



Jagiellonian University in Kraków
Faculty of International and Political Studies
Institute of European Studies

Hannah Elizabeth Day

Student ID number: 1180248

Field of study: European Studies

*Conceptual Problems in the Study of
Populism: Normativity, Contestability, and
Plurality*

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Dr Natasza Styczyńska (Jagiellonian University)
Dr Eva Piirimäe (University of Tartu)

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ABSTRACT

The complicated and mercurial character of populism is apodictic, but the consequences of populism's conceptual confusion have been overlooked as scholars refashion populism to fit the methodological and empirical goals of their research. In this thesis, I interrogate the nature of the conceptual debate and the problems of creating an unequivocal definition of populism. I identify and analyze the challenges of normativity and contestability, and, given these challenges, I utilize the philosophical and epistemological frames of relativism and pluralism to analyze populism's conceptual utility. I compare populism with a related concept, nativism, based on the pluralist assumption of concepts that concepts can be treated as distinct entities, but we can also form generalizations of concepts at a higher level of abstraction. I analyze the Manichean frame of "us" versus "them" that is the nexus between populism and nativism, and I discuss the vertical and horizontal planes of antagonism that can help differentiate the concepts. From an epistemological perspective, the contestable and normative conceptualizations of populism are not inherently disagreeable, so long as our understanding of concepts is based in the pluralist view.

Keywords: Populism, Nativism, Pluralism, Theory, Concept, Relativism

Słowa Kluczowe: Populizm, Natywizm, Pluralizm, Teoria, Koncepcja, Relatywizm

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

When I wrote my undergraduate thesis on Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's populism, I had three aims. I first wanted to decide what conceptualization of the oft-used, but widely-contested label of "populism" is most accurate and useful in analysis. I ultimately settled on conceptualizing populism as a psychosocial frame for reality (instead of an ideology, political strategy, rhetoric, or political style) that posits some in-group against an out-group, an "us" versus "them." My second aim was to discover, using a case study of President Bolsonaro, what people or groups comprised the out-group. I focused on the delineation of the out-group because, as Dutch political scientist Cas Mudde aptly discerns in an interview with *The Atlantic*, the formulation of the "us" or in-group is often much more haphazard and infrequent than the formulation of the "them"/out-group.¹ My final goal was to discover the role social media, specifically Twitter, played in the formation, articulation, and spread of Bolsonaro's message. Social media is now widely understood as an important tool for garnering support and rallying voters, particularly as social media user engagement is curated based on demographic information and interests, and I used Bolsonaro's tweets as primary source data to investigate how he utilized language, images, and videos to create a populist narrative of "us" versus "them."

After I completed my undergraduate research, I realized that what I spent most of my time and efforts on was the first aim: defining populism. Though I arrived at the understanding of populism as a frame, my research had two significant weaknesses. First, although I acknowledged the debate over populism and the alternative approaches to defining it, once I decided to conceptualize populism as a frame, I did not unpack the consequences of this choice. Moreover, I brushed over the importance of the debate itself in my pursuit of utilizing the concept for my analysis. The second weakness was that, conceptually-speaking, I analyzed populism in a vacuum. I assumed that what Bolsonaro was doing, who he was as a politician, was best described as populism. I did not bring the concept of populism into conversation with other, related concepts, like democracy, nationalism, xenophobia, or nativism. The multivalency of these concepts is a major source of ambiguity and shortcoming of much of the literature in political theory, but it is also an opportunity to explore the dissonance and consonance amongst them.

¹ Uri Friedman, "What is a Nativist? And is Donald Trump One?," *The Atlantic*, 11 April 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/04/what-is-nativist-trump/521355/>.

Therefore, the purpose of this research, and the contextual umbrella for it, is to examine the challenges of the conceptual debate over populism and identify the building blocks and primary nexus between two widely used and important, classificatory concepts of political theory: populism and nativism. I chose to continue my exploration of populism that I began in my undergraduate honor's research because my analysis was surface-level and ultimately existed to serve my goal of interrogating primary source data about President Bolsonaro. Unlike my past research, my goal here is not to arrive at my own, unique definition of populism or to agree with a definition offered by another scholar. So much of the current literature on populism is dedicated to this goal. My aim here is to analyze the challenges of populism's conceptualization, and engage populism with another related, but contestable concept: nativism.

Populism and Nativism

Mudde asserts in an article for *The Guardian* that nativism, not populism, should have been declared “word of the year” in 2017 by the Cambridge Dictionary.² The Cambridge Dictionary defines populism as, “political ideas and activities that are intended to get the support of ordinary people by giving them what they want.”³ Mudde argues that this definition conflates populism with responsive politics in idealistic democratic societies and, more importantly, misses the key facet of most conceptualizations of populism that posits “the people” and “the elites” against each other. Ultimately, Mudde concludes that 2017 was not a year of populism, but a year of nativism: a concept that, in recent years, has been whitewashed as populism.

