

T.C.
TURKISH-GERMAN UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT

**REVIEWING THE BREXIT AND DONALD TRUMP'S
ELECTORAL VICTORY WITHIN THE SCOPE OF
POPULISM**

MASTER'S THESIS

Sitki Eren SEZGİN

ADVISOR

Asst. Prof. Dr. Philipp Decker

ISTANBUL, July 2024

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ÖZET	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF POPULISM	4
2.1. APPROACHES AND DEFINITIONS	4
2.1.1. Ideational Approach	4
2.1.2. Leader.....	8
2.1.3. Strategic Approach.....	10
2.1.4. Discursive- Performative Approach.....	12
2.2. POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY	14
3. Populism Theories: “The Cultural Backlash” versus “Economic Grievances” Thesis	19
3.1. CULTURAL BACKLASH THEORY	19
3.2. ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES THEORY.....	21
4. DONALD TRUMP AND POPULIST RHETORIC.....	22
4.1 TRUMP’S ANTI-ELITE RHETORIC	24
4.2. TRUMP’S XENOPHOBIC -ANTI PLURALIST RHETORIC.....	26
4.3. ANALYZING THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OUTCOME FROM THE SCOPE OF POPULISM.....	29
5. THE CASE OF BREXIT	32
5.1.THE EVENTS THAT EMPOWERED EUROSCEPTICISM	32
5.2. THE PROCESS TOWARD REFERENDUM.....	34
5.3. POPULIST NARRATIVES OF UKIP AND NIGEL FARAGE	35
5.3.1. The Populist Narratives of UKIP in National Arena.....	35
5.3.2. Populist Narratives of UKIP in the European Parliament.....	37

5.4. EVALUATING THE OUTCOME OF BREXIT FROM THE SCOPE OF CULTURAL BACKLASH AND ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES THEORIES	40
6. THE TRANSITIVITY BETWEEN “CULTURAL BACKLASH” AND “ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES”	41
6.1. PSYCHOLOGY AS A REASON OF RISING POPULIST POLITICS.....	41
6.2. GLOBALIZATION EFFECT ON POPULIST RISE.....	44
6.3. EVALUATION.....	46
7. CONCLUSION	48
REFERENCES.....	50

ÖZET

BREXIT VE DONALD TRUMP'IN SEÇİM ZAFERİNİN POPÜLİZM KAPSAMINDA DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ

2016 yılı Batı'ya popülist siyaset ve siyasetçiler açısından damga vuran bir yıl olmuştur. Birleşik Krallık'ta AB'den ayrılma yönünde sonuçlanan referandum ve ABD'de Donald Trump'ın başkanlık seçimlerindeki zaferi, siyasette söylemin ne kadar önemli bir faktör olduğunu göstermiştir. İki örneğe de baktığımızda popülist temaların ağır bastığı kampanyaların varlığı açıkça görülmektedir. Bu iki siyasi gelişmeyi inceleyerek günümüz politik dünyasında popülizmin önemini daha iyi anlayabiliriz.

Popülizmin neden yükselişte olduğunu açıklamaya yönelik yaygın kabul görmüş iki teori bulunmaktadır. Bunlar "ekonomik mağduriyet" ve "kültürel tepki" teorileridir. Literatürde bulunan bazı araştırmalar "ekonomik mağduriyet" teorisinin daha olası olduğunu gösterirken, diğerleri "kültürel tepki teorisinin" daha ağır bastığı sonucuna ulaşmış, dolayısıyla popülizm üzerine çalışan akademisyenlerin çoğu iki kampa bölünmüştür.

Bu çalışmada amaç, popülizmin güç kazanmasının en önemli faktörünün gerçekten tespit edilip edilemeyeceğini anlamaktır. İleri sürülen argüman, mevcut araştırma sonuçları arasındaki uyumsuzluğun "ekonomik şikayetler" ile "kültürel tepki" teorileri arasındaki geçişkenliğin yeterince incelenmemesi sebebiyle ortaya çıktığıdır.

Bu argümanı test etmek amacıyla çelişkili araştırma sonuçları iki teorisinin de merceğinden karşılaştırarak çatışan kısımların sebebini açıklayabilecek alternatif yaklaşımlar araştırma sorusunun odağında incelenmiştir. Sonuç kısmında literatürdeki farklı çalışma sonuçlarının nedenleri açıklanmaya çalışılmış ve bulgular sunulmuştur.

Anahtar kelimeler: Popülizm, Brexit, Donald Trump, Ekonomik Mağduriyet, Kültürel Tepki

ABSTRACT

REVIEWING THE BREXIT AND DONALD TRUMP'S ELECTORAL VICTORY WITHIN THE SCOPE OF POPULISM

2016 has been a critical year in terms of showing the significance of populist politics and politicians in the West. United Kingdom's referendum outcome to leave the EU and Donald Trump's victory in the United States presidential election has shown the power of certain types of discourse in politics. When examined, both developments reflect campaigns with heavy populist themes. Studying these cases promises a better understanding of populism in contemporary politics.

The two most widely accepted theories that aim to explain the reason for rising populism are the "economic grievances" and "cultural backlash" theories. However, scholars are divided by conflicting survey results and analyses. While some research results have shown that the "economic grievances" theory is more probable, others concluded that the "cultural backlash thesis" holds more weight.

This study aims to understand if one can really detect the most prominent factor in rising populist waves. Due to the conflicting outcomes of different analyses, something seems to be missing from the empirics. This study argues that the discordance between the results in different studies stems from the overlooked transitivity between "economic grievances" and "cultural backlash" theories.

To test this argument, the outcomes of Brexit and the 2016 U.S. presidential election were compared through the lens of opposing research results in the existing literature, and the contradictory points were examined via alternative theories. In the conclusion, the causes of the opposing findings in the literature are discussed, and the verdict is presented.

Keywords: Populism, Brexit, Donald Trump, Economic Grievance, Cultural Backlash

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

UKIP: United Kingdom Independence Party

EU: European Union

EP: European Parliament

MEP: Member of the European Parliament

PSA: Political Strategic Approach

BAS: British Attitude Survey

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. The diagram of “affective political economy theory”	43
Figure 2. Diagram about the process of populism	45
Figure 3: The circle of populism from the start.	46

1. INTRODUCTION

To understand politics, we must understand the phenomena shaping it. In the year 2016, two important developments occurred that changed the political sphere in the countries where they took place and in the world. One of the two was Donald Trump's presidential election victory in the United States of America. The second was the Brexit referendum, which caused the United Kingdom to part ways with the European Union.

Both developments were significant in world politics. Donald Trump's unusual character and his way of practicing the duty of the presidency have differentiated U.S. domestic and foreign policies in a concerning way for Americans and other countries, respectively.

Brexit, on the other hand, was a step back in European integration that has been realized with great effort.

Donald Trump and the most pro-Brexit party in the UK, UKIP, have a common phenomenon: populism. While different definitions of populism exist in the literature, all agree that it divides society into two antagonistic groups: "the people" who are ignored and "the elite" who are abusive.

Since Trump, UKIP, and its leader, Nigel Farage, are all considered populists and since the outcome of their political victories has influenced the world, populism is a greatly important phenomenon that must be thoroughly studied.

Considering its impact, populism has been an important area of research in the political science field. Many different scholars have presented great work, such as Benjamin Moffit (2020), Cas Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), Ernesto Laclau (2005), and David Marsh (2019), to define populism. There is still not one and only definition of populism in the literature; however, as mentioned above, the key concepts (people versus elite antagonism) are agreed upon.

Nevertheless, defining populism is not enough to understand why it occurs and how it became so influential. To find the reason for the rising populist wave, scholars developed two approaches, known in the literature as the “cultural backlash” and “economic grievances” theories.

The “cultural backlash theory” (pioneered by Ronald F. Inglehart and Pippa Norris) links the cause of rising populism to the discontent of the more traditionalist and older cohorts’ reaction to the modern, globalized, and diversified (in terms of religion, ethnicity, nationality, and likewise) structure of society.

The second theory, “economic grievances”, on the other hand, takes the “left-behind” groups who are mostly blue-collar workers and traders, taking financial blows from cheap labor force flowing in from other countries and import competition, respectively.

While the “cultural backlash” theory recognizes the effect of the economy, and the “economic grievances” theory recognizes the effect of cultural discontent, both theories claim to be “the most prominent” cause of populism.

However, there is one not adequately stressed issue, and that is the transitivity between cultural resentments and economic grievances. There have been studies that worked on finding mediators between cultural and economic discontent (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021) and to detect a triggering link among them (Rodrik & Kennedy, 2021). Such studies presented different models regarding the process of populism.

Still, in order to better understand the relationship between the drivers of the populist wave, more research is needed about the transitivity between “cultural backlash” and “economic grievances” theory. This study aims to contribute to this gap by further investigating the importance of the interplay between two theories and by answering the question: Is it possible to detect “the most prominent reason” for the rising populism in Western politics with the existing research?

As the focus points, this paper takes the Brexit and the 2016 U.S. presidential election outcome.

Since both of these developments occurred with the significant effect of populism and their effect on the Western political sphere was severe, reviewing the two from a comparative perspective will be adequate.



2. DEFINITIONS AND APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF POPULISM

In this chapter, I will first provide a definition of populism. Since there is no consensus regarding an absolutely precise definition of populism, three major approaches to define it will be considered from the existing literature. After reviewing the three most prominent explanations, I will try to summarize the key elements that every definition of populism holds in common. The first thing to do is to introduce these descriptions of populism to clarify the phenomenon referred to as “populism” and then, second, to briefly discuss its relationship to democracy. Subsequently, in the third part of this chapter, I will present the major explanations of current populism that is dominant in the field of populism studies.

2.1. APPROACHES AND DEFINITIONS

According to Benjamin Moffit, one of the leading scholars on populism in the literature, one can divide the approaches to populism into three, these are the

The ideational approach defines populism as a “thin-centered ideology”, the strategic approach defines it as a strategy to retrieve desirable political outcomes, and the discursive-performative approach defines populism as an equipped performance (Moffitt, 2020).

2.1.1. Ideational Approach

The ideational way to define populism (which has gained a broad acceptance in the literature) is an answer to the definition problem of this phenomenon by Cas Mudde in 2004. Later on, Mudde teamed up with Rovira Kaltwasser, and the two are now the pioneers of the ideational approach (Katsambekis, 2022).

