followed in several southern European countries, provided fertile ground for populist rhetoric and leaders, it was rightwing populist parties that gained the most, not their leftwing adversaries (Guriev & Papaioannou, 2022).

Bergh and Kärnä (2021), based on the vote shares for 267 rightwing and left-wing populist parties in 33 European countries during 1980–2017, and globalization data from the KOF institute, found no evidence of a positive association between (economic or other types of) globalization and populism. Most controls were insignificant, including the Gini index in inequality of disposal income. Interestingly, the share of immigrants was significantly *negatively* related to the vote shares of populists.

Immigration is otherwise another popular argument behind the rise of populism (e.g., Borjas, 2014; Dustmann et al., 2005). Some argue that immigrants take away jobs from native workers and suppress their wages. Others say that immigrants do not work and rely on the host country's generous welfare system. Many claim that immigrants' values and social norms are incompatible with those of the host country, posing an existential threat to its identity and culture.

However, according to Guriev and Papaioannou (2022), the actual evidence is mixed. A first problem is that the public perceptions of the size of immigration differ considerably from the reality—according to Alesina et al. (2018) the *perceived* levels of immigrant stocks are two to three times higher than actual levels in countries like France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the US. Moreover, both in the UK and Austria local levels of EU immigration and refugee assignment, respectively, actually lowered the leave vote in the EU referendum and the support for the Austrian populist party FPÖ (Colantone & Stanig, 2018; Steinmayr, 2021). It is also important to observe that the number of immigrants and refugees is very low in countries like Hungary and Poland, which still have populist governments.

So, while failing policies may indeed have contributed to different social and economic problems, especially for some groups, it is hard to see that this is the major explanation. In general, there seems to be a strong bias in large parts of the populist literature to take the economic and social developments in the US, and perhaps the UK, where median wages have stagnated and income distribution worsened over the last three decades, as being representative to all countries (Velasco, 2020). Margalit (2019),

after surveying the relevant literature, concludes that the overall explanatory evidence of the kind of economic arguments presented above for the support of populism is modest: at the most, they can explain the outcome on the margin. Perhaps we may say that changing economic and social conditions sometimes may serve as *enabling conditions* for populism.

But let us also briefly mention a seemingly different set of institutional failures concerning democracy itself. For example, Grzymala-Busse (2019) argues that populism is arising from the failures of elite competition in democracies. The mainstream parties are said to fail to respond to popular grievances, demonstrate accountability, and offer credible political alternatives, and instead collude on economic issues, conceding both rents and sovereignty to governing elites and supra-national organizations such as the European Union.

However, this is almost identical to the arguments discussed above about economic policy failures and the purported “neoliberal” policy responses. It may well be that many democracies have underperformed compared to some indicators and that some policies have contributed to different social and economic problems, but as argued above it is hard to see this as the major cause behind populism. Most democracies have experienced problems with misguided policies before, as in the 1970s, without having these kinds of consequences.

A more important democratic problem and institutional failure, however, may be the connection between corruption and populism. As we saw in Chapter 2, populists often accuse elites and established parties of being corrupt. In many cases, populists also use this as an excuse to dismantle democratic institutions (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). If corruption really is prevalent, as it turned out to be in Italy in the early 1990s for example, then this will benefit populist parties. There seems to be substantial empirical evidence for this in Eastern Europe (Kossow, 2019). What is questionable, however, is how effective populist leaders are in actually fighting corruption. I shall return to the question of the rule of law in Chapter 6.

This brings us over to non-economic explanations. Structural changes like those presented above need to be interpreted and understood as good or bad, as just or unjust, as beneficial, or not, to have a causal effect. And there is a need for some kind of agency to make this happen.

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

Non-economic arguments are often put under the heading of a cultural backlash. For example, based on extensive survey data, Norris and Inglehart (2019) argue that populism is the result of a conservative backlash and authoritarian reflex due to, basically, increasing social divisions, rising inequality, worsening economic conditions for large groups of voters, especially of an older generation in rural areas. Similarly, Rodrik (2021), argues that “culture, racial attitudes, and social identity” provide a causal pathway through which globalization shocks and economic dislocation influence support for populist parties and candidates.