Newth argues that the so-called “populist hype,” a phrase borrowed from Glynos and Mondon's 2019 chapter in *Populism and Passions*, is often based on overemphasizing populism as a core, “thick” ideology or conflating it with related, composite paradigms, such as regionalism, nationalism, and nativism.⁴ Newth prioritizes differentiating between nativism and populism in order to avoid the inaccurate conflation of populism with all far-right/radical right-wing parties that emphasize “the people” against the elites. I agree with Newth's assessment that populism must be separated from nativism, and I delve into an important

² Cas Mudde, “Why Nativism, Not Populism, Should Be Declared Word of the Year,” *The Guardian*, 7 December 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/dec/07/cambridge-dictionary-nativism-populism-word-year>.

³ *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, s.v. “Populism,” accessed 15 April 2022, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/populism>.

⁴ George Newth, “Populism and Nativism in Contemporary Regionalist and Nationalist Politics: A Minimalist Framework for Ideologically Opposed Parties,” *Politics*: 1-22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395721995016>.

distinction between these concepts in Chapter V, but outlining differences is only a small piece of this research. Finding the similarities between concepts that are assumed to be related or even used synonymously is as important as parsing out the differences between them. The concepts of “populism” and “nativism” are often used to describe the same parties, individuals, or language, but what really connects them? And why does this type of conceptual connection matter to the study of contestable concepts?

Research Problem and Puzzle

One of the greatest strengths and challenges of political theory is the pluralism of methodology, traditions, approaches, and definitions. Pluralism in the field is a major strength because theorizing, criticizing, and understanding norms, practices, concepts, and actions is a fundamentally interdisciplinary endeavor and thus warrants diverse modes of thinking and research. However, the humanistic nature of political theory often clashes with the “true” scientific study in political science, particularly as political science becomes increasingly driven by quantitative research over qualitative research.⁵ Solving empirical problems has taken precedence over what Laudan accounts as *conceptual problems*, “presumably because it [the conceptual problem] does not comport well with those empiricist philosophies of science which have been the reigning fashion for more than a century.”⁶ Yet we undermine progress in the discipline of political science by failing to recognize the importance of conceptual problems in our research. The normative, evaluative, conceptual questions addressed in political theory complement the empirical, positive questions explored in political science, and political theory may directly inform the research agenda of political science. I unpack this friction between the epistemological traditions of political theory and political science more in Chapter IV, as it informs the analysis of evaluative, contestable concepts and theories.

The plurality of thought and approach in political theory extends from traditions and approaches into disputes over concepts, some of which, according to W.B. Gallie, are not resolvable, because they are *essentially contested concepts*.⁷ In a paper delivered to the Aristotelian Society in March 1956, Gallie introduced the term *essentially contested concept* to describe, “concepts which are essentially contested, concepts the proper use of which

⁵ John S. Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips, “Overview of Political Theory,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. Robert E. Goodin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199604456.013.0002.

⁶ Larry Laudan, *Progress and Its Problems* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1977), 45.

⁷ W.B. Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (1955-1956): 167-198, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4544562>.

inevitably involves endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users.”⁸ Gallie provides seven criteria for identifying and reasoning about such concepts, and identifies them with Roman numerals: (I) their appraisive character, (II) internal complexity, (III) diverse describability, (IV) openness to modification, (V) reciprocal recognition of their contested character among contending parties, (VI) the derivation of any concept from an original exemplar, and (VII) the probability or plausibility of continuous competition, through which greater coherence and clarity of the concept may be achieved.⁹ Gallie rejects the positivist assumption that human behavior is governed by a discernable set of laws and people’s actions can generally be explained by the norms through which they are socialized.¹⁰ Many concepts in the social sciences are contested, but fewer meet the parameters of an essentially contested concept.

The fundamental issue that Gallie identifies with the *essentially contested concept* is that the discord and differences amongst applications and interpretations of abstract, evaluative notions will not be settled through empirical analysis. John N. Gray explains that most of the concepts of our social and political thought have an *essentially contested character* as a virtue of the diverse and morally individualistic society that we live in.¹¹ Furthermore, Gray argues that to recognize that a concept is essentially contested perhaps even transcends definitional disputes and “is to proffer a philosophically partisan understanding of the character of the dispute itself.”¹² This meaning, sometimes the debate over a concept, such as “power,” becomes so meta-level and abstract that the debate is no longer about the concept of “power,” but is about the nature and shape of the debate itself. Even if a concept does not meet Gallie’s seven criteria of an *essentially contested concept*, Gray identifies that for concepts which are “rationally unsettlable,” the “criteria for its correct application embody normative standards.”¹³

Populism sits at the intersection of definitional plurality, contestability, and normativity. An apodictic feature of literature on populism is the unavailability of an unequivocally accepted definition for the concept. This is widely acknowledged by political

⁸ Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” 169.

⁹ Gallie’s seven indicators as described in David Collier, Fernando Daniel Hidalgo, and Andra Olivia Maciuceanu, “Essentially Contested Concepts: Debates and Applications,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 11, no. 3 (October 2006): 212, DOI: 10.1080/13569310600923782.

¹⁰ Lincoln Allison, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” in *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Politics* (3rd edition), eds. Iain McLean and Alistair McMillan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), DOI: 10.1093/acref/9780199207800.001.0001.

¹¹ John N. Gray, “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts,” *Political Theory* 5, no. 3 (Aug. 1977): 337, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/190645>.