In their words, “*we define populism as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, the pure people versus the corrupt elite, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonte generale* (general will) of the people.*”(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 5-6)

To clearly unbind this account, first, I should briefly mention the concept of “thin-centered ideology”. “*An ideology is a body of normative ideas about the nature of man and society as well as the organization and purposes of society*”(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p.6)

In his book Benjamin Moffit cites Freedon, who says the concept of “thin-centered ideology” is an infertile notion because of its very limited range of links to political conceptions (Freedon 1998, as cited in Moffit 2020) . Drawing from this definition, we can identify “thin-centered ideology” as a set of ideas that are not enough to stand alone in the political arena because of its limited content. This limited content lacks the capability to engage with the intricate nature of political life.

We can say that it (a thin-centered ideology, in this case, populism) only offers use when attached to “a host ideology” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). In other words, it should be used with a large set of ideas to really function.

Understanding the reasoning behind the term “thin-centered,” we should now mention what is populism’s main contents according to this approach. In their book (Populism: A Very Short Introduction) it is said populism has three main pillars. These are the people, the elites, and the general will (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017)It is safe to say that populism is a way of mobilizing the people against the greedy and corrupt elite, who are obstacles to the people's will. From this sentence alone, we can understand that populism has a divisive nature, as it creates two main camps.

However, in the case of right-wing populism, the distinction is not limited to the people and the elite. It is also divisive within the common (not “elite”) society. Because of the way it forms the concept of “the people”. “The populist right punches both up and down, respectively, at ‘the elite’ and at minorities (Judis, 2016, as quoted in, Moffit, 2020, Populist right and Nationalism section, para.2).

Speaking for the right wing, the people or, as sometimes, populists refer to as “true people” are basically the majority with the same ethnicity, religion, mother tongue, etc. Minorities and immigrants who are from different cultures and religions or who speak different languages are considered “alien.” The forming of the people often shows xenophobic and nativist features, stating that people from other backgrounds should be excluded (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

In the case of left-wing populism, the “people” are considered the “hardworking common folk” who are suffering from poor, inefficient, and even careless policies of elites who do not put ‘the people’ in the center but themselves as the beneficiaries of what states have to offer.

An important thing to note here is that in some cases, the populist left follows a quite inclusive way when describing the common folk or ordinary people by not outcasting minorities and immigrants. From this point—as we will see later in this chapter—the strategic and discursive—performative approaches differ from the ideational approach. The reason is that, according to the third one, people are “homogeneous.” The other two views disagree. More on this will be mentioned in the relevant parts.

This being said, the depiction of people vs. elite is a common part of the literature. All commentaries of populism mark ordinary men and women, who are shown as the true source from which populists claim to take their legitimacy. As Urbinati (2019) puts it “the logic of populism is the glorification of one part” (p.123). Also, remarking on its divisive and agitating nature.

We can emphasize this by carrying Norris and Inglehart’s comment here. That is, populists try to play on or create a concept of tribe. Tribes are cohorts that share the same identity, usually linked by common traditional or economic features, and they have a known leader (Norris & Inglehart, 2019) They continue and state that “populist rhetoric directs tribal grievances ‘upwards’ towards elites” (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p.7).

After mentioning the ideational take on the people, it is necessary to bring populism’s perception of the “elite” into light. Something has to be said here. The

general way of populism is clever. That is provoking people by using the feeling of injustice and “not having what you deserve because of the corrupt”. Together with the other elites are depicted as the culprits of social injustice and basically everything bad going on. Müller has defined populism as a political perception that enshrines the pure people and deems the elite as low-moral, unjust, greedy culprits (Müller 2016, as cited in Moffitt 2020). Shils also explains populism by emphasizing its positions against the elite by stating that populism is a largely spread grievance of the common people against the higher class who are in control of the administrative and economic order (Shils, 1956, as cited in Moffitt, 2020).

Populists use every resentment society has against elites to gain power. In a world where immigration and unbalanced income distribution largely exist, this comes as no surprise. David Marsh (2019) states that the four points that populism puts into play are clear: a hostile understanding of the elite as traitors, refusal of pluralism, emphasizing nativism instead of cosmopolitanism, and a strong leadership figure. We can see that elites are without a doubt depicted as underminer characters of ordinary people’s quality of life.

The other column that is fundamental in the description of Mudde and Kaltwasser is the general will. As aforementioned, populists ground their righteousness on the claim that they are the representative of the people’s wishes. Depicting themselves as the only true spokesperson of ‘the common folk on the street’ is populist actors’ general strategy. Doing so makes it easier for populists to present themselves as one of them (the people) and to create a distinguished image from the elite.

The populist’s claim to be “vox populi” (voice of the people) is a delicate subject. That is because it can raise some issues in a democratic system. It is true that there is a demand (demand and supply sides will be more detailly mentioned) for what populist actor speaks. However, stating that something is the pure will and absolute right wish of the ‘real’ people is highly problematic. This kind of rhetoric means that the wish of the outsider group (outsider, according to populists) holds no importance. We can imagine that when populist politicians come to power, the issue can turn into a democratic problem. The troubled relationship between populism and democracy has its own subchapter in this study and will be more elaborately discussed in the next pages.

Introducing the mainstays of the ideational approach ends here. However, I did not indicate another feature that is a main point of criticism among strategic and discursive performative scholars. From an ideational perspective, a political actor is either populist or not. Using the ideational approach, Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that we can clearly distinguish all populist and nonpopulist occurrences in the past and present (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The word “clearly” here is problematic for other approaches. The reason is that they see populism as a strategy or a performance, making it a more flexible and adaptable concept at different times for political actors. This will become clearer once we cover other approaches. Before doing that, however, I should introduce the “strong leader” concept since it has a pivotal role in the strategic approach to populism.

2.1.2. Leader

The concept of a charismatic or strong leader is a very powerful feature of populism. Since populism is divisive by nature, a leader who equips it will voice divisive rhetoric that targets the elites and others. Such a way of communication requires a passionate, exciting, and somewhat aggressive tone. Therefore, it is hard to imagine any populist leader depicting a calm personality (at least when he/she appeals to the public).

Taking it from Moffit, John Abromeit says that while some populist actors or populist movements are successful, some are not because “the people” are making the decision as to who they are going to listen to and who they are not (Abromeit, 2017, as cited in, Moffit, 2020).

The “daring” attitude of populist leaders is recognized and emphasized by almost all definitions of populism. Showing us that literature has one more widely accepted feature over the concept. This acceptance is not only over the leader aspect; we see that all different approaches of populism more or less examine and indicate the same actors, political groups, and movements, making it safe to say there is a common acceptance of populist figures and cases ”(Moffitt, 2020).

Another common feature is populist actors' common narrative that they all claim to be "the voice of people", there are many populists who use different ideologies and viewpoints, but they all wear the cape of vox populi (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). The Latin term vox populi (voice of the people) is enriched by Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017); they define it as the fundamental makeup for the populist leader that has two processes: differentiating the leader from the elite and connection to people.

To gain sympathy and trust, populist figures choose to attack and degrade the establishment, which is, of course, the design of the elites. The antiestablishment rhetoric is crucial for populists not only to transform public resentment as a support for themselves but also to strengthen their "outsider" image. Since they are against the current deformed system and corrupt elite, they should not be one of them. That being said, populists are often very wealthy characters such as Donald Trump and Silvio Berlusconi. "Paul Taggart's original observation, populism can be thought of as politics for ordinary people by extraordinary leaders who construct ordinary profiles" (Taggart, qtd. in, Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 78).

According to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017), these figures are "entrepreneur populists" who try to appear as "self-made honest men" as a threat to the elites (pp. 73,76). The term "entrepreneur populist" is used for businessmen who are entering the political arena.

The "anti-elite entrepreneur" image can be difficult to portray due to the significant amount of wealth that this type of populists usually has. (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Still, it is possible as seen in the Donald Trump example. Entrepreneur populists present themselves as hardworking men who successfully built a fortune despite the corrupt elite (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Doing so, they also aim to gain the sympathy of the people as an example of the "true self-made man" who struggled in the business because of the rotten establishment but emerged victorious (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

Also, since the division between the people and elite is not purely financial but also about morality, “entrepreneur populists” are usually able to find ground for themselves as the champions of the people (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017).

One important thing to note is that the lack of a strong leadership of political parties can -especially if they are constitutionally weak- also serve the populist one’s advantage. In Europe, the fortune of populist parties varies, especially over time, and in times like this, if other parties lack effective leadership, they can be overshadowed and cornered by populists, like the case of the United Kingdom Independence Party’s (UKIP) strong pressure over British National Party (BNP) and the National Front (NF)(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) . In my opinion, we can expand UKIP’s pressure on the big parties and governments. Considering that David Cameron felt strong pressure to hold a referendum, it is clear that not only a strong leader but the lack of a rival strong leader (of course, one that is against populist rhetoric) also opens available ground for populism.

2.1.3. Strategic Approach

Unlike ideational approach strategic and discursive approaches do not see populism as any kind of ideology. “The strategic and discursive-performative approaches both treat populism as a practice – something that is done – and as a gradational phenomenon” (Moffitt, 2020, Comparing Three Approaches Section, para. 8). Starting with the strategic approach (also called the Political Strategic Approach or PSA for short), it argues populism is a strategy that individual politicians use(Moffitt, 2020). By individual politicians, it is meant the populist leaders since PSA puts the leader figure at the center of populism.

The strategic approach marks the importance of the leader figure while indicating their pragmatic visions, which are far from being ideologically stable.(Weyland, 2021). This definition from Kurt Weyland emphasizes the pivotal presence of a populist leader, and it also marks the opportunistic tendencies of the leader figure as well as non-consistent and non-ideological behavior types. A clear difference between PSA and ideational approaches.

According to Paul D. Kenny, Populism is more about who holds power than what people believe they are a part of, and populist leaders seize power by linking the not-so-relatable masses via their false claims and personal charisma (Kenny, 2023).

This definition is important because it draws attention to three things. The first one is the charismatic leader. Second is the claim that “populism is not about what people believe but what they or their leader do.” This sentence shows us the importance of the actions. Since it is a leader-centric approach, we can say, at the end of the day, what the leader does will hold more importance than the masses he/she claims to represent. According to PSA reasoning, of course. The third important thing is the “linking not relatable.” This shows that, unlike the ideational approach, populism does not have to be anti-pluralistic.