The causal relationship may, however, just as well run in the opposite direction: namely, in the sense that cultural concerns and grievances shape people’s beliefs about economic change and its adverse impact on their standing (Margalit, 2019). People who worry about cultural homogeneity or changing cultural aspects of identity and community may be more likely to adopt the views that, for example, immigration and multiculturalism are having negative economic consequences. Immigration may thus cause both economic and cultural anxiety. There is considerable evidence consistent with this view (Brader et al., 2008; Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007).

An illustrative example is the book *What’s the Matter with Kansas? How Conservatives Won the Heart of America* by journalist and historian Frank (2004), who explores the support for anti-elitist conservative policies in Kansas, which he argues were against the economic interests of the majority of the voters in the state. By shifting the political discourse from social and economic equality to cultural issues, such as abortion and gay marriage, voters’ interest was redirected to fuel anger toward the “liberal elites”. Similarly, referred to by Rodrik (2021), Hacker and Pierson (2020) argue that this is exactly the strategy the Republican Party has pursued to advance a right-wing policy agenda—tax reduction, deregulation, weakening of labor market protections, and cuts in social insurance—that benefited the wealthy. While all this, of course, can be debated, it nevertheless shows that culture in terms of ideas, beliefs, and values often matters more than economic interests. Identity trumps interests, a fact that may be hard to accept for some economists.

There is some empirical support for these views. In a study, combining surveys and experiments, in Poland, the UK, and the US, Marchlewska et al. (2018) found that perceived ingroup disadvantage and collective

narcissism—the conviction that they have a superior vision of what it means to be a true citizen of their nation—led to support for populism. Noury and Roland (2020) in a review of the literature on the rise of identity politics and populism in Europe found a complex interaction between economic and cultural factors. They argue that economic anxiety among large groups of voters related to the financial crises in 2008–2009 and the austerity policies that followed triggered a heightened receptivity to the messages of cultural backlash from populist parties.

Still, culture is a loose concept that can mean many different things. From an ethnographic point of view (LeVine, 1984), culture represents a shared consensus on meanings among members of an interacting community, similar to the consensus on language, grammar, and pronunciation among members of a speech community. It is collective but is learned, consciously or unconsciously, through individual interaction with others. Similarly, D’Andrade (1984: 116) sees “culture as consisting of learned systems of meaning, communicated by means of natural language and other symbol systems, having representational, directive, and affective functions, and capable of creating cultural entities and particular senses of reality. Through these systems of meaning, groups of people adapt to their environment and structure interpersonal activities.”

Importantly, culture can change. For example, Putnam (2020), using numerous data sources and surveys shows that in the US the overall culture has become more individualistic and self-centered since the 1960s, moving from “We to I”, as he says, with lower social trust, bipartisanship, civic do-gooding, and community, in their view resulting in populist policies and uncompromising” hyper-partisanship”.

But again, it is hard to see that culture itself can be the major explanation behind populism. Culture, in terms of norms, traditions, and customs, only changes slowly, much more slowly than the economy and most formal institutions (Williamson, 2000). Hence, it is hard to see that the rise of populism over the last couple of decades can be explained by culture alone. At the same time, it should be obvious that at least right-wing populists often advance threats to cultural identity as a way to promote their institutional objectives. How changes in economic and social changes affect the cultural identity of people may be just as important as the effects on their economic interests. And as we shall see in the next chapter, this is also largely true for left-wing populists.

PSYCHOLOGY AND HUMAN NATURE

Another type of non-economic, non-rational explanation behind the rise of populism has to do with psychology and human nature. Already in the classic book *Escape from Freedom* (1941), Erich Fromm argued that it was psychological conditions that could provide the explanation for the rise of authoritarianism in the 1930s. Modern research in social and moral psychology largely confirms such a view.

