The Populist Paradox: A Critical Framework Proposal

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Abstract

Donald Trump's presidency has undeniably reignited academic interest in understanding the populist phenomenon and its political implications. Trumpian politics are frequently considered to be a stark departure from status quo politics, in favor of a radical right populism. Yet, the Trump presidency and populist theory itself poses a key contradiction, namely a populist paradox. I will propose a critical framework to understand populism as a mechanism of political power by the liberal state. In *What is Populism?*, Jan-Werner Müller identifies a contradictory nature to populism, as it often perpetuates the same political problems that the populist politics sought to replace. How could populist ideology, which is lauded as recognizing the systematic failures of the liberal state, also be a mechanism for its continued control? This paradox requires a theoretical framework to explain and unpack its implications. The seminal work of political philosopher Michel Foucault has immense explanatory power for this paradox when utilized as a conceptual framework. Populism ideology functions as a democratic justification for the maintenance of status-quo politics, which ultimately reproduces state power. I intend to develop a theoretical contribution to radical right populism studies, especially in regard to Trumpism in the United States. Interpreting Foucault's state power theories, this article applies the key concepts of power-knowledge, domination, and governmentality to populism studies.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

It is important to appreciate, foremost, what is meant by populism and the context in which populist politics occur. In short, it is a moralistic ideology in which a leader and/or party claims true representation of a political body also referred to as 'the people.' Liberal democracies tend to host the political conditions for populism, and these types of states are positioned as antithetical to the populist cause. The construction of 'the people' will first be analyzed, followed by a broader political contextualization of the populist phenomenon. This analysis will also focus on what Mudde has coined "the populist radical right"[1]. This includes populist leaders, parties, movements, etc. that accompany a significantly conservative host ideology. Cases such as former President Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Podemos in Spain, former President Rafael Correa in Ecuador, etc. are far too diverse to conceptualize neatly alongside right flavors of populism. There is value in narrowing the scope of inquiry when discussing such a broad and complex ideology. When the term 'populism' is used in this analysis, it implies the radical right notion of the word. Further, it is crucial to delineate the difference between populism ideology, and evaluations of populist governance in actuality. The criteria and circumstances surrounding populism as an ideology, or in its ideal state, will be articulated in the literature review. The analytical section transitions into assessing populist governance, which often proves inconsistent with the ideology. Finally, there exists a vast variety of populism scholarship with, often, oppositional definitions and conceptualizations of the phenomenon. In this analysis, I mainly rely on the theoretical works of Cas Mudde and Jan-Werner Müller. These scholars are some of the foremost and most widely cited in the field. Further research should be dedicated to alternative understandings of populism that cannot be fully captured in the space of this article.

1.1 Constructing 'The People'

Firstly, populism scholar Cas Mudde identifies a few key criteria for populist ideology. He defines populism as "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people"[2]. Essentially, populism at its core must engage in a fragmentation of a body politic into two fundamentally oppositional groups which compete for political representation. The populist makes a claim to represent a majority of common people in the nation and seeks to execute politics in their favor. This group represented

by the populist is considered to be 'the people' of a nation.

Importantly, Mudde also categorizes populism as a uniquely 'thin-centered ideology'[2] to address the often-contradictory nature of defining populism. How can leaders such as Hugo Chávez and Viktor Orbán both exist under the umbrella of populism with their vast political differences? A thin populism must accompany what Mudde calls a stronger 'host ideology' or 'thick ideology' that provides meaningful political substance to the populist leader, party, etc. For instance, the Prime Minister of Hungary, Viktor Orbán, is often classified by scholars as a populist leader. His substantive political ideology, however, is more accurately classified as radical right or conservative. Austerity policies to cut taxes for many Hungarian companies[3] is a conservative strategy, as it mirrors other conservative policies, but not necessarily the politics of other populist leaders. Former president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, on the other hand, almost doubled the tax rate for foreign oil companies in 2006[4]. Both leaders tend to be classified as populist by academics yet have immensely different and even oppositional policy agendas. Rather than "a 'full' or 'thick' ideology (such as liberalism or socialism) ... thin ideologies have a much more restricted core and focus on only a limited number of key concepts ... [and] do not attempt to provide the ideational roadmap for the wide range of questions that a full ideology would"[5]. Populism does not necessarily assume any political stance or policy advocacy, but rather looks to the 'host ideology' for political substance. For Orbán and Chávez, their populist ideology does not inform their policy agendas regarding taxation nearly as much as their thicker and substantive host ideologies of radical right conservatism and socialism respectively. Populism, itself, is not a reliable resource for a policy agenda, so leaders utilize accompanying thicker ideologies to form their substantive politics. From this, it is useful to characterize populism as a thin ideology to be understood as accompanying a more substantial ideology.