Since a collective mass movement is not always probable, people choose a political figure to represent them, and this “power transfer” supplies populist leaders with great political strength without any check-balance obligation (Weyland, 2021). Thus, populist figures can find available ground for their pragmatist aims, which in the end, significantly disempowers democracy (Weyland, 2021).

PSA, however, argues that the concept of people is too heterogeneous to empower as a whole. This is also an objection to the ideational approach’s “people as a homogeneous unity” argument. Taking advantage of their strategies, populist leaders are able to use their power when they see an opportunity. As a basic and brief definition, we can say that populists are power-seeking figures who intend to find it by playing on the grievances of the masses, according to PSA.

To mention the differences between PSA and discursive performative approaches, we can indicate that the discursive approach takes language, style, and overall behavior of populists as a performance, which is what populism actually is (according to them). PSA, on the other hand, claims these attributes of populist leaders are a part of their strategy, side elements for the “one of us” role but not the core of populism.

There is also the pivotal role of the leader. While Scholars who follow discursive- performative way accept the strong leader figure, they do not insist on the

role of the leader as an engine of everything (like ideational scholars). Moffitt (2020) provides the Tea party example. According to him, among the three approaches, only the strategic approach could not accept the Tea Party as a populist movement due to the lack of one most prominent leader figure (Moffitt, 2020).

2.1.4. Discursive- Performative Approach

Discursive- performative (or sometimes only referred to as performative) approach is a way of doing politics by performatively representing the people and again performatively undermining the elite (Moffitt 2020, as cited in, Aiolfi, 2022). Since this approach defines populism as a performance it also claims it is gradational and not binary (Moffitt 2020, as cited in Aiolfi, 2022). It means that the discursive performative approach sees populism as a phenomenon that can possibly be used in different intensity levels, unlike the claims of the ideational scholars who claim a person or movement is either populist or not (Aiolfi, 2022).

The “intensity levels” can mean different levels (some might be more populist than others) or simply different performances. Simply put, a right-wing and a left-wing populist will present different public appeals. Of course, populism can also differ even though in the same political spectrum, such as the United Kingdom Independence Party’s propaganda that was not racist like its populist rivals. However, it was still nativist and nationalist.

An important feature of the discursive-performative approach is that it really leans into, as it is called in the literature, “flaunting of the low,” which refers to the unfitting and sometimes vulgar language that populist politicians use. It is considered a common populist behavior. As Aiolfi (2022) says, the term “flaunting of the law” originates from discursive- performative camp; other approaches also reflect this by the works of scholars.

Drawing it from the book of Mudde and Kaltwasser, Aiolfi (2022) also indicates that “*populist actors generally use Stammtisch (beer table) discourse*” (p.3).

Pierre Ostiguy, who stated the use of politically inappropriate use of language is an “initiative” and also an “essential and non-controversial defining feature of populism,” presented a way that further inspects it (Ostiguy 2009, as cited in, Aiolfi, 2022). Stating that the traditional left-right political understanding is not enough to understand and explain the aspects of populism, Ostiguy presented the high-low axis to populism literature (Aiolfi, 2022). Furthermore, he subdivided the high-low axis into two categories: sociocultural and politico-cultural (Ostiguy 2009, as cited in, Aiolfi, 2022).

Sociocultural aspects stem from generally showing kind and refined behavior in public, and the politico-cultural side concerns leadership preferences and the decision-making process (Ostiguy 2017, as quoted in Aiolfi, 2022).

Thanks to this systematic study, the “flaunting of the low” concept is discussed in more detail in the literature, which makes it more salient.

Other than describing populism as a performance and bringing more attention to the certain type of attitude that populists tend to show, the discursive-performative approach also makes another important claim. That is, the people and the elite are actually constructed by populism (populist actors, parties, movements, and alike). This is not denying the “demand” side of populism, nor to deny the people versus the elite antagonism. It is (putting it simply here) reflecting the demand and the antagonism in a way that is suited to populist purposes through a performance. This claim takes its root from the book “On Populist Reason” by Ernesto Laclau.

Katsambekekis briefly explains it here *“This logic can be summarised in three steps: (1) ‘the formation of an internal antagonistic frontier separating ‘the people’ from power’; (2) the creation of links among popular demands that are left unsatisfied by an unresponsive ‘elite’ (chains of equivalence); and (3) the representation of ‘the people’ of populism as a marginalised and underprivileged plebs which claims to be the legitimate community of the people, the democratic sovereign”* (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017 as quoted in Katsambekis, 2022, p. 11).

As we can see, the term “chain of equivalence” is used here. Laclau (2005) argues that it is a way to link the masses (who are feeling some type of resentment against the political ground) through their grievances and thus “constructing the people”. This opens the door for the people to be a (very) heterogeneous unity, unlike the ideational approach claims. Of course, in the case of right-wing populist rhetoric, this is not likely. However, it is possible for left-wing populists to actualize; hence, we can say there is no concrete “homogeneity requirement” for populism as a pillar.

The Discursive-performative approach has an advantage when it comes to detecting and inspecting populism cases in detail. Instead of asking, “Who are the people and are the elite?” it would ask, “How are they constructed?” (Moffitt, 2020, p.?). This is important because it can offer a shortcut when looking for a case in a region that is hard to understand. By studying the leaders and the way how they define and “construct” the two camps and the antagonism between them, it might become easier to decide if a leader of a movement, a political party, etc., is populist or not. Knowing this, Moffit claims discursive–performative approach is capable of examining word wide set of populism occurrences (Moffitt, 2020). The actual efficiency of this, of course, can be more usefully measured by the different studies about different populist leaders or via a large-scale comparative populism study.

2.2. POPULISM AND DEMOCRACY

After the conspicuous developments in world politics, such as the 2016 United States (U.S.) elections and the vote for BREXIT (both happened the same year), the discussions regarding populism’s effect on democracy have become a hot topic. The rising far right in Europe also contributed to this. All these cases are accepted as populist by the vast majority of scholars. This section is not the place to explain why so. This will take place in the coming chapters. In this section, I will try to depict different ideas about the populism-democracy and the populism-liberalism relation.

To give a general idea, there are three different approaches: those who see populism as a danger to democracy, those who see it as another level of democracy, and those who position themselves on a two-sided standpoint (Abromeit, 2017).

It is really not that hard to grasp a part of the reasoning behind the defenders of any position here. For it is in the middle, I will start with the “equivocal” comments. According to the high level of stress that populism puts on the shoulders of democracy, it is menacing. However, populism also includes a democratic aspect in it, for it can really present the uncared problems of society. The problem is the lack of guarantee. While a populist leader/party or movement may actually voice a hassle of the society, who can say that populist actors will not make a divisive/hostile move that is targeting “others”? It is a slippery ground. Moffit shows this by quoting Arditi.

“Arditi’s (2007) suggestion that we should see populism as an ‘internal periphery of democracy’ is perhaps most useful in guiding us through this seemingly paradoxical relationship. Arditi explains that a periphery, internal or not, is a hazy territory that indicates the outermost limit of an inside and the beginning of the outside of a system, a grey area where the distinction between inside and outside is an effect of polemic. Populism can remain within the bounds of democracy, but also reach the point where they enter into conflict and go their own separate ways” (Arditi, 2007, as quoted in Moffit, 2020, Conclusion section, para.3).

In literature, populism has the nickname “the shadow of democracy.” According to the middle-ground thinking, it really is a cloudy and, as aforementioned, “grey” area that can threaten democracy via its assailant rhetoric or give voice to aggrieved and underrepresented groups.

When it comes to the camp that sees populism as a deepening of democracy, they defend the latter idea. Because it bears representativeness, there is a side that thinks populism is not against democracy. Mouffe argues even though it cannot be seen as an undemocratic phenomenon because it represents the popular will of the people and faces the establishment on behalf of the people. (Mouffe 2016, as cited in Urbinati 2019, p. 112).

There is something to be aware of here. That is, some scholars indicate populism is not against or a threat to democracy, but it is against liberalism. At this point I should introduce the term “illiberal democracy” that takes place in the populist literature. It may sound odd, but it is explained.

“For Müller, the term ‘illiberal democracy’ should not be rejected on the grounds of being contradictory; he points to historical examples such as that of European Christian Democrats, who were both democratic and proudly illiberal, and thus fit the bill perfectly”(Moffitt, 2020, Liberal Democracy and Populism section, para. 6).

There is a criticism towards liberal democracy which is useful for us in this part because it explains how liberalism and democracy may not always go hand in hand. So we can better grasp the term “illiberal democracy.” This criticism (which is coming from the radical democrats) explains this via the “two-strand model”. It separates democracy and liberalism and claims liberal democracy works as a tensity mechanism between two (Moffitt, 2020). *“The liberal pillar emphasises the rights of the individual and finds the ultimate authority of the state in the law, whereas the democratic pillar emphasises participation and locates authority within the sovereignty of ‘the people’”*(Moffitt, 2020, Radical Democracy and Populism section, para. 7).

The balance works like this: liberalism defends the minority rights (and human rights in general) against the bullying of the majority, and democracy makes sure the popular will is able to be realized; thus sovereignty of people can apply without sweeping the lesser numbers’ importance under the carpet (Moffitt, 2020). The claim of radical democrats is that the balance is off for the advantage of liberalism(Moffitt, 2020). Seeing democracy as a “deepening of democracy” is a comment that also radical democrats tend to favor. Which makes sense when thinking about the “two-strand model”.

As we know, populist actors lean their back to the will of the people to claim rightfulness. Their rhetoric aims to mobilize the masses. Therefore, in different times and different countries, populists do support decision-making by direct voting, be it

referendums or alike (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Based on this, Mudde and Kaltwasser argue, “In essence, populism is not against democracy; rather, *it is at odds with liberal democracy. It is a set of ideas that defends extreme majoritarianism and supports a form of illiberal democracy*”(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 95).

To inspect this in finer detail, providing populism’s and liberalism’s differences will be useful.

“...populism and liberalism differ along three core lines. First, populism is characterised by a single cleavage between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, whereas liberalism acknowledges multiple cleavages throughout society. Second, populism uses an adversarial style of politics, whereas liberalism seeks moderation through an ‘overlapping consensus’ between various interests that coexist in society. Third, populism is majoritarian: it considers only the view of the majority – ‘the people’ – to be legitimate, whereas as liberalism’s constitutionalism tends to seek protection for and give voice to minorities against majorities” (Riker, 1982, Rawls,2005, Pappas, 2016, as quoted in, Moffitt, 2020, Populism versus Liberalism section, para. 3)

After this clarification now, I can move to the “illiberal democracy” idea for populism and why populism is thought of as a threat to democracy or, rather, liberal democracy. Dividing the society into antagonistic groups can be one thing we mention(Moffitt, 2020). Its hostile attitude towards institutionalized democratic establishments, aggressive style, and othering the lesser numbered groups in society are clear reasons that are outright clashing with liberalism’s sensitive and protective (especially for minorities) practices (Moffitt, 2020).