To start, there is broad support for the view that humans have a “duplex mind” (Baumeister, 2005), that the mind operates on at least two levels, where one is more intuitive and automatic, while the other is rational and conscious. Kahneman (2011) called these System 1 and System 2 respectively, arguing that intuitive decisions are fast, automatic, and effortless, while rational decisions are slower and are taken in a serial, effortful, and more controlled fashion. Often the former, more intuitive systems take over, making us use different simplifying heuristics, instead of rational reasoning, which causes different kinds of biases in our decisions. This is where the lure of populism may come in.

According to Feldman and Stenner (1997) human nature is characterized by an authoritarian predisposition, a deep-seated, relatively enduring psychological predisposition to prefer—indeed, to demand—obedience and conformity, over tolerance, freedom, and diversity. This predisposition, she argues, is latent, but may be triggered.

Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt, in *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (2012), similarly argues that our minds are designed for the populist, groupish righteousness, that our behavior and ways of thinking are largely based on neurological intuitions that drive our strategic, rationalistic reasoning. Hence, we are intrinsically moralistic, critical, and judgmental fostering polarization between groups and society at large. In other words, humans have a *tribal mind* that can be activated by populist rhetoric and leaders. In a somewhat similar way Anne Applebaum argues in her best-selling book *Twilight of Democracy: The Seductive Lure of Authoritarianism* (2020) that political systems with simple, populist beliefs are inherently appealing, that there is a “seductive lure of authoritarianism”.

Boudry and Hofhuis (2018) even argue that cultural evolution, under certain circumstances, may develop “parasites of mind”, systems of misbelief that subvert the interests of their human hosts. An example could be the historical belief in witchcraft, but the argument may be

equally applicable to populist ideas and modern conspiracy theories like QAnon. Such systems of belief may become self-validating and exhibit a surprising degree of resilience in the face of adverse evidence and criticism (Boudry & Braeckman, 2012).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND ECHO CHAMBERS

Such parasites or lures may have become particularly important due to the growth of digital social media in recent decades. There is a growing amount of research that shows that social media is a key factor behind the rise of populism.

Initially, this new technology was seen as creating new sources of information that would strengthen democracy and participation. As Gurri (2018), argued, social media mobilized millions of ordinary people around the world, clearing the ground for the Arab Spring and viable critiques of institutional failures in many countries. The new information technologies enabled the public to break the power of the political hierarchies and experts. Traditional gatekeepers were weakened, and once marginal movements and politicians became empowered. In this way, digital media was a force of freedom and democracy.

However, over time digitalization and social media seem to have led to polarization and the denigration of independent journalists, to the expense of open, evidence-based public debate (Mounk, 2018). In an impressive survey of the current literature Tumber and Waisbord (2021) show that recent transformations in digital social media are highly conducive to the kind of polarized, anti-rational, post-fact, post-truth communication championed by populism. Digital platform tools have, using algorithms, making it possible, as part of their successful business models, to amplify content to segments of the population, often for political purposes, creating a powerful, unaccountable, and often untraceable method of targeting misinformation and conspiracy theories.

Hence, deliberate polarization and misinformation by populist activists and leaders have created filter bubbles and echo chambers where algorithms dictate what we encounter online, where users are exposed to views and opinions they already agree with while being sheltered from opposing perspectives (Sumpter, 2018). These echo chambers hamper balanced decision-making and undermine public discourse, and thus the foundations of democracy itself. Moreover, populist political leaders increasing, as was argued in Chapter 2, deliberately try to control both public and

private media to create polarization and boost support (Shayegh et al., 2021). As shown by Tumber and Waisbord (2021), the control of social media for such purposes has become prevalent on all continents. Using the tower of Babel as a metaphor, Haidt (2022) argues that social media has led to stupidity and the fragmentation of everything:

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and a few other large platforms unwittingly dissolved the mortar of trust, and belief in institutions, and shared stories that had held a large and diverse secular democracy together.