Further, populism is best thought of as a thin ideology as opposed to merely a rhetorical tool that can describe any or every politician or party. Populism is a combination of the following criteria, rather than instantiating certain parts. A politician can critique a political elite without utilizing moralism or holism and would, thus, not be considered properly populist. Similarly, a moralistic political stance need not be populist if it does not support the general will of the people. At its core, ideology itself is "a system of ideas that aspires both to explain the world and to change it. The populist, for instance, explains the world (or the nation) as consisting of two inherently oppositional groups within a liberal democratic system that has left 'the people' disenfranchised. In order to resolve the issues of an increasingly distant technocratic government, the populist proposes that they govern for 'the people.' Thus, populism's ideological contribution cannot be attributed to any or all politicians but is rather a unique political phenomenon.

Secondly, the construction of 'the people' is also uniquely moralistic and couched in values. Mudde writes that populism is "moralistic rather than programmatic"[2], or focuses on inclusion and exclusion rather than political substance. Scholars such as Müller agree, and write that "the claim to exclusive representation is not an empirical one; it is always distinctly moral ... [and] the populist logic also implies that whoever does not support populist parties might not be a proper part of the people- always defined as righteous and morally pure"[6]. The question of belonging to 'the people' of a nation also becomes a fundamental and morally existential one. It is notable that this logic relies upon moral symbols rather than evidential logic. Essentially, "what matters for populists is less the product of a genuine process of will-formation or a common good that anyone with common sense can glean than a symbolic representation of the 'real people' from which the correct policy is then deduced ... [which] renders the political positions of a populist immune to empirical refutation"[6]. Specifically, "populism requires a pars pro toto argument and a claim to exclusive representation, understood in a moral, as opposed to empirical sense"[6]. For instance, Trump's "condemnation of 'Crooked Hillary' during his 2016 election campaign, to which the crowd responded by chanting 'lock her up!'... [and] listing of unacceptable/corrupt acts committed by Congresswoman Ilhan Omar against 'hard-working Americans,' to which the crowd responded by chanting 'send her back!'"[7] demonstrate clear judgement of the morality of his political oppositions. Ultimately, the populist "may not win 100 percent of the vote, but they lay claim to 100 percent of the support of good, hardworking folks who have been exploited by the establishment"[8].

This characterization of populism as a specifically moralistic ideology does not reduce populist ideology as based solely on whims and illogical emotions of a group. To do so would simplify the complexity of populist ideology. Rather, while populist ideology is rooted in moralism and emotion, that is not to say that it is inherently illegitimate or unconvincing. That is proven untrue by cases of populist political success such as former President Donald Trump in the US, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey, President Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, etc. There would be no reason to study populist politics if it could be so reduced. Ultimately, "it is not just patronizing to explain the entire [populist] phenomenon as an inarticulate political expression... it is also not really an explanation"[6].

Moreover, belonging to 'the people' of a nation is more consequential than merely an individual's claim-

ing of a political identity. To populists, "opponents are not just people with different priorities and values, they are evil!"[2] A necessary component of constructing 'the people' of a nation as morally righteous and pure, is the creation of a foil, or opposite, which instantiates opposite characteristics within 'the other.' Consequently, political "compromise [becomes] impossible, as it 'corrupts' the purity"[2] and 'the people' and 'the other' become fundamentally incompatible and existentially threatening to each other. Populists position "the pure, innocent, always hardworking people against a corrupt elite who do not really work (other than to further their self-interest) and, in right-wing populism, also against the very bottom of society (those who also do not really work and live like parasites off the work of others)"[6]. 'The people' are also often characterized as "the 'common people' (the part of the res publica made up of commoners, or in modern terms: the excluded, the downtrodden, and the forgotten)"[6]. Ultimately, the "core claim of populism ... [is that] only some of the people are really the people"[6].

Thus, in constructing 'the people' of a nation, the group becomes a political "macrosubject"[6], and is understood by the populist leader as a homogenous and morally pure entity which they have the sole representative claim. A political holism develops, which is "the notion that the polity should no longer be split and the idea that it's possible for the people to be one and- all of them- to have one true representative"[6]. Within this claim to representation, there is also a subsequent mediatory role that the populist subsumes. Populists always want "to cut out the middleman, so to speak, and to rely as little as possible on complex party organizations as intermediaries between citizens and politicians"[6]. The populist leader becomes a site in which politics is accessed by 'the people,' and in turn, a conductor for politics to access the true will of 'the people.'