Since populism in every form is against the elite and the establishment that is claimed to favor elites, it has a tendency to bypass democratic institutions and make decisions through popular will. This is one of the important problems for scholars who argue populism is dangerous for democracy, liberalism, and liberal democracy altogether. Mudde and Kaltwasser (2017) argue due to its monist nature and the claim of representing the will of the ordinary people, populism can lean towards authoritarianism. Saying that it has a monist core, is a comment of ideational approach.

However, for strategic approach the opportunistic characterization of populists, the leader centrism, and populist's search for unmediated support also makes populism be able to shift towards authoritarianism. For the discursive-performative approach, undemocratic or "illiberally democratic" rhetoric and provocations by populist actors are also possible since it populism is accepted as a performance.

Taking all these into account, it is possible to understand populism as illiberal democracy as marked here, "populism can develop into a form of democratic extremism or, better said, of illiberal democracy"(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 82). Also, whether monist or pluralist, the notion of people as a heterogeneous or homogeneous element, populism always pits the people against the elite, and it claims that the people are the majority, which is the true decider of the popular will.

Here Urbinati has a great criticism: "*I argue that populism is structurally marked by a radical partiality in interpreting the people and the majority; this implies that, if a populist movement comes to power, it can have a disfiguring impact on the institutions, rule of law, and division of powers that comprise constitutional democracy*" (Urbinati, 2019, p.112).

Considering the abovementioned statements (especially the anti-establishment features), a populist government can really have a destructive effect on democracy. That is being said, for its to be destructive, populism does not need to be in power.

The case of Brexit is a great example of this. Even though UKIP was not a significant party in the national vote count, it still was the most prominent party that achieved to influence the masses on behalf of vote leave and in the and UKIP had an unforgettable effect on the history of British politics. (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

To sum up this part, while populism may make the political ground notice uncared problems of citizens and force the political class's hand to respond, the way populism claims to be the voice of people is problematic, to say the least. Since it not only challenges the elite but also strikes democratic institutions, it threatens a functional mechanism for constitutional rights. The agitating and belligerent style is not only for defending ordinary people's rights in the street. It does set a hostile ground for whatever it is targeted. The toleration aspect of it is really limited if not zero. This really raises

worries when populism rises to power. Since the way of the expression matters whatever the purpose behind it, and populism bears an ill attitude. Which can very well be performed or strategized for the selfish purposes of populists. Political correctness does not only exist to be formal, but it is also there to instill sensitivity towards different thoughts.

In 21st century a democracy should not be where people carelessly fight for their view and while winners enjoy their triumph losers are mindlessly forced to obey the popular will. Therefore, a liberal democracy is the best way to actualize a democratic existence. Populism without a serious doubt does clashes with the liberal aspect of modern democracies. Which shows that it is mostly a toxic phenomenon.

3. Populism Theories: “The Cultural Backlash” versus “Economic Grievances” Thesis

In the previous chapters, I introduced populism and tried to summarize the three most prominent approaches for defining it. However, we cannot just ask the question, “What is populism?” and stop there. We should also try to understand what is the cause of it? This chapter is to answer that, but just like the definition of populism, the cause of it is also arguable. There are two major theories trying to provide the most prominent reason behind populism. Therefore, it is needed for this study to include and explain both of them.

The two major theories to find the root of populism are known as “the cultural backlash theory and “the economic grievances” theory. Below, in a separate subtitle for both the detail depictions are given.

3.1. CULTURAL BACKLASH THEORY

This theory positions cultural reactions and the concept of “defending traditional values” together with identity at its center. According to scholars who pursue this theory, the main reason for the feeling “culturally threatened” (which is the prominent

reason of increasing populism) is the rising immigration and the increased mobility of people, which happens due to wars and globalization (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Considering the growing rightwing populism in Europe and the U.S., the cultural backlash theory explains this via racism, nationalism, nativism, xenophobia, and islamophobia that is agitated by populism and populist leaders. It does not reject the economic side of the picture, but it argues that the economy is a less important reason (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021). The core argument is that the othering (via xenophobia, nativism, etc.) and change in values (from traditionalism to cosmopolitanism) are the reasons for the rising populist voices in Europe and the U.S. (Inglehart & Norris, 2017).

The leading scholars behind cultural backlash theory are Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart. They address the problem by stating that virulent reactions to any kind of minorities (ethnic, religious, etc.) are a reflector of the resentment (Inglehart & Norris, 2017)

Surely the timing of rising immigration and increasing populism (both in the West) is not a coincidence but a clear indicator of the fact that especially populist right takes its driving power from the resentment against “the others” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

Other than the obvious demeanor of marking any type of “other” as a scapegoat, the cultural backlash theory also indicates the old generation versus new values factor, which is the shifting political correctness understanding and the liberal democracies’ growing tolerance for the old times’ marginal concepts. Which is strongly related to globalization. The populist backlash, according to cultural theory, is “reflecting a nostalgic reaction among older sectors of the electorate seeking a bulwark against long-term processes of value change, the ‘silent revolution’, which has transformed Western cultures during the late twentieth century”(Inglehart & Norris , 2016, p. 13). This “silent revolution” can be summarized as the liberalized social life’s and especially advanced (also broadened) university education’s cosmopolitan effect on younger generations after the war period, which encouraged younger cohorts to be more open-minded and tolerant towards different cultures, beliefs, and lifestyles compared to the older

generations. When globalization came into play it only empowered these changing values (which are safeguarding differences). Hence, people who were raised in a much more traditional world started to miss the good old days, which especially right-wing populists glorify (Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

The feeling of nostalgia, the yearning for old values, together with nativism, nationalism, racism, xenophobia, and islamophobia, is recognized as the main reason for growing populism by the scholars who defend cultural backlash theory.

3.2. ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES THEORY

Unlike the cultural backlash theory, the economic grievances theory does not recognize the hostile resentments against those who are different as the main reason for populism. Instead, it replaces all those with economic resentments towards immigrants and minorities. While not denying the antagonistic othering towards immigrants and minorities, it claims the rising populism stems from those who are economically wounded by globalization and “left behind” by the establishment. (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021). Deemed as the “job stealer foreigners,” hostility against minorities still exists; however, the driving power for this belligerent approach is the economy.

“Socially disadvantaged groups, Betz suggests, are most prone to blame ethnic minorities and migrant populations for deteriorating conditions, loss of manufacturing jobs, and inadequate welfare services”(Betz, 1994, as quoted in, Inglehart & Norris , 2016, p. 11).

This blaming is advantageous for populist leaders not only because it supports their rhetoric but also because of the fact that specific groups who feel under any sort of danger tend to support authoritarian leaders (Bornschieer, 2010, as cited in, Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

The economic reasoning for populism takes people and divides them into the “losers and the winners of globalism.” It claims that low-skilled workers and uneducated people are economically threatened by the new coming “others” who place them in a disadvantaged position in their own country. Therefore, while growing hostility emerges with populist rhetoric, it also makes an authoritarian figure who can be the defender against threats (populists) appealing to the masses.

4. DONALD TRUMP AND POPULIST RHETORIC

It is well known that former U.S. President Donald Trump is a character that always stands out with his extraordinary (in a very negative way) attitude. In this chapter of the study, I will provide examples of his populist rhetoric on his way to the Oval Office and analyze it to break down its populist features.

In his campaign, Donald Trump frequently used anti-elite, xenophobic, and politically combative language. Blaming the elite because of economic shortcomings and showing the immigrants as the fuel to the fire, he checked all the boxes that a populist would perform. His “us versus them” rhetoric targeted the rich and the poor against the “real American people”.

Before giving examples from the literature on the populist attitudes of Donald Trump I must introduce the term “Trumpism” since it is adopted by some scholars.

“Trumpism: The policies and political ideas of the US president Donald Trump (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2022)

“Trumpism is a populist combination of racial anger, anti-multiculturalism, nationalist loneliness, a nostalgic nostalgia for the past, misogyny, and sexism, strong one-man rule, an aggressive political style, and anti-Islamism” (Inglehart & Norris, 2016, p.).

As seen in the quotation above, the definition of Trumpism from the scope of Inglehart and Norris is not very different from populism. In the later part of this chapter, I will give examples of Trump's populist rhetoric on immigrants, Muslims, Mexicans, African Americans, and the elite. Before that, however, I want to give other scholars' take on Trump as a populist.

Sanders & Creve (2019) State “By using his classical populist attitude, Trump stated he is against corrupted establishments and immigrants who are dangerous for American’s professional and social life.”

They also add, “While Trump's campaign narratives were built on populist themes such as past glory, anti-immigrant position, and national interests, he also differentiated himself with the anti-status quo arguments from his rival Hilary Clinton” (Crewe & Sanders, 2019).

McKay (2019) brings attention to his inexperience in any public office, and he also ties Trump’s personality to his populism by stating that Trump is a psychologically unbalanced liar whose presidential victory was seen as an example of the rising populist politics (Crewe & Sanders, 2019).

After these statements from other scholars that indicate Trump is an outright populist, it is important to mention how he built his “outsider” image.

The interesting thing is that despite not being from the political world, he was definitely from the financial elite class. In 2016, his personal net worth was over 3 billion dollars (Lu, 2024).

At this point, placing Trump in the “entrepreneur populist” classification (detailedly explained in the 8th and 9th pages) introduced by Mudde and Kaltwasser (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017) will be adequate. This type of populist leader tries to put large spaces between honest businessman and corrupt elite portrayals.

To Trump’s credit this image is hard to build. Although it is highly capable, populism (at least plain and open) is not specifically against the rich but very clearly against the political elite.

Even though it is difficult, this small distinction presents an opportunity to show oneself as the “self-made entrepreneur” (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). As mentioned in the “Charismatic Leader” chapter, one strategy that entrepreneur populists use is claiming that they are against the corrupt elite and that they made their fortune despite them.