¹² *Ibid.*, 339.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 339.

scientists and theorists, often in the first section or chapter of their study, before they either adopt an approach or definition articulated by another scholar, in part or in full, or formulate their own conceptualization of populism. Here, conceptual concerns over populism typically garner attention because they influence methodological and analytical concerns about the external validity or generalizability of the research. On their own though, conceptual problems warrant study. Conceptual problems may be, according to Laudan, internal or external. Internal conceptual problems are self-contradictory or invoke unclear mechanisms, while external conceptual problems lie in erroneous assumptions about the world that are not sustained by epistemic doctrine.¹⁴ Both of these types of problems can emerge in the populist literature, but I concentrate on the internal, contradictory or unclear conceptualizations.

One of the puzzling aspects of much of the literature on populism is that even as scholars claim to appreciate the importance of the definitional uncertainty of the concept, there is a gap in research addressing the impact of this ambiguity. Is it sufficient to simply acknowledge that conceptual debate exists? Why have we not scrutinized the framework of the debate itself? Have we done our due diligence as scholars by simply accepting contestability or that certain concepts are rationally unshakable? What are the consequences of what Peter Wiles characterized in 1969 as: “To each his own definition of populism, according to the academic axe he grinds?”¹⁵ Wiles’ question gets to a root problem and substantial puzzle in the scholarship on populism: researchers redefine and refashion populism to fit their methodological, theoretical, and empirical goals. What are the consequences of reinventing the wheel, so to speak, and theorizing populism in such diverse ways? This research puzzle and problem directly addresses the consequences of the “to each his own way” approach to populism that Wiles observed.

Research Questions

The primary research question guiding this research is thus:

What are the challenges in creating an unambiguous definition for populism?

These complicated issues of conceptualization and definitional debates also raise several sub-questions that I address in this thesis:

¹⁴ Laudan, *Progress and Its Problems*, 49-64.

¹⁵ Peter Wiles, “A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine: Some Elementary Theses on Populism,” in *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, eds. Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 166.

- What are the ontological dilemmas that confront political scientists and theorists as they attempt to define populism? What epistemological tools can we use as political theorists to bridge the gap between these different conceptualizations?
- What is the nexus between populism and nativism?
- How does unifying synthesis between populism and the related concept of nativism increase understanding?

Methods and Program Relevance

This research lies within the discipline of political theory, or political philosophy. My analytical chapters (Chapters IV and V) discern the challenges of analyzing normative and contestable concepts and compare the meta-level concepts of populism and nativism, rather than examining country-level, party-level or microscopic empirical data. I adopt a conceptual analysis approach for Chapter V because my aim here is to square-the-circle between two concepts that are often pitted against each other and explicate the nexus that connects many different scholars' conceptualizations. I do not believe that I can fully disambiguate populism in this research, nor do I offer my own unique definition. Rather, I use abstract conceptual analysis and unifying synthesis between existing conceptualizations of populism and nativism to provide clarity for internally incoherent or contradictory approaches. I acknowledge and describe the important differences between populism and nativism and use my literature review (Chapter II) as a basis for this discussion, but I focus on the antagonistic relationship of "us" versus "them" that predicates and unifies these concepts. I explain my methods and explain the reason I adopted these methods in depth in Chapter III.

Theories of relativism and pluralism inform this research. I expand on both in later chapters, but by way of introduction, I answer my research questions and examine the multitude of definitions of populism using these philosophical and psychological frames. Though it is tempting to view these as synonymous, I acknowledge them to be distinct. Relativism holds that standards of truth or methods of inquiry vary between contexts, none of which can be decidedly "right" or "wrong," and pluralism allows for multiple conceptualizations, but these are not undoubtedly equal. I favor Weiskopf's assessment that pluralism, as a theory of concepts themselves, helps us to simultaneously treat concepts as different kinds of representational structures used for different circumstances *and* formulate generalizations at

higher levels of abstraction.¹⁶ Pluralism does not mean that concepts need to be eliminated in favor of another, more specific and uniform construct, since insofar as there are generalizations that cross between the sub-kinds of concepts, they retain a higher-level of cognitive unity.

My initial intent with this research was to use a case study of populism or nativism from Central/Eastern Europe as evidence of the utility of the concepts and their connection. However, as previously mentioned, I realized that the importance of the debate itself is too often glossed over in favor of quickly defining these concepts to apply them to empirical analysis. The connection between this research and the area studies aspect of this program is that without conceptual inquiries such as those I address in this paper, the regional application of debated concepts like populism would lack an informed theoretical basis. It is not realistic for me, in the span of a master's thesis, to settle the decades-long dispute over populism, and subsequently utilize the term for a country- or party-level case study, so I resolved that my efforts would be better spent towards analyzing the consequences of theoretical dissension and the opportunities provided by the creation of connections between concepts. Thus, though I do not directly address populism in any of the Central and Eastern European countries, this research could be foundational for future application of concepts of populism and nativism in the region.