Lastly, here are a few common critiques of populism that ought to be mentioned. Namely, populist ideological opposition to pluralism and debate, and its support for holism. Pluralism is one of the first clear issues within populist ideology, demonstrated when the populist can no longer conceive a legitimate opposition to the morally righteous politics of the populists. A pluralistic perspective, in contrast, would value the coexistence and collaboration of multiple political values together in a representative state. This inherently has negative consequences for political debate and democratic norms that require one to legitimize, while not necessarily agreeing with, one's opposition. Müller writes that "when [populists] are in power, there is likewise no such thing as a legitimate opposition"[6].

Similarly, the multi-dimensionality and variety that exists within a body politic cannot be fully captured by populist holism. The formation process for constructing the people requires it to "be 'extracted' from the sum total of actual citizens ... [and] then presumed to be morally pure and unerring in its will"[6]. However, fundamentally, a "whole people can never be grasped and represented- not least because it never remains the same, not even for a minute: citizens die, new citizens are born ... [and] yet it is always tempting to claim that one can actually know the people as such"[6]. To conceive of 'the people' as a monolith is a contested assumption by many scholars.

1.2 Contextualizing 'The People': Liberal Democracy and Technocracy

The context in which populist politics emerges is also a contentious subject for populism scholars. In what kind of political environment do populist politics emerge? One of the prerequisite claims made by populists is that their democratic state has failed to meaningfully represent common citizens, also known as 'the people.' Many political contexts for populism exist within a 'liberal democratic state.' Definitionally, a "liberal democracy is a system in which [citizens] participate by voting for a representative who usually comes from a political party, and where the scope of government is limited by liberal freedoms and the rule of law"[9]. In essence, a liberal democracy is characterized by a fair and free representative voting system alongside individual liberties. The core concept of this kind of system is that voters can have meaningful influence in their nation's politics and feel politically efficacious. Liberal democracy is also fundamentally "based on pluralism—on the idea that you have different groups with different interests and values, which are all legitimate"[8]. Currently, "96 out of 167 countries with populations of at least 500,000 (57%) were democracies of some kind, and only 21 (13%) were autocracies." Populism, as defined, tends to only be meaningfully present in democratic states.

The ideal of the liberal democratic state, however, is not realized from the populist's perspective. Rather, populist politics claim to be "a potential corrective for a politics that has somehow become too distant from 'the people"'[10]. Some populism scholars come to agree with the populist's recognition of the shortcomings of the state but may not support particular attempts to alleviate the issues. For example, Richard Hofstadter wrote in his seminal text *The Age of Reform* that historically, "populism was the first modern political movement of practical importance in the United States to insist that the federal government has some responsibility for the common weal." Further, scholars such as Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau characterize the shortcomings of the liberal democratic state but depart towards a progressive and leftist populism. Left populism is an attempt to "radicalize social democracy" and oppose a "bourgeois democracy" in a way that addresses some of the very same issues that mobilize radical right

populists. Essentially, most instances of populism identify an issue with the existing government but deviate when it comes to policy agendas aimed at fixing the problems. These differences can be attributed to the differences in 'thick' ideologies that accompany populism. Nevertheless, this particular investigation attempts to isolate the radical right flavor of populism for clarity and analytical purposes.

Populist ideology juxtaposes itself with the existing liberal democratic establishment, which is often characterized as technocratic and far removed from the real lives of citizens. There is a "long tradition of a more 'elitist' conception of democracy [controlled by] ... increasingly distant and technocratic political and economic elites." Namely, populists often argue that "liberal democracies are increasingly dominated by highly educated and liberal elites whose backgrounds and outlook differ fundamentally from those of the average citizen; a development that has been exacerbated by the rise of a new 'governance elite', connected through informal and formal networks that cut across elected national governments." Thomas Frank described this view of liberal democracies as the "elitist theory of democracy" in which there is reason for political disenfranchisement. It is a conception of the state as a system that works to maintain "consensus quietly, harmoniously, and without too much interference from subaltern groups." Populists construct their political style as a foil to the established elite similarly to the process of characterizing 'the people.' Benjamin Moffitt recognizes that populists prefer 'common sense' or the wisdom of the people, 'bad manners,' and emotionality, whereas the technocratic style centers expertise and specialized training, 'proper manners,' dry and scientific language, and emotional neutrality, or 'rationality.' In other words, "technocracy and populism are mirror images: one is managerial, the other charismatic: one seeks incremental change, the other is attracted by grandiose rhetoric; one is about problem solving, the other about the politics of identity."