4.1 TRUMP'S ANTI-ELITE RHETORIC

There are plenty of examples of Donald Trump's combative and careless words against the ones who are oppose to his presidency. In addition to that, in his speeches, it is common for him to target the so-called elite and politicians in general. Concerning pitting the people against the elite, which is populism's most predominant future, it will be adequate to give some examples of Trump's anti-elite rhetoric.

“The people are correct, and the ruling class is mistaken on every significant problem impacting this nation. In regard to taxes, the scope of government, trade, immigration, and foreign policy, the elites were mistaken” (Trump, 2011).

Above, there is a very self-explanatory example of populist rhetoric. A sentence that is said to completely play on popular public complaints as an effort to give the “likeminded” man image.

As it is the general situation in election campaigns Trump's “drain the swamp!” slogan is also trying to give the message that he is fighting against the corrupted circles. (Crewe & Sanders, 2019, p.103)

“I, for one, am not interested in defending a system that for decades has served the interest of political parties at the expense of the people. Members of the club—the consultants, the pollsters, the politicians, the pundits and the special interests—grow rich and powerful while the American people grow poorer and more isolated” (Trump, 2016). This article, which Trump wrote for The Wall Street Journal, is especially a good example of Donald Trump's anti-elitist narratives, as he is giving a whole cohort of occupations that he deems as corrupt.

Something is worth mentioning here. Fighting against corruption is one thing that is completely decent. To adopt a strategy that pretends to fight it is another, which is what Trump did in 2016. He often states that he was self-funding his campaign in an effort to make people believe he was not one of the corrupt rich.

Trump is also very successful in showing his business achievements as proof that he is “the person” who can achieve similar accomplishments as president. It is

known in the literature that one of the defining elements of populist leaders is to present themselves as “the only one who can solve the problems”. While examining his rhetoric, it is not a challenge to find all of the populist attributes, be it anti-elitism, anti-pluralism, politically inadequate language, or the claim of being the only person who can be a true leader.

In one of his speeches (this one is in New York City) Donald Trump states as following:

“...When I see the crumbling roads and bridges, or the dilapidated airports, or the factories moving overseas to Mexico, or to other countries, I know these problems can all be fixed, but not by Hillary Clinton – only by me” (Politico, 2016) This claim is a clear depiction of the true leader claim.

He goes on to state that it is not possible to change anything by electing the people who made the system this way in the first place. (Politico, 2016). Then he calls for the supporters of Bernie Sanders to join him so together they can wipe out the corruption, and he continues by blaming the bureaucrats, the “corrupt” businesspeople (the ones he claims who are unlike him), and Hilary Clinton of being liars (Politico, 2016)

This part alone is a summary of why Donald Trump counts as a populist politician. In this passage, he targets the politicians, bureaucrats, and business people who can be (in populist rhetoric) described as elite.

There is, however, another part that is quite important. Trump, by using the “champion of the people” image, calls another political party’s voters to support himself. It is a purely pragmatistic move as he is not only delivering a message that plays on people’s grievances but also tries to make sure that his message is comprehensive enough to draw other voter characteristics.

In another part of his speech, he states that America has lost when she switched from putting the people’s welfare first to putting it after the already rich companies’ benefits (Politico, 2016).

This part is to attract low-skill workers who are, as the “left behind” argument states, economically hurt due to globalization and foreign people/immigrants who came to America to find low-skilled factory work.

Even from one speech, it is possible to see all the anti-establishment attributes in Trump's talk. What is missing is a well-explained solution method.

Just as the UKIP example, Trump does not offer any real political solution that is based on a method. He (again, like UKIP and Farage) only provides simple answers and claims he will fix every troubled matter.

4.2. TRUMP’S XENOPHOBIC -ANTI PLURALIST RHETORIC

To be able to rise on the surface of public grievances, populists do not only depend on spreading economic misinformation. To increase their support, populists also play on cultural, traditional grievances. Xenophobia and a society definition from an anti-pluralistic lens is a way of populist supply.

Of course, if a part of society has these latent or openly expressed anti-pluralistic thoughts, it will draw them toward the populist candidates. To achieve this during his campaign, Donald Trump targeted Mexicans, Muslims, African Americans and other minorities in his speeches and on his social platform accounts.

In his speeches, Donald Trump uses what I prefer to call the “degrading by generalization” strategy. When he gives an example that is committed by an immigrant, and using it, he blames the entirety of an immigrant cohort. Even though he rarely adds a balancing sentence (like in the quotation below) it is far from being sincere.

“They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume, are good people” (Reilly, 2016, para.5)

In this example we see his accusation by generalization and after, a balancing sentence to give the impression that he also tries to be fair, but it really holds no weight.

Another blaming element towards immigrants is associated with the economy in Donald Trump’s rhetoric.

“Trump said (by referring to Mexicans) as he declared he will run for the office on June 16, 2015. “And now they are beating us economically. They are not our friend, believe me. But they are killing us economically. The U.S. has become a dumping ground for everybody else’s problems” (Reilly, 2016, para.4)

This example also shows how Trump readily labels people from different backgrounds with negative generalizations. From a financial standpoint, he often emphasizes the negative effects of immigrants. One of his promises was to build a wall in the Mexican border, which he claimed Mexico will pay for it.

The promise to build a wall is an extreme offer itself let alone making another country provide the finances for it. Still, he was quite assertive about it.

The political move here, however, might be more sophisticated than one can think.

Drawing from the Judis’ work Yalçın Tarancı,(2023) conveys:

“While Trump supporters did not believe that all illegal immigrants could be deported or that Mexico would be willing to pay for the wall, they also believed that this is how the distinction between “us” (the people) and “them” (the other) became clear. In fact, easy solutions like this were the result of Trump's tendency to oversimplify extremely complex issues and propose solutions that would appeal to the public” (Judis, 2016 as quoted in, Yalçın Tarancı, 2023, p.56)

Oversimplification seems to be a common tool that populist leaders use since we see it in the discourses of both Farage and Trump.

Mexicans are not the only group targeted by Trump; however, he targeted many people from different cultures and backgrounds in order to play on white Americans’ vote, who are in anti-pluralist mindsets.

In their work (Khan et al., 2021) examines three different strategies Trump uses in his discourse when talking about Muslims. To sum up, briefly, the first one is the “constructive strategy.” Which “aims to form an image on the notion of unity and sameness between the people of in-group for the sake of differentiation from the people of the out-group”(Khan et al., 2021, p. 5).

Showing Muslims as potential terrorists and therefore dangerous people who are too risky to be involved in society, Trump is constructing an Islamophobic resistance in Americans' cognition that is not limited to America(Khan et al., 2021). This is an exclusionary, alienating and unrealistic discourse given the fact that there are approximately 3 million Muslim Americans within the U.S. borders (Khan et al., 2021).

The second type of strategy Trump uses against Muslims is “strategies of perpetuation”(Khan et al., 2021). In this strategy the out-group is demonized by a specifically formed victim identity that represents the “people” who are hurt, and this rhetoric is continuously used (Khan et al., 2021).

The third and last strategy is referred to as “strategies of dividing and destroying”(Khan et al., 2021). It is basically creating a hostile and negative image for Muslims by using destructive and degrading language, which persistently portrays them as a threat to the United States’ well-being and prosperity. (Coles, n.d.)

From all the examples that are given above, there is no room for doubt that former American president Donald Trump ran a campaign that was based on populist discourse. From economy to culture, Trump blamed either the existing establishment and elite (which he refers to as “members of the club”) or immigrants together with various cohorts who are from different backgrounds within American society. All the hardships and their root reasons that the U.S. faces, have been presented through a populist, anti-pluralistic lens to the society. As for the solutions (discussed above), there was no planned roadmap that was presented to the public. The answers to complex problems were always simple.

This part of the study has been written to satisfy the structural need to show Donald Trump’s populist behavior.

4.3. ANALYZING THE 2016 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OUTCOME FROM THE SCOPE OF POPULISM

In the previous section, I tried to answer the question, “Why does Donald Trump count as a populist politician?” From the various examples given above, the populist features of Donald Trump’s campaign should now be clear. The next step is to analyze why this populist candidate emerged victorious. Is it because of cultural resentment, as it is claimed in the cultural backlash theory, or the success of the campaign is rooted in economic resentment, as it is claimed in the economic grievances theory?

To show that by analyzing the case of 2016 U.S. presidential election I will introduce both theories arguments about the Trump’s victory and I will interpret their findings.

The data in the literature shows that financially poor regions are more prone to voting for Trump. This does draw attention to economic grievances theory. However, it does not explain why people with financial worries shift towards the populist right. The left and even the populist left should have been growing stronger from the lens of an exclusively economic reasoning (Ferrara, 2023).

In the region/district-focused research (which mostly leans towards economic grievances theory), it is clear that the areas that are financially struggling are more prone to support Republican politicians in the U.S. (Autor et al., 2020, as cited in, Ferrara, 2023). The literature also shows “Chinese import” in the U.S. market is highly affecting the welfare of the same regions(Ferrara, 2023). To gain votes from “import-exposed” areas, protectionist trade policies offer a promising way; thus, Donald Trump followed this road during his candidacy(Ferrara, 2023).

“Studies focusing on the political consequences of Chinese import competition have consistently shown that trade exposure favors candidates and parties at the right end of the political spectrum... However, it is not entirely clear why this occurs”(Cameron, 1978, Rodrik, 1998, Walter, 2010, as quoted in, Ferrara, 2023, p. 679).

It is also known that unlike the district level analyses, individual level surveys show cultural grievances more conspicuously (Rodrik,2021), (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021)

The forthcoming features of people who voted for Donald Trump are older age, rural residency, white ethnicity and Christianity. According to CNN 2016 presidential election exit polls which involved 24558 participants, electors who are 40 and older are more prone to voting for Trump (CNN, 2016)

Among the participants, 49% of the electors between 40-49, 52% of electors between 50-64, and 52% of electors who are 65 and older preferred Trump. (CNN,2016). Considering the high age mean, the claim of job losses because of immigrants in blue-collar works takes a blow.

Also, when we look at the income statistics in CNN exit polls, the high-income percentages of Trump voters are visible. Among the participants, when we look for those who earn under 50.000, the percentage of Clinton supporters is 53%, and the percentage of Trump supporters % is 41 (CNN,2016). When we look at those who earn 50.000 or more, Clinton supporters take 47% of the share, while Trump voters take 48% (CNN, 2016). If we move higher on the income ladder, those who earn under 100.000 are divided into 49% Clinton voters and 45% Trump voters (CNN,2016), which is not a significant difference. Among those who earn more than 100.000 the percentages are even both Trump and Clinton supporters detected as 47% (%3 did not answer). The missing percentages for all the afore mentioned statistics are those who did not answer.

