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<http://revintsociologia.revistas.csic.es>**INTRODUCTION: VARIETIES OF  
POPULISM IN EUROPE AFTER  
THE GREAT RECESSION****MARCO DAMIANI**

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The politics of European countries have experienced dramatic transformations over the last ten years. The joint combination of long-term structural processes (globalization and European integration) and exogenous shocks (the Great Recession and the migration waves from Asia and Africa) have increased public feelings of political alienation and discontent, and led to the severe electoral punishment of mainstream political parties (Kriesi et al 2008; Hernández and Kriesi 2016). The political effects of these structural processes and conjunctural shocks have been more intense in Southern European countries as a result of the rising perceptions of widespread political corruption. New political actors have emerged and become crucial players in the social, electoral, political, and institutional arenas. In many instances, as qualitative holistic data shows (Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2019), these emerging political forces have articulated populist appeals emphasizing the opposition between the people and a self-serving political elite. In combination with different kinds of substantive grievances, these appeals have proved electorally successful in many European countries. The Italian coalition government formed by

the Movimento 5 Stelle and the Lega in 2018 is perhaps the most revealing instance of this type of political development.

The articles gathered in this special issue use different types of methodological strategies (qualitative, comparative, and quantitative) in order to analyze the nature and implications of these transformations in several European countries. These articles mostly focus on the party systems of three Mediterranean countries (Italy, Spain, and France) that, despite sharing key similarities in their long-term cleavage structures (importance of state-Catholic church conflicts and role of socialist-communist splits- Rokkan 1981: 85-87-), have in fact experienced very different types of political transformations over the last twenty years. And although in these three cases new parties articulating populist appeals have become key political players, such parties have channeled very different substantive grievances and adopted quite diverse if not opposed political and ideological platforms (Ivaldi et al 2017). This combination of minimally shared contextual and party system features and wide diversity in the ideological articulation of populist

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discourses and demands provides the contributions gathered in this issue with analytical leverage regarding the commonalities and differences of populism in Western and Southern Europe. Furthermore, the fact that most comparative works touching upon this field of research have either focused on Central and Northern European cases (as in Kriesi et al 2008) or on a restrictive set of Southern European cases (often strictly focusing on third wave democracies, that is, on Spain, Portugal and Greece), underscores the interest of the works presented in this special issue.

The cases studied here illustrate the ideological and programmatic diversity of populism. This diversity is not accidental and does not reflect any flaw in the theoretical concept of populism. On the contrary, this ideological diversity reveals crucial structural features of populism that have already been underscored by different authors. In order to show this it is necessary to reconsider the core elements of populism as understood from the perspective of the ideational approaches that now prevail in this field of research (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). In the first place, populism thus understood consists above all of a set of ideas that is distinctive and that, at the same time, can be articulated with very different substantive contents (Canovan 1984). The ideational and discursive core of populism thus understood lies in the opposition of the people and the elite (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019). This opposition has a strong moral, often Manichean content, and, portrays the people as virtuous and the elites as self-serving and corrupt (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019). Now, this core can be articulated in very different ideological frames and can have very diverse, even contradictory substantive implications. The open character of populism derives from the intrinsically open contents of the term “people” (Canovan 1984: 313-15) and, in Laclauian terms, from the vast possibilities available for the redefinition of equivalential chains among multiple grievances leading to the construction of dichotomic frontiers between the people and the elite (Laclau 2007: 130-33). This intrinsic openness of populist ideas and discursive devices is in fact linked to the contingent character of democratic demands. Of course, this open character of the concept of the people and of its polar opposition to the elites does not diminish the crucial importance of the sociopolitical configurations to which populist discourses can be linked (Anselmi 2018).

The articles gathered in this special issue analyze the diversity (ideological, discursive, and attitudinal) of populism by combining multiple analytical strategies (qualitative and quantitative, case oriented and comparative). In this methodological and empirical richness lies one of the main interests of this issue. The article by de Blasio and Sorice focuses on the relationships between “surrogate representation” and

the institutionalization of neo-populist movements and parties. In particular, these authors explore the connections between the rhetoric of e-democracy and the processes of depoliticization in new techno-populist movements. Anselmi and de Nardis analyze the emergence of multipopulisms in Italy in connection with the de-politicization processes experienced by that country. These authors examine the main populist phenomena in Italian politics as variants of a shared structure whose main point of commonality lies in the presence of “civic matrix.” More specifically, the pattern of multipopulism in Italy has been characterized by a succession of populist variants organized around the prevalence of the civil society and the rejection of politics. The pieces by García-Sanz et al and Boscán et al use public opinion data in order to examine the determinants, ideological correlates and party-system effects of populist attitudes in Italy, Spain, and France. García-Sanz et al analyze the persistence of spatial, ideological electoral competition and the role that populist attitudes play in the explanation party ideological locations. Their analysis shows that the inclusion of populist attitudes makes spatial models more realistic and that the effects of populist attitudes on ideal party locations are stronger in the two cases that suffered the most as a result of the Great Recession, that is, in Italy and Spain. Boscán et al show that populist attitudes are a clear component of the Italian, Spanish, and French public opinions, and also that, important differences notwithstanding, at the party system level populist attitudes are positively related with redistributive preferences. Their article shows also that, at the individual level, socio-economic characteristics (education, occupation, and income) exert similar effects on populist attitudes in these three countries. Finally, Plaza-Colodro et al examine, at the supply-side level, the associations between populism and euroscepticism in different European countries. The theoretical and empirical richness of these analyses has been made possible by recent methodological refinements in the study of populism in both the fields of discourse and public opinion (Hawkins and Castanho Silva 2019; Hauwaert et al 2019; Wiesehomeier 2019).

Two main, broad inferences can be drawn from these analyses. In the first place, these articles show both the pervasiveness and the crucial political implications of populist discourses and attitudes in Europe after the Great Recession. The presence of populist ideas among political parties is revealed by discourse analyses (both qualitative and quantitative) and expert-based data. And the importance and effects of populist attitudes among the publics is shown by quantitative analyses on the attitudinal maps, voting effects, and party-system implications of populist attitudes. No accurate understanding of the current politics of these three countries can be elaborated without paying special attention to the characteristics and effects of populist discourses and attitudes. In

the second place, analyses in these articles reveal the combination of a shared populist ideational core with diverse discursive, ideological, and programmatic elements. A shared “populist moment” is present in the cases analyzed here, and some ideological and socio-economic constants have also been identified by these works. And however, at the same time, populist discursive configurations are characterized

by important substantive and ideological differences as a result of the contingent historical and political patterns that distinguish each of these cases. By exploring the invariant and diverging elements that are present in populist actors and ideas, this comparative issue help us improve our understanding of the characteristics and effects of populism in contemporary European politics.

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