Liberal democratic nations can thus witness "a crisis of faith in democracy, with political party membership falling dramatically and citizens finding themselves more and more disillusioned with mainstream politics." The successes of populism can be "connected to what one might call promises of democracy that have not been fulfilled." Essentially, many political theorists conceptualize populism as a response to waning political efficacy and a desire from regular citizens to be recognized by political leaders. For instance, in the United States, "high levels of inequality, coupled with high levels of distrust, apparently strengthened resentment towards economic and political elites, providing the right environment for Trump's "drain the swamp" rhetoric." Interestingly, there is empirical truth to some of the issues identified by populists (on the left and right), coupled with misinformation. There is truth to concerns about economic inequality in the US, for instance, as "a greater share of the nation's aggregate income is now going to upper-income households and the share going to middle- and lower-income households is falling ... [and] the share of American adults who live in middle-income households has decreased from 61% in 1971 to 51% in 2019." However, populist politics is also prone to misinformation and baseless conspiracy theories, which will be investigated more thoroughly in the Trumpian Populism section. Thus, populist politics recognizes citizens' real disillusionment with their national politics and the liberal democratic state, while also engaging with unsubstantiated issues.

Populist politics emerge through a disillusionment with the established liberal democratic state and seek to provide an alternative governance that meaningfully represents 'the people'. Elitist and technocratic impulses of the state are met with oppositional political strategies of the populist, who attempt to appeal to common sense, emotionality, and moralism. There is empirical validity to the shortcomings of the liberal democratic establishment, yet misinformation continues to pervade populist rhetoric. There is more to be said about knowledge dissemination and misinformation in the following sections.

1.3 Applications to Trumpian Populism

Donald Trump can be considered a populist leader because his political style and governance meets a few aforementioned criteria: recognition of and exclusive claim to represent 'the people' of a nation, anti-pluralism, and moralism. For instance, Trump tweeted the phrase 'the people' roughly 609 times between January 27th, 2011 and January 3rd, 2021, often making sweeping claims about a population. He clearly speaks to, and about, a certain group of people in the US, which he claims to represent politically. Trump has claimed that "[he] alone can fix the broken system in Washington... promising to serve as the 'voice' of the 'forgotten men and women of our country."' At his inauguration, Trump declared that "January 20th, 2017, will be remembered as the day the people became the rulers of this nation again."

Further, the January 6th, 2021 riots at the Capitol in Washington DC demonstrate an exclusive claim to represent the people, which extends far enough to even make claims to delegitimize the 2020 presidential election results. The Trump campaign and its supporters went to court over the election results in 6 US states as an attempt to reverse the election results. This example clearly shows a lack of dedication to plural and tolerant politics, to the point of contesting what was considered a free and fair election. This mirrors the concept that the populist "may not win 100 percent of the

vote, but they lay claim to 100 percent of the support of good, hardworking folks who have been exploited by the establishment."

Lastly, Trumpian rhetoric is famously values-based and moralistic. This is exemplified in a tweet from the former president: "The Governor of Michigan should give a little and put out the fire. These are very good people, but they are angry. They want their lives back again, safely! See them, talk to them, make a deal." The narrative that his following consists of good people that are disillusioned with establishment politics, is quintessential populist rhetoric. A morally righteous and disenfranchised people are being recognized and advocated for by the former president. Thus, Trumpian populism proves to be a useful case study for populism, and in particular, radical right populism. The paradox of populism, in which populist leaders "[reinforce], or [offer] another variety of the very exclusion and the usurpation of the state that it most opposes," is also quite relevant to Donald Trump's presidency.

2 ANALYSIS

Populism fundamentally claims to be a liberatory and democratic force in the face of political oppression. However, do populists in power actually rule for 'the people,' or do their policies end up mirroring the very technocracy it positions as its opposition? Jan-Werner Müller writes that "populism in power brings about, reinforces, or offers another variety of the very exclusion and the usurpation of the state that it most opposes in the reigning establishment it seeks to replace." Specifically, "what the 'old establishment' or 'corrupt, immoral elites' supposedly have always done, the populists will also end up doing- only, one would have thought, without guilt and with a supposedly democratic justification." In this way, populism can be "deployed to their own advantage by the very traditional elites that 'people power' was supposed to sweep away in democratic revolution." Hofstadter recognizes a similar phenomenon in his historical work on US populism in the progressive era. Namely, he writes that, "one of the ironic problems confronting [populist and progressive] reformers around the turn of the century was that the very activities they pursued in attempting to defend to restore the individualistic values they admired brought them closer to the techniques of organizations they feared." Essentially, these scholars amongst others articulate paradoxical inconsistencies between the ideals of populism as a liberatory and radically democratic ideology and the actualized populist governance.