While “import-exposed” and financially less happy regions and districts do tend to vote for Donald Trump, the above-given statistics show that financially struggling people are not the only cohort that votes for Trump. Among the white, rural resident voters, a decent amount of “financially safe” people still voted for Trump.

Considering this and the ambiguous reason why economic hardships have risen on the populist right, not the left, we can turn to the interplay between the two theories to better understand these points.

A possible answer might be lying in the transitivity between the economic and cultural grievances, and if it is, even the economic anxieties would be the root cause of the

rising populist vote, economic grievances theory still would not be the most prominent reason for the victory of Donald Trump or Brexit outcome. According to the economic grievances perspective, the populist left also should have risen rose, but the votes shifted towards the right. Therefore, a purely economic perspective is troubled, and taking into account the victory of the right, it may not be the determinant factor for the emerged Trump presidency and Brexit outcomes.

That being said, a pure cultural resentment theory will also be problematic because economic hardships do push the votes toward populist candidates, be it on the left or the right side of the political spectrum.

It is true that neither theory ignores the effect of the other one in the rising populist trend; however, the claim that either one of them is the most important one is definitely questionable when the interplay seems strong. The reason for the Trump presidency and vote to leave the U.K. might even be the mediators between economic and cultural resentments.

5. THE CASE OF BREXIT

5.1. THE EVENTS THAT EMPOWERED EUROSCEPTICISM

The United Kingdom (UK) and its relationship with the European Union (EU) have always proved troubled. This chapter will not go back to the roots of the UK's first integration into the European Union, but I will take the issue from important points in terms of growing Euroscepticism in the UK. Since Euroscepticism and populism are strongly related (in the case of Brexit) so, understanding the causes of Euroscepticism will help us better see how populism used it to pave the way for the Brexit referendum.

When the topic is Euroscepticism there are three prominent point of views in the literature, the economic view claiming that Euroscepticism stems from economic hardships in Europe; the identity view, which claims some European citizens put their national identity first and they even see the term "European" as an undermining factor of their national identities and as the third one the institutional view which puts the low level of trust towards EU institutions to the center (Hooghe & Marks, 2007, as cited in, Kneuer, 2019).

From this alone, we can already see that the first two causes (economy and identity) are the same as the two major theories on the reasons of populism. Also, the third one (distrust in institutions) is a well-defined and emphasized factor within the studies of populism.

Drawing from Starting's work, Öner remarks on the three main milestones that caused Euroscepticism to grow in the UK: the Maastricht Treaty, the enlargement of the EU in 2004 (towards Middle and East Europe), and 2007 (Bulgaria and Romania joined as members), and the 2008 world economic crises. (Startin, 2015, as cited in, Öner, 2021. p.7)

Sokullu, by citing Hall, gives the Maastricht Treaty and the EU's enlargement policy as the two major reasons of vote leave (Hall, 2016 as cited in Sokullu, n.d.). We can see the Maastricht Treaty and enlargement policy are shown as both the reasons for

Euroscepticism and populism in the literature. From the perspective of this paper, the 2008 economic crisis is also a reason for populism and Euroscepticism to find ground in the UK.

Maastricht Treaty showed that the European integration process was gaining a political dimension and therefore Eurosceptic view's worries regarding national sovereignty grew bigger (Startin, 2015, as cited in, Öner, 2021. p.7).

Maastricht dispersed the idea that the EU will be an economic trade cooperation among the European states; it made people notice that the integration process is planned in a deeper political level and thus made a significant impact on the potential and already Eurosceptic cohorts, also in the UK it brought the questions about the future of the national parliament. (Startin, 2015, p.314).

The enlargement policy, on the other hand, provided the right to free movement to new member states' citizens, which was also a source of worry for the Eurosceptics. (Startin, 2015, as cited in, Öner, 2021). "Crucially, Maastricht also enshrines the principle of the Freedom of Movement in the EU, something which opponents of the EU in the UK and elsewhere have progressively exploited in their Eurosceptic rhetoric and discourse"(Startin, 2015, p.314).

The 2008 world economic crisis as the third actor was very handy from a Eurosceptic and populist perspective. For the Eurosceptics a crisis the Eurozone was a clear opportunity to raise their voices (Startin, 2015).

Even though the source of the economic crises was not the Eurozone, the blame of the economic hardships afterward, fell on the shoulders of the currency change (Startin, 2015).

It is important to note the difference between populism and Euroscepticism here. While the two can very well go hand in hand, Euroscepticism does not always need to be populist (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). One can be skeptical and worried about the impact of the EU on his/her country, be it economically or because of anxiousness about national sovereignty.

However, populism tries to make that effect based on post-truth (a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs

rather than one based on facts) (dictionary.cambridge.org, n.d.) and very often outright false propaganda. It uses the masses' anxiety or sensitiveness to pit them against the establishment and the elite. It divides the people and the elite into two antagonistic camps and uses emotional tactics and incendiary rhetoric to increase public stress. Doing so populists pave the way for the agitated and resentfully motivated people to grant them political power.

Now that I have briefly shown the picture of which events caused or rather empowered the Euroscepticism in the UK and talked about how populism and Euroscepticism differ, it should be adequate to introduce the process that led to the referendum and then the populist actors and their propaganda to push people's preference towards vote leave.

5.2. THE PROCESS TOWARD REFERENDUM

Since in the earlier chapter I stated that this paper will not go too back about the UK and EU relationship, I will take the process from the David Cameron era, when he declared that UK would go to a referendum. In his article Bale gives the reasoning of Cameron.

Rising support for UKIP and the pressures from Tory MPs made Cameron notice that he might not be able to control his party and if they don't ease the pro-Brexit voters (also pro-Brexit Tory MPs) the conservative party could lose the upcoming elections; thus Cameron decided to go for a referendum (which he thought would end in favor of remaining in the EU) to cut all the raising Tory voices and weaken UKIP's momentum. (Bale, 2018).

In short, Cameron called for a referendum to ease the Eurosceptics in his party and to claim UKIP's votes (Norris and Inglehart 2018, as cited in Öner, 2021). He expected that the outcome will be staying in the EU (Farrell & Newman, 2017).

However, as we all know the outcome was different.

David Cameron was confident that the Brexit outcome will not occur, he did not realize that the support for remain side was lesser than it was for the leave side thus he

had to watch the populist wave that led by UKIP took the referendum by their wild propaganda (Behr, 2016, as cited in, Farrell & Newman, 2017).

It is clear that Cameron has miscalculated the strong populism effect in the UK's case, not only but predominantly practiced by UKIP and Nigel Farage.

5.3. POPULIST NARRATIVES OF UKIP AND NIGEL FARAGE

Since the tremendous effect that UKIP and Nigel Farage bring to British politics and Farage being the most central figure that comes to mind when the word BREXIT is mentioned, this part of the study will focus on how Nigel Farage and the party that he was the former leader of, UKIP, influenced the leaving decision by populist narratives.

To briefly give a picture of UKIP, Öner by citing Bale, conveys,

“UKIP is established 30 years after the UK's first application to European Community and from its first day it was strongly Eurosceptic and in time it also became populist. UKIP states that Brussels is a threat to UK's national sovereignty also that EU is not legitimate, and it is an obstacle for UK to play a global role. Especially after the economic crisis and immigration crisis UKIP's already rigid Euroscepticism is not really changed but its populist features grew significantly.”.(Bale, 2018, as cited in, Öner. 2021, pp.102-103).

5.3.1. The Populist Narratives of UKIP in National Arena

Considering the UKIP's successes in the EP, this subtitle will be about their campaign within the UK. I will try to summarize their rhetoric in the EP under the next subtitle.

UKIP and Nigel Farage used economic and anti-immigrant narratives to push the ideas of the people toward leaving the EU. When we look at it economic grievances and cultural backlash are the two main theories in the literature that is shown as the cause of populism. Of course, very fitting to populist rhetoric anti-elitist propaganda was also visible in UKIP's campaign for BREXIT. Leave side's anti-elitist rhetoric predominantly targeted the EU politicians in Brussels by claiming that the UK's national sovereignty was in danger.

UKIP took economic grievances, nationality, Euroscepticism, cultural security and showed the EU as the ultimate responsible while presenting BREXIT as the ultimate solution or at least as the biggest and most important step to fixing all problems(Uca, 2022).

On the anti-elite side, the target was Eurocrats and, of course, the government. Sovereignty and economic prosperity come forward when we look at anti-elitist discourse. Sovereignty claimed to be ruined because of the EU, and the government was also guilty because they were not fighting enough to defend British interests.

“The populist message that UKIP followed to achieve its Eurosceptic aim was based on the people versus elite eurocrats. The center parties consist of elite cartels who are indifferent to people’s problems. They were harmful to public interests and let country defenseless against the EU raid. British culture and economy were being ruined by eurocrats regulations and unlimited immigrant flow. In order to defend the economic austerity and cultural security the solution was to leave EU and UKIP was the only real presenter that can make it happen”(Clarke et al., 2016, as quoted in, Uca, 2022, p.173)

Above, we see how the economy is directly linked to immigrants and Eurocrats. A typical construction of perception effort. There is also the concept of cultural security which is playing on the cultural resentments.

The “us versus them” theme was not only built upon the way of life concept. As an example, UKIP and Farage tried to gain votes from people (people with openly or hidden cultural resentment feelings) by claiming that Türkiye will join the EU in 2025. (Uca, 2022).

UKIP also published a video that 15 million radical Muslims will come to UK via Türkiye’s EU membership (UKIP, 2016, as quoted in., Uca, 2022)

The famous “breaking point” poster was another “us vs. them” themed othering campaign move. On the poster it is seen that hundreds maybe thousands of refugees who are formed a very long que and waiting to pass borders. Also, under the red and quite big “breaking point” slogan there writes “EU has failed us all”. Of course, the poster has drawn many negative reactions but Nigel Farage, defending the poster as a

campaign element said “It is important for it draws attention to the danger. It made leave side win the referendum” (Farage, 2018, as quoted in., Öksüz, 2020, p.60)

As much as UKIP, its leader Nigel Farage too was a prominent actor in the way to Brexit (Steenbergen & Siczek, 2017). What truly set Nigel Farage apart was his politically inadequate attitudes. Which is a typic populist feature.