CHARISMATIC LEADERS AND POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

An additional important explanation behind the rise of populism that has been proposed concerns the role of the leaders, or in terms of the explanatory model above: the policy entrepreneurs. They are the main actors that develop, articulate, and communicate new ideas, facts, perspectives, values, and worldviews to activate power resources and interests, and to influence public opinion and other decision-makers (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Karlson, 2018; Kingdon, 1984; López & Leighton, 2013; Mintrom, 1997). Without agency, no change.

According to Weyland (2017, 2022), personalistic charismatic leadership, usually sustained by direct connections to an unorganized mass of followers, is central to populism. Typical examples are Alberto Fujimori and Hugo Chávez in Latin America, Viktor Orbán and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Europe, Rodrigo Duterte and Narendra Modi in Asia, and Donald Trump in the US.

Such leaders, as we have seen in Chapter 2, seek to establish a direct relationship with the people, circumventing parliaments, and often party structures, through mass meetings, television performances, or social media. They are experts in using the populist rhetorical style and discursive framing to gain power and promote institutional change in their desired direction. The ‘us-versus-them’ logic, calling for the recognition of ordinary people, and narratives about corrupt elites, ‘others’ that threatens the identity of true people, and emotional arguments about meaning and community are used systematically.

Populist leaders often see themselves as symbols, embodying the true people. For example, Alberto Fujimori in Peru in 1990 crafted his campaign with the nonelite slogan “A President Like You” (Levitsky &

Loxton, 2013: 167). Similarly, former Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, used “Chávez is the people!” as a slogan. But, as pointed out in Chapter 2, a special challenge is to balance such ordinariness with extraordinariness (Moffitt, 2016). How can you both be just like the people and at the same time be so talented and special as to rise above the people and be their leader and representative? Various techniques are used to show such extraordinariness, including showing off wealth, and masculinity, and presenting themselves as the singular figure who can fix the economy, law and order, etc. Just think of leaders like Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Silvio Berlusconi in Italy, or Donald Trump in the US.

Surprisingly little, however, has been done about how other policy entrepreneurs support or interact with populist leaders. It is likely that different special interests groups form themselves into “policy coalitions” to influence the specific policies promoted by the populist regime (Sabatier & Weible, 2007; Sabatier & Zafonte, 2001). It is not hard to think of different groups, even if they may not fully support the populist ideas, that have an interest in tax cuts, redistribution, limiting immigration, supporting protectionist measures or in extending welfare benefits, or getting subsidies or protection for certain industries, not to say of becoming plutocrats themselves. In Latin America, an obvious example of such “policy entrepreneurs” are groups within the military (Scharpf, 2020), while in Eastern Europe oligarchs are the likely candidates (Carpenter, 2020). In all democracies, as Mancur Olson (1965, 1982) and many others have shown, there are special interests will free ride on the common good.

EXPLAINING POPULIST INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

All the above-mentioned factors clearly have a role in explaining why populism is popular and how populist institutional change comes about.

Changing economic and social conditions, such as globalization, failing welfare programs, crises, inequality, and immigration may certainly provide fertile ground for populists to promote their ideas. And especially so if they are framed in ideological terms. But by themselves, these kinds of changing conditions are insufficient to explain populism. Instead, cultural factors about identity need to be taken into account. Also, humans seem to have a latent authoritarian predisposition, that our minds are psychologically designed for populist tribalism and righteousness, fostering polarization between groups and in society at large. Moreover,

digital social media is highly conducive to the kind of polarized, anti-rational, post-fact, post-truth communication championed by populists. Algorithms and platform tools have created methods for targeting misinformation and conspiracy theories to large audiences creating echo chambers where populist beliefs are sustained.

This is where the real importance of populism comes in: populist leaders deliberately use ideas, beliefs, and values—the populist rhetoric and discursive framing—to shape or condition these interpretations. Human nature and the active use of social media help in this endeavor. The populist leaders also directly influence the voter majority and other interests that hold the power resources needed to promote their populist institutional orientation of autocratization. Left- and right-wing populists, as presented in Chapter 2, may even form a symbiotic relationship in this process, each promoting the polarization of society, in a self-enforcing process.