Thesis Overview

This research is divided into five subsequent chapters. In Chapter II, I conduct a thorough literature review of populism and nativism. My literature review is a substantial section of this thesis because my main goal is to interrogate the challenges that exist in the current scholarship aiming to conceptualize populism. I first examine populism, and I separate my examination into four subsections; the first three of these subsections are based on the three conceptual approaches to populism from the *Oxford Handbook of Populism* (ideational, political-strategic, and socio-cultural); the fourth section interrogates conceptualizations of populism that do not fit well into one of these approaches, or perhaps intersect or overlay the approaches. I focus on the contributions of Laclau, Mudde, Kaltwasser, Weyland, Knight, Moffitt and Tormey, but include many scholar's definitions of populism. I then review the state of the literature on nativism. I break this section down differently, since there are not clearly defined analytical approaches, as nativism is widely understood as an ideology. I instead

¹⁶ Daniel Aaron Weiskopf, "The Plurality of Concepts," *Synthese* 169, no. 1 (2009): 145-173, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40271295>.

initially look at broad definitions of nativism, particularly those from Fry, Mudde, and Daigle, Neulen and Hofeman, before examining nativism in the tradition of political science from the United States, since this is where the term was originally used. Here I highlight John Higham's contribution, as his book *Strangers in the Land* is classic and foundational to more recent scholarship on nativism beyond the borders of the United States.

Chapter III introduces the methods of my analysis and my rationale for adopting these methods. I divide Chapter III into four sections. First, I outline my conceptual framework, which includes the frame of reference, or the contextual umbrella under which I have grouped these concepts, and the grounds for comparison. I explain why I have chosen to compare populism and nativism, rather than other related concepts. Second, I define concepts and the method of conceptual analysis that I use in this research. I explicate the analytical philosophy of conceptual analysis, with an emphasis on Johan Olsthoorn's chapter in *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*¹⁷ and the fifth issue on "Concepts" from Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.¹⁸ I offer justification for why I adopted this method for my analysis of populism and nativism. Third, I identify the protagonists of literature on populism and nativism that I focus on in my analysis, and why I chose these scholars. Fourth and lastly, I discuss limitations of this type of qualitative, philosophical research method.

Chapter IV addresses my primary research question: What are the challenges in creating an unambiguous definition for populism? I argue that there are two main issues in the conceptualization of populism: normativity and contestability. I first analyze populism's normativity, with a focus on Mouffe, Laclau, Müller, Lukacs, and Mueller's imaginations of populism, and how populism's evaluative relationship with democracy creates theoretical challenges. I highlight here the epistemological tension between political theory and political science that I briefly introduced in this chapter, and the consequences of pejorative, polemical theorizing. I then introduce the challenge of contestability through the frame of ontological relativism. Though terminological debate is standard within political theory, the oxymoronic certainty of uncertainty in the literature on populism is a unique challenge to its empirical and analytical utility. None of these conceptual challenges are insurmountable, but they must be recognized and unpacked, and I consider the conceptual challenges here.

¹⁷ Johan Olsthoorn, "Conceptual Analysis," in *Methods in Analytical Political Theory*, ed. Adrian Blau (London: King's College, 2017), 153-191.

¹⁸ Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, "Concepts," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/#ConConAna>.

Chapter V is my conceptual analysis of the connection between populism and nativism. I divide Chapter V into four sections. First, I argue that the nexus between the concepts of populism and nativism is the antagonistic, binary frame of “us” versus “them” and a propensity to divide the world into in-groups and out-groups. Second, I unpack the shared ontological roots of ideational populism and nativism, and the generalizable scheme of “us” versus “them” that underpins both concepts. Third and lastly, to not seem as if I aim to synonymize populism and nativism, I concentrate in this brief third section on a notable difference between the “in-out” dichotomies of populism and nativism: the vertical opposition of populism and horizontal opposition of nativism. I call attention to and support Brubaker’s conflict with these strict boundaries of horizontal and vertical appeal, and his appeal for a multidimensional plane of opposition. I conclude in the fourth section by reiterating that populism’s purported “thinness” does not negate the dualistic, in-versus-out worldview that the concept shares with nativism.

Chapter VI concludes my dissertation research. I discuss the findings from the previous chapters and provide an explicit answer to my research question. I proffer how this analysis more broadly contributes to the growing body of literature on nativism and populism. I review the challenges of the spectrum of approaches to populism and discuss populism’s newness in political theory. Lastly, I propose possible avenues for future research on this topic. Researchers could further unpack the conceptual differences and similarities between nativism, populism, and related concepts, like nationalism, (anti-)democracy and xenophobia, or explore how the vertical and horizontal forms of otherness or opposition manifest in policies, rhetoric, or party platforms.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Review Introduction

This chapter is divided into two main sections, the first of which examines the state of the literature on populism and the second on nativism. Within each section are subsections that divide the scholarship by relevant approaches and the chronology of developments. In the section on populism, I first broadly define the concept before examining the three approaches from the 2017 *Oxford Handbook of Populism*, and conceptualizations that overlap or do not fit well within these three approaches. The complicated nature of populism means that it has been analyzed from many theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches, but this is timely and warranted given the relationship with contemporary democracies. Conceptualizations of nativism are not so clearly distinguished by approaches, so for this section I look at several general definitions before examining the design and usage of the term in the American political scholarship, given that this is where it originated. The scholarship on nativism and populism use some shared methodological approaches, such as case study or policy analysis, but for the purpose of this explorative research, I focus on the definitions of the concepts themselves.