In order to make sense of this contradiction, it is important to consider what kinds of incentive structures exist within a liberal democratic political establishment. The populist faces different pressures and motivations during a campaign, or in a state of mobilization, than they face as a leader within a government structure. As a result, it is vital to recontextualize the populist within a system of governance to clarify the aforementioned paradox. Specifically, how does an institution such as the state deal with criticism? What is at stake when a state is criticized? This is the point in which frameworks for understanding social and political power become important to extend understanding of populism. Departing quickly from this notion, as Müller does, is analytically insufficient. However, looking at the work of Michel Foucault can resolve the logical tension existing in Müller's argument.

2.1 Constructing a Foucauldian Framework

There are three main ideas from the work of Michel Foucault that are essential in understanding state incentive structures and the general ways in which state power functions. Namely, the concepts of power-knowledge, domination, and governmentality together build a Foucauldian framework which can be employed to make sense of populism's paradox.

Firstly, Foucault theorizes knowledge and power as integrated with one another and mutually reinforcing phenomena. There is no real separation between the concepts and they ought to be considered together. He coined the term 'pouvoir-savoir,' or 'power-knowledge,' where knowledge is created, influenced, spread, etc. power resides. Essentially, the term attempts to call attention to "the involvement of knowledge in the maintenance of power relations." Conceiving of power and knowledge in this interconnected way is also a basic foundational concept in the tradition of critical theory. Notably, domination is a conceptual subset of power relations. It is a situation in which asymmetrical power relations become fixed, where power relations are generally considered by Foucault to be mobile, and fluid. In other words, when power becomes concentrated and maintained within certain people, institutions, organizations, etc. a dominating relationship can exist. There are three major types of power according to Foucault: Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power, and Biopower. This framework straddles all three types, as Foucault conceives of their presence (at differing degrees) in all institutions, apparatuses, and states.

Further, Foucault applies this conceptualization of power to real institutions, such as states. He theorizes the state to necessarily contain regulatory systems that maintain and establish order, and arguably, dominance. Specifically, the state "requires an apparatus that will ensure that the population, which is seen as the sources and the root, as it were, of the state's power and wealth, will work properly, in the right place, and on the right objects." In other words, political power relations require consistent upkeep and management. The state as an institution requires intentional systems that work

to reproduce and maintain existing power relations, in which it benefits. Fundamentally, "the essential function of society or the State ... is to take control of life, to manage it." This is specifically a dominating power relation because the state intends to make sure that the population functions in a specific manner, which is necessarily a rigid goal that is opposed to the free movement of typical power.

Foucault begins to define the state through its managerial and dominating nature. He writes that the state consists of "a regime of multiple governmentalities." The concept of governmentality is a portmanteau that combines the terms government and rationality in order to express instances of "activity meant to shape, guide, or affect the conduct of people." Essentially, governmentality and the act of governance works to influence the actions of a group of people. Order is the result and ultimate goal of governmentality and state management. Foucault writes that "order is what remains when everything that is prohibited has in fact been prevented." Thus, movement and "circulation [are] ... the essential problem of security." An order is reached once movement of power and knowledge is controlled and fixed. Ultimately, the identification of power as connected to knowledge, domination as a rigid concentration of power, and governmentality as a mechanism for state management proves useful in contextualizing populist leaders in power, which will be investigated in the following section.

2.2 Applying a Foucauldian Framework: Trumpian Populism

The core theoretical claim of this section includes the following: the populist project aims to position the populist leader as the primary mediator of political knowledge. From this position, the populist works to control both the source and substance of political knowledge that is communicated to citizens which, in turn, allows for the concentration of power in the state. Power, as Foucault conceives of it, parallels the control and movement of knowledge. When the state encounters criticism, such as populist challenges to the liberal establishment, it works to neutralize this opposition through knowledge control apparatuses. The ultimate consequence of this phenomenon is governmentality and management of a citizenry. This creates a self-reproducing system in which the state maintains its power over the nation.