“He was not interested in detailed, intellectual arguments or political philosophy, on the contrary he humiliated these type of dialog as “PPE nonsense” to mark politicians who studied Politics, Philosophy and Economics (in short PPE) as Oxford graduate elites. His simple but powerful mocking and combative language together with a built “one of the common people” image was reflecting populist style of politics” (Goodwin & Milazzo, 2015, pp. 6-7).

5.3.2. Populist Narratives of UKIP in the European Parliament

Albeit being opposed to the EU, UKIP did not act shy when it came to running for European Parliament elections. It may seem like a conundrum, but it is proven to be a good strategy. For Eurosceptic parties, being in the EP is an opportunity to be against the EU from within and, quite ironically, by using the EU’s funding. Farrell and Newman (2017) convey that European Parliamentary Elections were more beneficial (in terms of funding and representation) for Eurosceptics than it was for Euro-enthusiasts, at least in the case of the UK. “Especially after Parliament elections moved to proportional representation, they provided an opportunity for the UKIP to campaign on an anti-Europe platform and to win both publicity and electorally”(Farrell & Newman, 2017, p.240).

UKIP was not a significant party in the national level competition (Abedi and Lundberg, 2009). However, when it comes to EP elections it achieved very successful results”(Farrell & Newman, 2017).

To better understand the Eurosceptics in EP, Natalie Brack’s work is a great source. According to her works, there are three types of Eurosceptic MEPs

Being in the European Parliament comes with financial benefits. UKIP took advantage of the funds that are paid by the EU to enhance itself (Farrell & Newman, 2017) .

Natalie Brack (2013) in her work describes three types of Eurosceptics within EP (Brack, 2013) These are “the absentee”, “the public orator”, and “the pragmatist”.

The first type “absentee” is described as:

“The role of the Absentee is characterized by two main elements: comparatively limited involvement inside the Parliament and an emphasis on the national arena and the voters”(Brack, 2013, p.92). *“Absentees” prefer to not be involved in the usual work of an MEP but rather make propaganda in their constituency about the negative sides of the EU on the nation states’ sovereignty, economic wellbeing etc.* (Brack, 2013).

In Brack’s interview with John Whittaker (who as a UKIP MEP), he states he is there to insist upon the problems of the EU (Brack, 2013, p.97).

Through MEPs, it is also possible to obtain financial benefits for one’s party. Brack shows this by putting a line from her interview with Trevor Colman (also a former UKIP MEP) in her article.

Colman states that he is there to collect his many for the party’s sake and the MEP position comes with various benefits(Brack, 2013, p .97).

For its involvement in groups (Eurosceptic and populist groups within the EP) and other activities, UKIP received more than 6 million over the years.

The second type, which is described as “the public orator,” basically corresponds to using the EP ground to spread anti-EU propaganda. Their way of using this is indicating and exaggerating the disadvantages of the EU”(Brack, 2013). Unlike “the absentee”, “public orator” is well aware of the rules and the general order within the EU because only by knowing how things work, they can take speaking ground (Brack,

2013). “Public orators” usually try to slow down and interrupt the ongoing processes; thus they undermine the general working flow (Brack, 2013).

Another part of her interviews with MEPs (this time with Tom Wise, who was also a UKIP MEP) reflects how important for the orator type to attend the discussion in the EP.

He (Tom Wise) states that his presence in the EU is serving the purpose of being able to oppose the EU; therefore he says he shows great effort to be present in every session and receive as much speaking time as he can (Brack, 2013, p. 99).

It is easily understandable that “public orators” are active Eurosceptic populists. Their true aim is to gain visibility together with funding.

“This type of Eurosceptics (public orator) think their purpose is to be present and grasp whatever downside they can find within the EU organization; they are always eager to answer journalists and gain any kind of opportunity to reflect a malfunctioning image of the European Parliament and European Union, the main reason of their activeness and presentness is to detect everything that is not ideal and loudly reveal it to public” (Brack, 2013, p.99).

The last type is described as the pragmatist. However, it should be noted that this kind of Eurosceptic MEP is not pragmatic on behalf of himself/herself. They are being pragmatic on behalf of their nation. It is safe to say that they are Eurosceptics who put their national interests forward and so they are present in the EP to make sure that there is a gain for their own nation and to prevent any disadvantageous decision. Brack states they are trying to be efficient by mostly committee work (Brack, 2013). It is also stated that this MEPs are respectful to the rules and procedures of the EU. They are also very present and active to be aware of any process and to be involved via amendments (Brack, 2013).

Since they are voicing their opposition within the rules and regulations and in a suitable manner, they are too informed and adequately (also systematically) involved in the EP to be called populist.

5.4. EVALUATING THE OUTCOME OF BREXIT FROM THE SCOPE OF CULTURAL BACKLASH AND ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES THEORIES

The conflicting result on district-level research and individual-level surveys is present in the Brexit case, too. Donald Trump's victory and Brexit outcome share much in common when it comes to empirical research. The older electors' significant presence is one of these similarities. Another one is that both Trump and Brexit supporters are crowded in rural regions. Both elector type has lesser education level compared to the supporters of rival campaigns. The "import-exposed" or financially poor regions are prone to vote for Brexit, just like in the U.S., where the regions with the same feature tend to vote for Trump. Also, according to the literature, religious and more nationalist voters are more prone to support Trump in the U.S. and stand for Brexit in the U.K.

It is clear that the regions and voter characteristics are similar in both cases, and so is the point of question. When we look at the Brexit case, we see that UKIP managed to draw votes from the left. We did not see a more powerful left in the times of the referendum. Why the economically troubled voters did not cause the rise of the populist left.

Also, there is another important point that Curtice (2016) indicates. Young people might think that they can have a greater chance to grasp good-earning company and/or cooperation jobs in a globalized Europe.

Regarding to the general picture he also states the idea of majority of the British people is that the E.U. membership is good for U.K.(Curtice, 2016). Curtice also gives 2015 BSA (British Social Attitudes) survey results and shows that 35% of people think that the UK's economy is affected positively by being linked with the EU, approximately twice the number of those who think the EU is harmful for the British economy (Curtice, 2016, p. 213). According to the same survey, when asked what if Britain were to leave EU how would the economy effected, %40 replied it the economy would be affected badly, %24 said the economy would improve and 31% said it would not matter(Curtice, 2016, p. 213). About the cultural grievances however he conveys that the resentment against "European identity" is strong because people think that it suppresses the "British identity".

6. THE TRANSITIVITY BETWEEN “CULTURAL BACKLASH” AND “ECONOMIC GRIEVANCES”

6.1. PSYCHOLOGY AS A REASON OF RISING POPULIST POLITICS

Psychology is a science that can help us illuminate the afore mentioned questions. Especially the link between economic and cultural resentments, if there is any. Rhodes- Purdy et al. (2021) is especially leaning on this question and they present a new theory that aims to shed light on why populist attitudes are on the rise. In this subchapter, I will explain their reasoning to support my position.

Rhodes- Purdy et al (2021) name their theory as “Affective political economy” and their aim can be summarized as to show that both factors (economic and cultural grievances) are making a difference and we do not need to race them with each other; they are trying to show this by presenting the relevance between economic and cultural theories through the emotion factor.(Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021, p.2)

The starting point of the authors attempt to implement emotions as the mediator factor comes from incoherence. Populist politics has grown stronger starting from the 2008 global economic crisis, however, in public opinion surveys economic grievances thesis do not reveal themselves as much as cultural factors (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021). To explain this situation, they offer to integrate the factor of emotions into the equation. Knowing the general way of expression that populism shows itself, it is a very relevant possible third factor. The author's explanation of the presence of emotions as a mediator factor can be summarized as follows:

The dramatic intensity within populist narratives is easily visible and it is obvious that emotions are playing a pivotal role in this political phenomenon”(Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021)

Emphasizing the importance of the economy, the study draws attention to an important pattern.

When we look at history, a pattern that indicates rising populist waves after economic hardships are visible, but when it comes to individual-level surveys the data is leaning towards the cultural backlash theory; thus researchers of populism are facing a dilemma (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021, p.1).

To unfold this discordance, they introduce anger as the main mediator that links economic threats to cultural reactions. Figure 1 below shows their theory as they depicted in their paper.

Before interpreting the diagram, however, it will be useful to make clear why the authors took anger as the decided emotion.

They explain the reason for their preference by saying anxiety and anger can cause hidden cultural resentments to rise or create new cultural resentments through economic uncertainties (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021) We see anger and fear as possible mediators, but the authors preferred not to add fear to the equation.

Fear (or anxiety as two terms used interchangeably in the article) can also empower populist attitudes. Since “fear triggers information seeking, it can make people aware of a situation. However, this information will possibly be biased. Thus, there is a chance that it could further improve negative attitudes towards minorities. However the other way is still possible and due to this reason the main emotion in the paper is preferred as anger. Since populism is about strongly opposing the establishment, the emotional mediator should alert people. Fear, however, does not active fighting instinct, instead, it activates the “flight” instinct (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021) .

The perception of being in danger (thus feeling under threat) causes blaming “other” groups, if there are different cohorts within the society people will start blaming them due to their differences, this process brings fury, and fury or anger is a motivating emotion to express one’s grievances through political choices (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021, p.5).

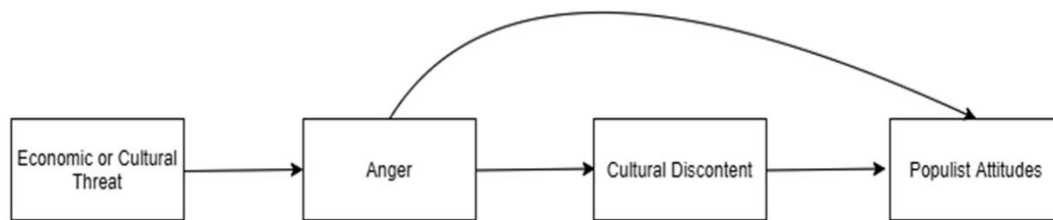


Figure 1. Affective political economy theory diagram

Figure 1. The diagram of “affective political economy theory” by (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021).

Source: (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021, p.3)

Here, we see that the starting point is described as an “economic or cultural threat”. To make the claim more detailed, economic threats (like global economic crises) inflame anger, and anger wakes latent cultural grievances, which ends up resulting in rising populism. Another possible outcome can start with a cultural threat scenario (like in some areas of some countries, increasing the number of minorities), which directly raises anger, and through anger, populist movements gain more support.