Overview of Populism

An axiomatic feature of the literature on populism is that it acknowledges the debate and contestability of the term. Even further, scholars *acknowledge the acknowledgement* of the debate.¹⁹ Though definitional debates are not exclusive to the literature on populism, unlike debates over other *-isms* of political science like Marxism or liberalism, populism lacks a lineage or “anchor” in a tradition of thought.²⁰ As a result, much of the literature on populism is based on assembling seemingly similar case studies and assigning populism to be the link between them. For some, the widespread – and often confusing and derogatory use of populism – means that the term has lost its conceptual clarity and analytical utility. Conversely, this debate over populism and the sustained salience of the term may mean that continuing to study and clarify the term is important to political scholarship. I advocate for the latter point and use this section to present definitions within three central conceptual approaches to populism described by the 2017 *Oxford Handbook of Populism*: ideational, political-strategic, and socio-cultural. I additionally describe and analyze conceptualizations that do not fit neatly within one of these three categories or perhaps overlap them.

¹⁹ Francisco Panizza, “Introduction: Populism and the Mirror of Democracy,” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, ed. Francisco Panizza (London: Verso, 2005), 1-31.

²⁰ Simon Tormey, *Populism: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2019), 33-35.

The remainder of this section on populism is divided into four subsections. First, I examine the ideational approach to populism, with a focus on Laclau's 1977 theorization in *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, which is best known as the foundational work of this approach. I unpack the idea of populism as a "thin-centered ideology," as it is presented by Mudde and Kaltwasser, and explore Canovan's conceptualization of "the people" and the importance of "the people" to the populist ideology. Second, I consider the political-strategic approach that emphasizes personalistic leadership and noninstitutionalized support from mostly unorganized followers. I emphasize Weyland's contribution to this approach, but also discuss Betz and Neyhuis' definitions. Third, I review the socio-cultural approach wherein populism is understood in terms of a political relationship between leaders and followers. I argue in this subsection that the conceptualization of populism as a political style fits best within the socio-cultural approach, and thus examine the works of Knight, and Moffitt and Tormey. For each of the three subsections, I criticize and review the shortcomings of each approach. Fourth and lastly, I scrutinize the conceptualizations of populism that do not fit well into the ideational, political-strategic, or socio-cultural approaches, or overlap these approaches. More specifically, I discuss Barr and Jansen's combination of elements of the political-strategic and socio-cultural approaches, Müller's idea of populism as a "moralistic imagination," and how Taggart bypasses the approaches altogether and identifies six principal themes of populism.

Ideational Approach to Populism

The first approach to populism, articulated by McRae, Laclau, Mudde, Stanley, and other scholars, frames populism as an ideology. The term *ideology* derives from the Greek "idéā" (notion or pattern) and "logíā" (the study of), but was coined as "ideology" by French Enlightenment philosopher Antoine Destutt de Tracy in his 1796 publication *Eléments d'idéologie*.²¹ Though de Tracy synonymized "ideology" with the "science of ideas," the term has since been defined and understood differently across disciplines and may or may not rely on factual basis. In the Marxist interpretation, ideology has been framed with largely negative connotations. Marx and Engels argue that ideology represents the "production of ideas, of

²¹ Emmet Kennedy, "Ideology from Destutt de Tracy to Marx," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 3 (July - Sep. 1979): 353, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2709242>.

conceptions, of consciousness,” but these ideas are expressions of the unjust class system and legitimize the hegemonic dominance of the ruling class.²²

Ernesto Laclau’s first published work, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*, is frequently described as post-Marxist or post-structuralist and is the seminal work in the approach of defining populism as an ideology. Laclau argues that ideologies do not have determinate class connotations, since ideologies can be articulated for contradictory interests and purposes, but contends that class struggle can be an important mechanism for the transformation and evolution of ideologies.²³ Laclau’s theory of populism stems from an interrogation of Peronism and the emergence of new social movements in Latin America. Laclau relies on Althusser’s theorization that ideology transforms individuals into subjects and “the unifying principle of an ideological discourse is the ‘subject’ interpellated and thus constituted through this discourse.”²⁴ In periods of revolution or instability, the dominant ideological discourse changes and so does the interpellation of subjects. In Marxism, these periods of antagonism are class struggles because ideological content has a clear class-based connotation. However, according to Laclau, this approach is reductionist, since not every antagonism between a dominant power bloc and “the other” or “the underdog” is best understood in terms of class, and the process of articulating ideology requires the existence of non-class contents. At this point, Laclau clarifies that “the people” is an objective determination and pole of contradiction posited not necessarily in terms of class. Laclau ultimately asserts that “populism consists in the presentation of popular-democratic interpellations as a synthetic-antagonistic complex with respect to the dominant ideology.”²⁵ In other words, a key characteristic of populism is that it presents popular interpellations as antagonistic.

In Laclau’s more recent scholarship on populism, specifically *On Populist Reason*, he focuses on the formation of collective identities and how populism’s “ideological simplicity” allows the ideology to articulate solidaristic communities.²⁶ *On Populist Reason* examines the psychology of collective identity formation and behavior before further developing the conceptualization of populism and employing instances of “populist moments,” including the nineteenth century People’s Party of America in the United States and Peronism in Argentina.

²² Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology, Part One with Selections from Parts Two and Three, Together with Marx's "Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy"* (New York: International Publishers, 2001), 47-65.

²³ Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1977).

²⁴ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005), 99-103.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 172-173.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Populism, according to *On Populist Reason*, is not a marginal phenomenon, but “is the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such.”²⁷ Laclau develops his argument from *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* on the myriad of possibilities for populism, as he asserts that populism, and the articulation of the “people,” may be the basis of an emancipatory endeavor, or it can be reactionary and authoritarian.²⁸ For Laclau, populism is a broad matrix of struggle for hegemony, which opposes the Marxist assumption that a particular social group (the working class) are engaged in an ideological-political struggle against elites. Thus, populism is neither a particular political movement nor a predetermined set of political content; instead, it is a plurality of “contents” to be filled through hegemonic struggle and construction.²⁹ Arditì criticizes the political logic in Laclau’s blending of politics, hegemony, and populism in *On Populist Reason* and Laclau’s normative assumption of the absence of community as a precondition for the populist articulation of togetherness.³⁰

Cas Mudde argues that most definitions of populism do not differ from those of right-wing extremism, and approaches to populism as an ideology and political style are often conflated. In Appendix B of *The Ideology of the Extreme Right*, Mudde defines populism as:

“The belief in the soundness of the common man; anti-elitism; support for direct democratic measures on the basis of letting the people decide; call for referendums at various levels and to go back to the grass roots.”³¹

This definition, while perhaps too broad to be of much empirical utility, emphasizes the idea of “the people” in opposition to elites. In *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, Mudde and Kaltwasser more concretely 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 *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”³²

²⁷ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 67.

²⁸ Slavoj Žižek, “Against the Populist Temptation,” *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (Spring 2006): 558, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/505378>.

²⁹ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 13.

³⁰ Benjamin Arditì, “Populism is Hegemony is Politics?,” review of *On Populist Reason*, by Ernesto Laclau, *Constellations* 17, no. 3 (2010), 494-496.

³¹ Cas Mudde, *The Ideology of the Extreme Right* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), 188.

³² Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 5-6.

Defining populism as a “thin-centered” ideology, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser, is necessary because populism is necessarily attached to—and even can be assimilated into—other ideologies. Populism is often combined with thin- and thick-centered ideologies such as nationalism, socialism, neoliberalism, and nativism, which Bešlin et al. focalize in their study of how populism is “thickened.”³³ The thinness of the populist ideology suggests to some scholars that populism is transitory since, “it either fails or, if successful, “transcends” itself into something bigger.”³⁴ Stanley similarly argues that populism is a thin ideology that is often found in tandem with thick or “full” ideologies.³⁵ However, Stanley claims that the mercurial, slipperiness of populism means that it cannot develop a coherent set of policies.

Mudde and Kaltwasser argue that there are three important strengths of the ideational approach to populism; first, this approach can accommodate the vast range of political actors associated with it; second, it is positioned better to address the relationship between populism and democracy; third and lastly, defining populism as an ideology allows scholars to understand the supply and demand for populist politics. While for some scholars, the vast application of the term “populism” is a weakness of the ideational approach, Mudde and Kaltwasser assert that to understand populism through this approach, we must make sense of non-populism. The two examples that they offer of non-populism are elitism and pluralism. Elitism follows the same distinction of society that populism does wherein there are some distinct “good” and “evil” groups, but the virtues of groups are positioned oppositely.³⁶ Conversely to both populism and elitism, pluralists believe that society should consist of broad, occasionally overlapping, social groups that are not necessarily divided by ethnic, economic, gender or political lines. Populism, therefore, only makes sense as an ideology once we understand that there exist opposite ideologies.

On the question of populism’s relationship to democracy, Mudde and Kaltwasser avouch that there is not such a straightforward, black-and-white relationship. Populist actors tend to emerge within liberal democratic frameworks and though it is often understood in derogatory terms. Populism may be a democratizing force, since it aims to empower groups that feel unrepresented by the political establishment. On the other hand, in outlining the boundaries of “the pure people,” populist actors exclude some and “can legitimize

³³ Milivoj Bešlin et al., “Political Populism from the Fringe to the Mainstream: A Conceptual Framework,” *Populist Rebellion Against Modernity in the 21st-Century Eastern Europe: Neo-Traditionalism and Neo-Feudalism (POPREBEL)* Working Paper no. 4 (2020), 4-5.

³⁴ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 6-7.

³⁵ Ben Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 1 (2008): 95-110, DOI: 10.1080/13569310701822289.

³⁶ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 7-8.

authoritarianism and illiberal attacks on anyone who (allegedly) threatens the homogeneity of the people.”³⁷ Mansbridge and Macedo further explicate that the “core” of populism, i.e., the moral battle against elites, can be good for democracy, while some of the other characteristics of populist movements, such as exclusivity and nationalism, can be dangerous for democracy.³⁸ Thus, the relationship between democracy and populism is complex and populism can be simultaneously beneficial and harmful to democracy.