Firstly, regarding the source of knowledge, populists such as Trump simultaneously work to become the major site of political knowledge for their constituency and to limit other competing sources of information. Like the use of Twitter for political communication and communication of the 'fake news' narrative, in the case of Trump.. Many followers of Trump look to his Twitter account as an access point to learn what is happening in their national politics. This account was not only used as a personal platform, but frequently included information about current US politics. For instance, Trump tweeted from this account referencing the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, 362 times and used his Twitter platform to engage with the Supreme Leader of North Korea, Kim Jong-un, to say: "[w]ill someone from his depleted and food starved regime please inform him that I too have a Nuclear Button, but it is a much bigger & more powerful one than his, and my Button works!" These tweets were communicated to the account's 80.3 million followers. Not only did Trump have a considerable number of followers, but this rise in attention to his Twitter platform was accompanied by a rejection of traditional mainstream media sources. Media sources, which were historically sites of knowledge transfer for US citizens about politics, have undergone a significant delegitimization for Trump's sympathizers. Trump's quintessential 'fake news' campaign has led many of his followers to turn their attention towards him for political knowledge instead of "mainstream news organizations [which] have experienced a considerable decline in public confidence." This is a departure from the typical style of establishment leaders. While most politicians, regardless of political ideology, attempt to create convincing political narratives, few actively work to discredit and antagonize mainstream media as Trump has.

Fake news is defined as "fabricated information that has the format of news content but not the editorial standards and practices of legitimate journalism." Note that there is some empirical truth being referenced by Trump in the recognition of 'fake news' and misinformation in a rapidly advancing digital age. Take for instance a study by Statista media researcher, Amy Watson, which found in March 2020 that "around 47 percent of surveyed U.S. adults had encountered a lot or at least some news about the coronavirus which seemed completely made up, highlighting the issue of fake news circulation and unreputable sources seeking to capitalize on the public's need for news and updates in times of crisis." Misinformation is not unique to the Covid-19 crisis, but is an intrinsic feature of our modern technological society.

The vetting processes for creating legitimate and rigorous news reporting has been challenged by the rise of social media platforms, in which anyone can create, spread, etc. news information. Anyone with a Facebook account can make a post about current events that is factually untrue, and it is available to be seen by all of their friends. There is far more information existing online than ever before, but again, without the same fact-checking and validity standards as traditional media sources. However, the claim of 'fake news' by Trump while referencing a real crisis in news

media, does not do the important work of creating critical media consumers. Rather than encouraging critical and intentional consumption of media, the 'fake news' campaign has only worked to contribute to the confusion, and lead followers of Trump to view less and less sources as credible, while increasingly looking to him for political knowledge. Instead of reading articles from the New York Times, one might log onto Twitter to see what the president has Tweeted today. This phenomenon works to establish Trump on Twitter as a primary mediator and source of political knowledge.

It is also noteworthy that Twitter was the chosen platform for political communication by Trump's team and administration. Not only is it one of the most popular social media platforms, but it also has strategic communication features. Namely, "because of its character limitation, Twitter structurally disallows the communication of detailed and sophisticated messages… a Tweet may be clever or witty, but it cannot be complex." The nuance of typical political reporting is not well captured when shifting from article-based communication to the simplification of a Tweet. Many see this as a way that Trump strips away the 'political correctness' or the niceties often seen in political communication and speaks in headlines. This is another way in which Trump can claim to speak for the 'the people,' who are often alienated from the complex jargon and euphemisms used by a typical politician in a liberal democracy. Instead of consuming lengthy and nuanced pieces full of politicalese, Trump's following looks to him for quick snippets and headlines to understand current political news.

Further, populist ideology tends to reject the need for political debate. If the populist is an instantiation of 'the people,' who are the legitimate political stakeholders of a nation, then debate is a waste of time. The populist need not quibble about policy when they are legitimated as the true and sole representation of a nation's citizenry. Knowledge mediation, in particular, is a necessary precondition for the elimination of debate. Ultimately, "'real Americans' can be done with the media and have direct access (or, rather, the illusion of direct contact with) a man who is not just a celebrity; the self-declared 'Hemingway of 140 characters' [who] uniquely tells it like it is." If power and knowledge are intertwined like Foucault theorizes they are, then Trump sequesters more and more power as he is able to be the almost exclusive point of access to knowledge for citizens about politics. Lastly, I do not intend to conceptualize knowledge transfer as solely a top-down phenomenon, which would be far too simplistic. Knowledge does not have merely a one-way movement from those in political power down to their constituencies. Rather, it might be most useful to understand Trump's strategy as an attempt to consolidate sites of knowledge transfer from multiple parties and to multiple parties.