This theory makes a great point by arguing that economic insecurities can feed cultural resentment. Thus, supporting the idea of intersectionality between the two. However, if the starting point (the perception of the threat) is cultural, it does not show a section where transitivity works from cultural to economic resentment. If we take this argument as an equation, it is possible to summarize it as follows: If the root event is economic, through anger, it brings cultural resentment. If the root event is cultural, through anger, it empowers cultural resentment.

One thing that might be worth attention is the possibility of cultural resentment’s waking effect on economic grievances. Since the mediating effect (anger) is prone to mislead one into false judgment, it is not hard to imagine a xenophobic person who is blaming immigrants for economic problems. If anger brings blaming, this should be possible, and since it is an emotional reaction, economic logic could not be an essential factor for the blamer.

However, since I do not have survey data that backs up this assumption, I leave it here as something to consider, and I do not add it into the argument of this paper.

One thing the “affective political economy theory” shows is that rising populism can be rooted in both economic and cultural effects and through emotions (which is chosen as anger by the authors) there is transitivity between the two. Although this transitivity is only shown from the economic to cultural side, this does not make the economy the most prominent root cause since a cultural threat as a starting point is also possible.

To conclude this part from a transitivity point of view the capability of both types of resentment to be the root cause of rising populist tides supports the difficulty to detect the most powerful reason for rising populism. Furthermore, the element of anger might play more than a mediator role.

In a scenario where the economy is accepted as the root cause, through anger it will increase the cultural backlash effect. However, if, in such case, we try to declare the economy as the most prominent effect, we can still be wrong. It is important to understand that the root effect and the most powerful effect do not have to be the same. Thus, to reach such a conclusion, we would need to figure out how much anger has added to the increased cultural backlash. While the populist wave grows, the dominance of cultural grievance can become more salient and dominant than the economic root cause. In this kind of situation, should we say that cultural resentment or anger itself is the most prominent effect of the rising percentage of the populist party’s votes?

6.2. GLOBALIZATION EFFECT ON POPULIST RISE

In this chapter, I will examine another work that offers another mediated understanding of the rising populism. Reviewing different studies both on the economic and cultural side Rodrik (2021) offers a diagram that takes globalization shock as the source reason of populism.

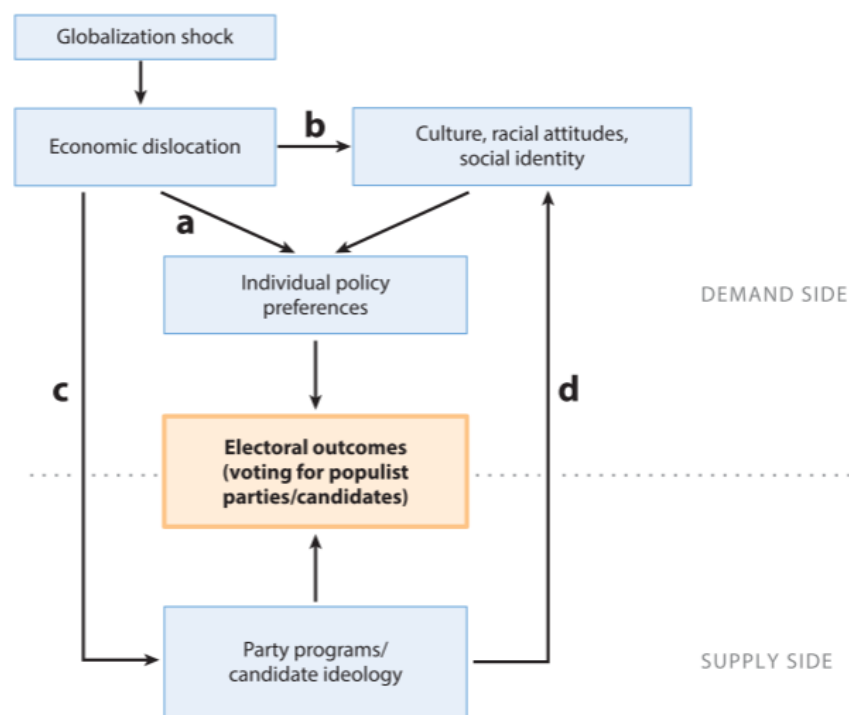


Figure 2. Diagram about the process of populism

Source: (Rodrik, 2021, p. 140).

In Figure 2, we see that globalization shock (economic or cultural) is accepted as the root cause. Economic dislocation right after is shown as the first step. In a situation where a global economic crisis is the matter, this diagram is easy to follow. On the other hand, if a globalization shock is mostly about immigration or refugees, there comes another claim. That is such events (crowded numbers of people moving through countries) awaken economic insecurity. Following this logic, the economy seems to come first, then cultural resentment.

At this point, taking into account the different results that different research offers, taking only the economy after the root cause as the first step might be misleading. That said, the diagram still offers a transitivity between the economic and cultural sides. Moreover, the supply effect is also taken into consideration here, unlike the previous study that Rhodes-Purdy et al. (2021) offers. There is room for criticism here about the supply side. The cause of the supply is also shown as it only stems from economic dislocation.

Of course, the anti-pluralistic narratives are symbolized by arrow d; however, populist narratives built themselves upon economic grievances, cultural resentment, and anti-elite rhetoric. It is clear that the supply side does not stop after taking the motivation from (according to the diagram above) economic hardships; the populist narrative will emphasize the economy again and again.

6.3. EVALUATION

After reviewing the literature. I formed a diagram that represents my idea, regarding how the growing populism trend works. Just to be clear, I do not claim to develop a problem-solving diagram however since it adds another point of view maybe some aspects of it could prove useful.

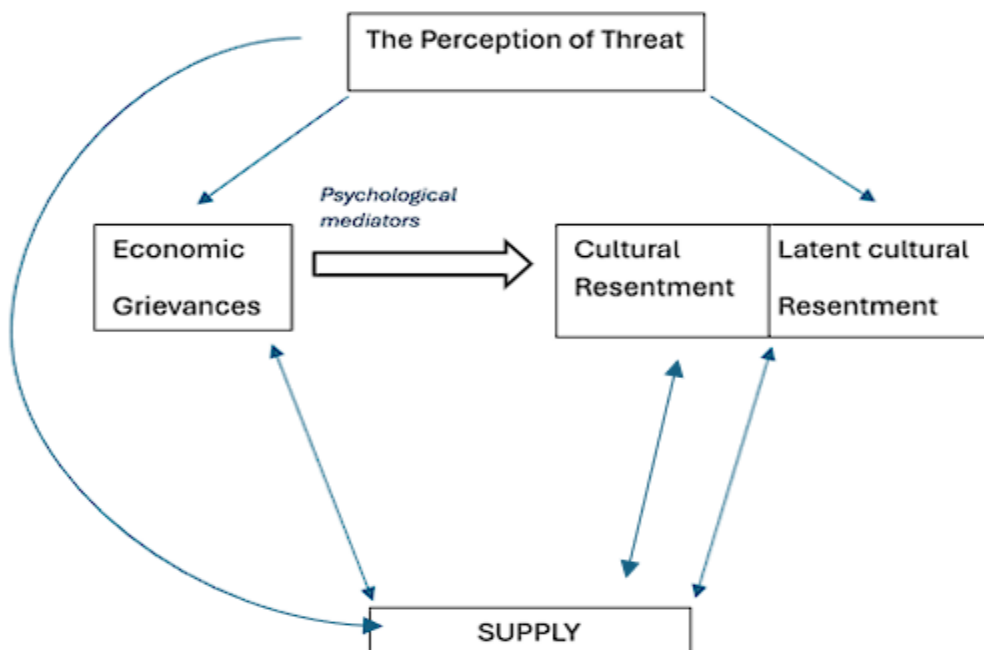


Figure 3: The circle of populism from start. Formed by author

The process starts with a “perception of threat” that can be either economical or, so to say, “cultural.” Every society has people in it who have hidden cultural ambitions and resentment. This does not require analyses. If the perception of threat is more on the identity side than the arrow goes to the latent cultural resentment part. If it is another matter like an economic crisis, it first goes to the “economic grievances” section, and from there, via mediators, “cultural resentments” arise. This type of cultural resentment is different from latent ones because they gain psychological ground from the economic effect since both effects are interchangeable. The root cause, “perceived threat,” directly gives an opportunity to populist rhetoric, which is the supply side. From there, the supply side feeds economic and cultural (both types) fears and, by doing so, increases the demand that was already there.

7. CONCLUSION

Finding the most prominent reason for the rising populist wave in the West is difficult because of the transitivity between cultural resentments and economic grievances. Existing research is starting the road to prove one of the two theories. Thus, the possible mediators and the level of interrelatedness between cultural and economic effects are overlooked.

The concept of transitivity (or interplay) needs to be examined in the literature in more detail. When there is an economic hardship (nationwide or worldwide), its effect on rising populism is clear. However, cultural backlash is also an important element that contributes to populism. While some researchers suggest that the economy is the first factor and the cultural side of populism stems from it, they seem to overlook the difference between latent and later-formed cultural grievances.

As mentioned earlier, there are always racist, sexist, nativist, and anti-modernist cohorts exist in every society. If a factor is the most prominent one, it should mean it pushes more people toward populist attitudes than the other factor. Thus, it can be detected as the most important cause of populism. Suppose one takes the assumption that cultural grievances stem from economic resentment. In that case, he/she should support this argument by presenting statistics showing that people who have cultural opposition solely because of economic resentment outnumber those with cultural resentment without any perception of economic threat.

If such evidence does not exist, then it is not probable to argue that economic threats are the most prominent reason for rising populism. Similarly, arguing that cultural backlash is the main reason is not possible. Since studies have conflicting results (some in favor of economic resentment theory, others stand for cultural backlash theory), the level of interrelatedness is the key to finding an answer. Thus, declaring one of the two theories as the winner is not possible without the evaluated transitivity level.

Scholars of populism should pay more attention to the transitivity among cultural resentment and economic grievances; this way, a broader conceptual framework can be formed. Using the existing studies, detecting the “most prominent” cause of rising populism is not probable. Even though some scholars have presented work on the interplay and different mediators between cultural and financial anxieties, e.g., (Rodrik, 2021), (Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2021) more research is needed.

By leaning towards the transitivity between two theories and trying to emphasize the understudied part of the literature, I believe this paper can contribute to the existing populism studies by showing that a broader conceptual framework is needed to better understand the rise of populism in the West.



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