Third and lastly, Mudde and Kaltwasser assert that using an ideational approach to populism allows us to see both the supply and demand for populist politics. Populist actors will often fail if the demand for populist politics does not exist. Societies with a demand for populist politics necessitate a supply of populists. On the supply side, successful populists “combine a broad range of societal grievances” to this us-versus-them dynamic and attach other ideologies to populism.³⁹ Moreover, their success is related to their ability to create a sense of urgent crisis, and a narrative of crisis that can be disseminated to the people.⁴⁰ On the demand side, the emergence of demand for populism occurs under a specific set of circumstances, including major policy failures and economic downturn.⁴¹ Activating populist attitudes and creating an environment in which populists can be successful also requires citizens to feel like the political system as it stands is unresponsive.

Canovan also advocates for an ideational approach to populism and focuses on the ideological contest between populist and liberalist understandings of democracy. Canovan theorizes that at the heart of the democratic project, there is a fundamental contradiction “between *bringing the people into politics* and *taking politics to the people*.”⁴² Democracy is rife with populist themes, including emphasizing the majority and transparency against corruption. Moreover, populist democratic ideology is understood in terms of linkage between “the people,” democracy, sovereignty, and majority rule. Canovan references Freedman’s “more neutral” approach to ideology, wherein ideologies are “conceptual maps of the political world,” and she additionally highlights the ability of ideology to “inspire faith and bestow legitimacy.”⁴³ She objects to the notion that populists are merely reactionary and do not hold

³⁷ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 18.

³⁸ Jane Mansbridge and Stephen Macedo, “Populism and Democratic Theory,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 15 (2019): 60, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-101518-042843>.

³⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*, 104-105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁴² Margaret Canovan, “Taking Politics to the People: Populism as the Ideology of Democracy,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, eds. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 42-43.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

comprehensive ideologies. The core populist concern with “the people” and opposition to the elites, in Canovan’s view, compromise a position and ideology that is discernible as populist.

Though Laclau, Mudde and Kaltwasser all invoke the idea of “the people,” they do not thoroughly investigate and define this signifier. In *The People*, Canovan identifies the simultaneous familiarity and ambiguity of the language of “the people” and argues that the obscurities of the notion are ultimately an asset.⁴⁴ Membership to “the people” has historically been for the excluded lower orders, and the subsequent contrast to the elites and powerholders that this concept thus constructs have been leveraged for action. Canovan illustrates that throughout history, many antithetical ideas of “the people” have been brought forth, including the people as sovereign, as rulers, as a specific nation, and as humanity.⁴⁵ Despite the internal tensions between these meanings that may obscure the clarity of the concept, these meanings all underscore the importance of “the people” as an important political authority. Canovan claims that, for populists, “the people” needs to be “in some way constructed, mobilized or represented to be in a position either to wield power or to be checked in doing so.”⁴⁶ Populist movements mobilize excluded, “ordinary” people by drawing upon the authority of the people-as-whole. The occasional, spatially-diverse and amorphous mobilizations of “the people” mean for political scientists that the term is still imprecise, but continues to play an important role in our conceptualizations of democracy, politics and populism. There are still ambiguities to the concept of “the people,” but Canovan’s contribution sheds light on the positive reasons for these obscurities.

Populism understood through the ideational approach is most frequently associated with Laclau’s theorization, but Mudde, Kaltwasser, Canovan and Stanley provide further explanation and argument for why this should be the favored approach. Despite the depth of scholarship in this approach, there are many who criticize the idea of populism as a “thin ideology.” Schroeder contests labeling populism as a “thin-centered” ideology by focusing on the original definition of “thin ideology” from Freedden.⁴⁷ Freedden defines a “thin ideology” as “one that, like mainstream ones, has an identifiable morphology but, unlike mainstream ones, a restricted one.”⁴⁸ Schroeder argues that populism has distinctive elements that make it an ideological alternative, not a thin ideology that needs to be tacked onto another ideology.

⁴⁴ Margaret Canovan, *The People* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁴⁷ Ralph Schroeder, “The Dangerous Myth of Populism as a Thin Ideology,” *Populism* 3, no. 1 (2020): 13-28, DOI:10.1163/25888072-02021042.

⁴⁸ Michael Freedden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2003), 98-100.

According to Schroeder, conceptualizing populism as a thin ideology is a dangerous myth because scholars risk missing the point that populism can be an independent, self-sustaining force.

Political-Strategic Approach to Populism

Although ideological approaches to populism have received significant attention in the academic community, the political-strategic approach has also gained traction and focuses on what populists do. The conceptualization from Weyland is one of the most fundamental definitions of populism as a political strategy:

“Populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers.”⁴⁹

Such a strategy consists of “the methods and instruments of winning and exercising power.”⁵⁰ At an ideational level, this conceptualization may be described as “Caesarism” or “Bonapartism,” both of which follow the logic of an authoritarian or autocratic political philosophy. Though these terms are often used pejoratively, they relate to the macro-social phenomenon Weyland describes here that tend to rely on a “strongman,” or charismatic leader, and anti-elitist rhetoric to garner support.