Populist ideas, beliefs, and values, and in particular those relating to identity, shaped by the distinct rhetorical style and discourse frames, play the central role in this process of autocratization as presented in Fig. 4.1. While ideological and cultural factors about identity and the like can be seen as ideas in terms of values and beliefs, the same is hardly true for humans' latent authoritarian predispositions or tribal minds. Neither are the digital social media that are used to promote populist polarization. But fake news certainly can. What we may say, however, is that all these factors may enhance the effects of populist ideas in certain circumstances.

In the next chapter, we shall further explore the populist ideas, values, and beliefs, what I shall call, *populist collectivistic identity politics*.

REFERENCES

- Acemoglu, D., Johnson, S., & Robinson, J. A. (2005). Institutions as a fundamental cause of long-run growth. *Handbook of Economic Growth, 1(A)*, 385–472.
- Alesina, A., Miano, A., & Stantcheva, S. (2018). *Immigration and redistribution* (No. w24733). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Applebaum, A. (2020). *Twilight of democracy: The seductive lure of authoritarianism*. Anchor.
- Autor, D., Dorn, D., & Hanson, G. H. (2021). *On the persistence of the China shock* (No. w29401). National Bureau of Economic Research.
- Baumeister, R. F. (2005). *The cultural animal: Human nature, meaning, and social life*. Oxford University Press.

- Baumgartner, F., & Jones, B. (1993). *Agendas and instability in American politics*. University of Chicago Press.
- Baumol, W. (1993). Health care, education and the cost disease: A looming crisis for public choice. *Public Choice*, 77(1), 17–28.
- Baumol, W. (2002). *The free-market innovation machine: Analyzing the growth miracle of capitalism*. Princeton University Press.
- Bergh, A., & Kärnä, A. (2021). Globalization and populism in Europe. *Public Choice*, 189(5–6), 1–20.
- Berman, S. (2021). The Causes of Populism in the West. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 24, 71–88.
- Blyth, M. (2002). *Great transformations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Borjas, G. J. (2014). *Immigration economics*. Harvard University Press.
- Boudry, M., & Braeckman, J. (2012). How convenient! The epistemic rationale of self-validating belief systems. *Philosophical Psychology*, 25(3), 341–364.
- Boudry, M., & Hofhuis, S. (2018). Parasites of the mind. Why cultural theorists need the meme’s eye view. *Cognitive System Research*, 52, 155–167.
- Brader, T., Valentino, N., & Suhay, E. (2008). Is it immigration or the immigrants? The emotional influence of groups on public opinion and political action. *American Journal of Political Science*, 52(4), 959–978.
- Buchanan, J. (1986). The constitution of economic policy. *American Economic Review*, 77(3), 243–250.
- Carpenter, M. (2020). *The Europe whole and free: Europe’s struggle against illiberal oligarchy*. The Polish Institute of International Affairs, PISM. https://pism.pl/publications/The_Europe_Whole_And_Free_Europes_Struggle_Against_Illiberal_Oligarchy. Gathered January 13, 2023.
- Cayla, D. (2021). *Populism and neoliberalism*. Routledge.
- Colantone, I., & Stanig, P. (2018). Global competition and Brexit. *American Political Science Review*, 112(2), 201–218.
- D’Andrade, R. G. (1984). Cultural meaning systems. In R. A. Shweder & R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory. Essays on mind, self and emotion* (pp. 88–119). Cambridge University Press.
- Deneen, P. (2018). *Why liberalism failed*. Yale University Press.
- Dippel, C., Gold, R., & Heblich, S. (2015). *Globalization and its (dis-)content: Trade shocks and voting behaviour* (NBER Working Paper No. 21812).
- Dustmann, C., Fabbri, F., & Preston, I. (2005). The impact of immigration on the British labour market. *The Economic Journal*, 115(507), F324–F341.
- Eichengreen, B. (2018). *The populist temptation: Economic grievance and political reaction in the modern era*. Oxford University Press.
- Feldman, S., & Stenner, K. (1997). Perceived threat and authoritarianism. *Political Psychology*, 18(4), 741–770.
- Frank, T. (2004). *What’s the matter with Kansas*. Metropolitan Books.