The populist also works to influence the substance or content of political knowledge in the state. For instance, conspiracy theories are "not a curious addition to the populist rhetoric; they are rooted in and emerge from the very logic of populism itself." The anti-pluralism and emotional appeal over policy and logical appeal uniquely facilitate misinformation for populists. Essentially, "what distinguishes democratic politicians from populists is that the former make representative claims in the form of something like hypotheses that can be empirically disproven on the basis of the actual results of regular procedures and institutions like elections." For example, regarding the 2020 presidential election, Trump "retweeted a baseless report that the voting-machine system had 'deleted 2.7 million Trump votes nationwide,"' among other false statements regarding the integrity of the election. Further, the 'birtherism' conspiracy also exemplifies how misinformation was strategically weaponized in favor of Trump. He famously "embraced the birther theory wholesale, wielding his trademark innuendos." The birthplace of former president, Barack Obama, has been substantiated numerous times (Honolulu, HI). Yet, questions of this conspiracy continued to surface amongst Trump supporters despite the factual evidence. Ironically, Trump has tweeted the phrase 'fake news' 940 times.

Trump also utilizes the 'drain the swamp' rhetoric to address the real disillusionment of average people with the technocratic tendencies of the US liberal democracy. In many liberal democracies, including the US, there is an "increasing perception of corruption in public services – and the impunity enjoyed by those who profit from it – [which] is increasingly pushing countries towards populist politicians who promise to change the system and break the cycle of corruption and privilege." Populists, including Trump, are not the only politicians or parties with anti-corruption or anti-elite platforms, but nevertheless capitalize on this stance. Simultaneously, Trump "has openly accepted alleged 'emoluments,' foreign and domestic government payments and benefits forbidden by the U.S. Constitution" and has faced investigation of "tax dodges, illegal campaign contributions, and improper foreign contributions to his inaugural committee." The very issues recognized in 'drain the swamp' rhetoric are perpetuated by the Trump administration. In fact, Trump's cabinet consisted of "17 millionaires, 2 centimillionaires and 1 billionaire," and was "the most wealthy group of people who have served in a presidential Cabinet in history." Nevertheless, Trump's approval rating stayed consistently between 30-40% throughout his presidency. The inconsistencies between his populist ideology and rhetoric in his campaign and the realities of his governance did not meaningfully impact his political influence. Rather, it is arguable that the continuation of 'the swamp' has seen a "democratic justification," just as

Müller theorizes.

From this, populism, in its radical right flavor, is a democratic justification and governing strategy that allows establishment politics to continue but with dissent essentially neutralized. Trump can simultaneously critique 'the swamp' and technocratic liberal state, while mirroring that same governance with an ultra-rich cabinet. The issues of the liberal democratic state can persist, but under the guise of the popular rule of 'the people.' Again, the state employs mechanisms of management in order to govern the state towards a democratically justified order, which describes the role that populism plays as a democratic justification. Populists such as Donald Trump, strategically position themselves to be exclusive sources of political information, which they can then manipulate in their favor. This is distinct from typical political rhetoric, which attempts to be convincing yet does not claim exclusivity and typically depends on empirical knowledge and logic. Sources and mediators of knowledge also wield significant power. This power is not the free-flowing and symmetrical relation, but rather concentrates in favor of the populist and the state. The 'populist in power' can thereby be theorized alongside state mechanisms of control and management. Populist rhetoric that was once critical of the state, becomes mechanized in favor of its domination. The real issues recognized by those sympathetic to populism, such "institutionalized corruption of special interests, lobbyists and big-money donors" (also known as 'the swamp'), become essentially neutralized. Populist sympathizers' issues with liberal democracies, including inequality, corruption, etc. are recognized by the populist and feel deeply seen. However, the populist does not need to actually accomplish the tasks set out in the ideal populist ideology. Rather, the ideology becomes a veil over existing and often contradictory politics of the enduring status quo.

The concept of governmentality is the last piece necessary to clarify the paradox of populism. Populists such as Trump play this mediatory role in which power-knowledge is concentrated asymmetrically and thereby capitalized on. The state always has an incentive to maintain this kind of power relation in favor of itself as a self-producing and self-sufficient system. Populism, while in theory challenges this power relation, ends up reinforcing this same structure because the incentive continues to exist when they govern. Populism, as an ideology, has strong roots in the ideals of democracy, that the government ought to work for and listen to the needs of the average person. Behind this guise, however, the realities of populist governance gain a democratic justification even when it works to uphold establishment politics. The logical end to Foucault's analysis in Discipline and Punish is the creation of docile and subjected bodies that no longer threaten power relations. He concludes in this genealogy, that technologies of power lead to the ultimate end of obedience and submission of subjects.