- Friedman, B. M. (2017). The moral consequences of economic growth. In *Markets, morals & religion* (pp. 29–42). Routledge.
- Fromm, E. (1941). *The escape from freedom*. Farrar & Rinehart.
- Fukuyama, F. (2022). *Liberalism and its discontents*. Profile Books.
- Grzymala-Busse, A. (2019). Conclusion: The global forces of populism. *Polity*, 51(4), 718–723.
- Guriev, S., & Papaioannou, E. (2022). The political economy of populism. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 60(3), 753–832.
- Gurri, M. (2018). *The revolt of the public and the crisis of authority in the new millennium*. Stripe Press.
- Hacker, J. S., & Pierson, P. (2020). *Let them eat tweets: How the right rules in an age of extreme inequality*. Liveright.
- Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. Vintage.
- Haidt, J. (2022). Why the past 10 years of American life have been uniquely stupid. *The Atlantic*, 11. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369/>
- Hazony, Y. (2018). *The virtue of nationalism*. Basic Books.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow* (1st ed.). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Karlson, N. (2018). *Statecraft and liberal reform in advanced democracies*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Karlson, N. (2019). The idea Vacuum of liberalism and the quest for meaning and community. *Journal of Contextual Economics—Schmollers Jahrbuch*, 139(2–4), 259–269.
- Kelly, P., & Pike, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Neo-liberalism and austerity: The moral economies of young people's health and well-being*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kingdon, J. W. (1984). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies*. Little Brown.
- Kossow, N. (2019). *Populism and corruption*. Transparency International. <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/assets/uploads/helpdesk/populism-and-corruption-2019-final.pdf>
- Lakner, C., & Milanovic, B. (2013). *Global income distribution: From the fall of the Berlin wall to the great recession*. (Policy Research Working Paper, No. 6719). World Bank, Washington, DC.
- LeVine, R. (1984). Property of culture: An ethnographic view. In R. A. Shweder & R. A. LeVine (Eds.), *Culture theory. Essays on mind, self and emotion* (pp. 67–87). Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S., & Loxton, J. (2013). Populism and competitive authoritarianism in the Andes. *Democratization*, 20(1), 107–136.
- Lindell, J., & Pelling, L. (2021). *Det svenska missnöjet*. Atlas.
- López, E., & Leighton, W. (2013). *Madmen, intellectuals, and academic scribblers: The economic engine of political change*. Stanford University Press.

- Majone, G. (1992). *Evidence, argument, and persuasion in the policy process*. Yale University Press.
- Mahon, R. (2007). Swedish model dying of Baumols? Current debates. *New Political Economy*, 12, 79–85.
- Marchlewska, M., Cichočka, A., Panayiotou, O., Castellanos, K., & Batayneh, J. (2018). Populism as identity politics: Perceived in-group disadvantage, collective narcissism, and support for populism. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 9(2), 151–162.
- Margalit, Y. (2019). Economic insecurity and the causes of populism, reconsidered. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 33(4), 152–170.
- Marx, K. (1867). *Das Kapital*, Erster Band, MEW, Bd, 23, 647. Vol 2. Hegel and Marx. Routledge.
- McCloskey, D. (1985). *The rhetoric of economics*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- McCloskey, D. (2006). *The bourgeois virtues: Ethics for an age of commerce*. University of Chicago Press.
- Milanovic, B. (2016). *Global inequality: A new approach for the age of globalization*. Harvard University Press.
- Mintrom, M. (1997). Policy entrepreneurs and the diffusion of innovation. *American Journal of Political Science*, 41(3), 738–770.
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Repression*. Stanford University Press.
- Mounk, Y. (2018). *The people vs. democracy: Why our freedom is in danger and how to save it*. Harvard University Press.
- Mudde, C. (Ed.). (2017). *The populist radical right: A reader*. Routledge.
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (Eds.). (2012). *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or corrective for democracy?* Cambridge University Press.
- North, D. C. (1981). *Structure and change in economic history*. Norton Press.
- North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change, and economic performance*. Cambridge University Press.
- North, D. C. (1994). Economic performance through time. *The American Economic Review*, 84(3), 359–368.
- Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Noury, A., & Roland, G. (2020). Identity politics and populism in Europe. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 23(1), 421–439.
- O'Connor, N. (2017). Three connections between rising economic inequality and the rise of populism. *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, 28, 29–43.
- Olson, M. (1965). *The logic of collective action; public goods and the theory of groups*. Harvard University Press.
- Olson, M. (1982). *The rise and decline of nations: Economic growth, stagflation, and social rigidities*. Yale University Press.
- Piketty, T. (2014). *Capital in the 21st century*. Harvard University Press.

- Putnam, R. (2020). *The upswing: How America came together a century ago and how we can do it again*. Simon & Schuster.
- Roberts, K. M. (1995). Neoliberalism and the transformation of populism in Latin America: The Peruvian case. *World Politics*, 48(1), 82–116.
- Rodrik, D. (2018). Populism and the economics of globalization. *Journal of International Business Policy*, 1(1), 12–33.
- Rodrik, D. (2021). Why does globalization fuel populism? Economics, culture, and the rise of right-wing. *Populism Annual Review of Economics*, 13(1), 133–170.
- Roosma, F., Gelissen, J., & van Oorschot, W. (2013). The multidimensionality of welfare state attitudes: A European cross-national study. *Social Indicators Research*, 113(1), 235–255.
- Rosenberg, N., & Birdzell, L. E., Jr. (1987). *How the West grew rich: The economic transformation of the industrial world*. Basic Books.
- Sabatier, P. A., & Zafonte, M. (2001). Policy knowledge: Advocacy organizations. In N. J. Smelser & B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the social and behavioral sciences* (pp. 11563–11568). Elsevier.
- Sabatier, P., & Weible, C. (2007). The advocacy coalition framework: Innovations and clarifications. In P. Sabatier (Eds.), *Theories of the policy process* (2nd ed., pp. 189–222). Westview Press.
- Scharpf, A. (2020). Dangerous alliances: Populists and the military. *GIGA Focus Latin America*, No. 1.
- Schumpeter, J. A. (1942 [1994]). *Capitalism, socialism and democracy*. Routledge.
- Shayegh, J., Storey, L., Turner, R., & Barry, J. (2021). A social identity approach to how elite outgroups are invoked by politicians and the media in nativist populism. *Social Psychology*, 43(6), 1009–1025.
- Sniderman, P., & Hagendoorn, L. (2007). *When ways of life collide: Multiculturalism and its discontents in the Netherlands*. Princeton University Press.
- Steinmayr, A. (2021). Contact versus exposure: Refugee presence and voting for the far-right. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 103(2), 310–327.
- Sumpter, D. (2018). *Outnumbered: From Facebook and Google to fake news and filter-bubbles—the algorithms that control our lives*. Bloomsbury Sigma, Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Tumber, H., & Waisbord, S. (2021). *The Routledge companion to media disinformation and populism*. Routledge.
- Velasco, A. (2020). Populism and identity politics. *LSE Public Policy Review*, 1(1), 1–8.
- Weyland, K. (1996). Neopopulism and Neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected Affinities. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 31(3), 3–31.

- Weyland, K. (2017). Populism: A political-strategic approach. In K. Weyland, C. R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of populism* (pp. 48–72). Oxford University Press.
- Weyland, K. (2022). How populism dies: Political weaknesses of personalistic plebiscitarian leadership. *Political Science Quarterly*, 137(1), 9–42.
- Williamson, O. E. (2000). The new institutional economics: Taking stock, looking ahead. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 38(3), 595–613.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