A similar end can be drawn from this analysis but directed towards the political mind. The political fervor that demands liberation from the inadequacies of the liberal state is consolidated by the populist and ultimately squashed. Disciplinary power of the state "fixes ... arrests or regulates movements ... it must neutralize the effects of counter-power that spring from them and which form a resistance to power that wishes to dominate it: agitations, revolts, spontaneous organizations, coalitions- anything that may establish horizontal conjunctions." Thus, the populist paradox is no coincidence or accident, but rather demonstrates state power maintenance towards order. That order can only be reached when the threat that populist ideology poses to the existing state is fully negated.

Lastly, it is very difficult to disentangle populism from its host ideology. One could argue that Trump's authoritarian or illiberal impulses could better explain his role as a nexus of political knowledge dissemination than his populist ideology. However, a key component of Müller's populist paradox is the 'democratic justification' that it provides to the host ideology. Again, radical right populism occurs in the context of a liberal democracy that is seen as becoming too distant from the regular citizen. There is not a rejection of the democratic project itself. While the populist in power might take actions that lead to democratic erosion, it is done in a way that has a popular and/or democratic justification. From this, the authoritarian or fascist tendencies of the radical right require a guise of populism to be successful in the liberal democratic political context. Thus, while it is notoriously difficult to separate the aspects of politics that are populist compared to leftist, socialist, fascist, conservative, etc., in this case, populism is a necessary component. An analysis that seeks to understand Trump as a site of political knowledge without considerations of populism ideology and the connection between the populist and 'the people' would be incomplete. The study of populism continues to be tremendously salient to Trumpian politics.

3 CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Ultimately, populism scholarship ought to consider populism as a mechanism of power maintenance by the existing state. While this is a complicated conclusion, it is insufficient to continue considering populism only from a 'bottom-up' perspective, which decontextualizes populist leaders and isolates them from the state and its apparatuses. Rather, Foucault's philosophy provides a framework for reconceptualizing the phenomenon through a clarifying and critical framework. Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin expertly recognize this gap in existing scholarship in their text

National Populism; there has been a disproportionate focus on the 'demand side' of populist politics rather than the 'supply side.' This analysis only just begins to understand the complexities of populist supply and is a call for further critical contextualization of populism, especially in the Trump case.

From this, citizens ought to be suspicious of democratic justifications for policy and the suppression of political consciousness like that seen in the Trump case. The insidious impact of Müller's populist paradox is that some of the same issues identified by the populist are continued under the guise of populism. The populist neutralizes the very political uproar that supports them, and the liberal state is allowed to maintain its order and the distribution of power-knowledge in a political community without the same critique. Populists recognize many of the failures of the liberal democratic state without meaningfully caring to solve them, hollowing out the liberatory and radical potential of populist politics. Rather, the state in power seeks to maintain its power and manage dissent directed towards itself. It develops mechanisms to release the civic frustration but not in a way that challenges the asymmetrical distribution of power in which it benefits. Further, this analysis makes a case that the populist ought not be thought of as exterior to the political establishment. Again, there is explanatory value in conceiving of populist politics as a mechanism for the liberal democratic state. Populism may fluctuate in popularity and attention, but fundamentally it remains hollowed, as a "permanent shadow of representative politics."

Nevertheless, this article is limited in its focus on the application of the proposed framework on populism cases. While the Trumpian populism section provides a tremendously necessary exercise of the article's theoretical contribution, there are many diverse cases of populism. Populism studies are constantly confronted with the issue of forming theory that is informed by vastly differing political realities. Because of this, more research to employ this framework on different cases of populism is necessary to test its usefulness and accuracy beyond the Trump case. Moreover, this article does not focus on left-wing populism and is thus, incomplete. Further research in this area is undoubtedly imperative. There are also limitations inherent to theoretical work being done about state theories. Each state is a different entity with a complicated and multi-dimensional history. How can we theorize about a state in general given the diversity of actual states? This is not a unique conundrum, but rather is inherent to much of the theoretical political science work being done. Again, there is a need for more expansive research in this field, which could work to include leftist populism.

4 EDITOR'S NOTES

This article was peer-reviewed.

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