The political strategy is the primary way in which an actor wins elections, makes, and enforces decisions. Political strategies are comprised of two components: the type of political actors that seek and exercise power; and the principal power capability which that actor mobilizes for support.⁵¹ The type of ruler might be an individual person, an informal group or a formal organization, and the principal power capability might be via numbers or special weight (economic clout or military coercion). Populism, in Weyland’s analysis, is a political strategy revolving around an individual that prefers numbers to win influence and sustain authority. The ruler’s relationship to the support base is “direct,” unorganized and increasingly relies on social media as a channel of communication.

Weyland delineates between versions of personalistic leadership by offering two types: “a rigidly ideological, ‘ideocratic’ variant that is non-populist, and a flexible, opportunistic

⁴⁹ Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics,” *Comparative Politics* 34, no. 1 (October 2001): 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/422412>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵¹ Kurt Weyland, “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press 2017), 55-56.

variant that qualifies as populist.”⁵² Weyland borrows the concept of ideocracy from Kailitz, who describes these regimes as those that “claim that they fulfill the laws of nature, history or God and pave the way to a utopian future. Their source of legitimation lies in the future...”⁵³ As opposed to the opportunistic personalities of populist leaders, ideocratic personalities are guided by a dogmatic ideology and are purported as the only interpreters of said ideology.⁵⁴ Still, the line that Weyland tries to draw between a non-populist, ideocratic variant and flexible, opportunistic, populist variant is blurry because in their pursuit of power, populist leaders may adopt, or at least claim to adopt, principles that will bring a society toward a better future. Weyland’s abductive reasoning decides who falls in each of those categories, so the framework is somewhat arbitrary.

Betz asserts that populism is primarily a political strategy, “whose political rhetoric is the evocation of latent grievances and the appeal to emotions provoked by them, rather than ideology.”⁵⁵ Betz highlights here the importance of the emotionality of the populist rhetoric and appeal, and further claims that it is designed to tap into feelings of *ressentiment*. The notion of *ressentiment* is most frequently associated with Nietzsche, who describes it as a psychological condition involving toxic, vengeful anger and resentment. *Ressentiment* goes further than awareness of envy and injury and “actively seeks outlets for personal rage.”⁵⁶ Radical right-wing parties, according to Betz, use strategy to mobilize select, country-specific and popular *ressentiments* and corrode trust in the established elites.⁵⁷ Popular *ressentiments* can be triggered by a single event or they can develop over an extended period, and sources of these may be that some social groups enjoy preferential treatment. In addition to the mobilization and articulation of *ressentiments*, radical right-wing populists identify themselves with a specific issue; often, this issue is immigration.⁵⁸ Betz’s conceptualization of populism as a political strategy focuses only on radical right-wing populists. In some ways, this is a strength of his argument because he does not try to apply populism as a blanket, catch-all term for diverse politicians and parties. On the other hand, it is also a limitation, since we do not

⁵² Weyland, “Populism: A Political-Strategic Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, 50.

⁵³ Steffen Kailitz, “Classifying Political Regimes Revisited: Legitimation and Durability,” *Democratization* 20, no. 1 (2013): 47, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2013.738861>.

⁵⁴ Weyland, “Populism: A Political Strategic Approach,” 62-63.

⁵⁵ Hans-Georg Betz, “Conditions Favouring the Success and Failure of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, eds. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 198.

⁵⁶ Robert C. Solomon, “One Hundred Years of *Ressentiment*,” in *Nietzsche, Genealogy, Morality*, ed. R. Schacht (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 95-126.

⁵⁷ Betz, “Conditions Favouring the Success and Failure of Radical Right-Wing Populist Parties in Contemporary Democracies,” 200.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

know from this analysis if and how left-wing populism is defined and understood as a political strategy.

Nyenhuis, similarly to Weyland and Betz, views populism as a political strategy utilized by actors to garner support.⁵⁹ One of the weaknesses of the scholarship on populism, as described in Nyenhuis' introduction, is that it focuses too much on the demand-side explanations instead of the motivations and strategy of populist candidates themselves. Nyenhuis outlines four components of populism as a political strategy: political style, relationship with followers, political organization, and political history. To understand political style, Nyenhuis focuses on candidates' rhetoric and utilizes Hawkins' rubric of populist content to consider if and how populists employ Manichean and anti-establishment discourse.⁶⁰ Hawkins assigns speeches one of three scores (2, 1, 0) according to if and how the speech frames issues (in Manichean terms or not), reifies issues, ties ideas to national and religious leaders, romanticizes the "good majority," and vilifies the "evil minority."⁶¹ In terms of relationship with followers, Nyenhuis argues that populists tend to rely on direct and personalistic links because they often lack the traditional channels of mobilization, such as organized parties and unions. In this vein, political organization for populists is typically vertical, with the candidate or leader enjoying disproportionate influence within limited intermediary institutions. Lastly, Nyenhuis considers political history, or the mobilization of what Roberts describes as "outsider politics."⁶²

Barr characterizes "outsiders" in terms of experience with the political or party system.⁶³ Outsider location is relative to the party system, since some parties might be considered marginal or *de facto* outsiders if they are not amongst the consistently competitive, dominant parties. Yet, the bimodal conceptualization (insider or outsider) of the party system does not capture the position of politicians like Brazilian President Bolsonaro. Despite decades of experience in the Brazilian Chamber of Deputies, when Bolsonaro launched his presidential campaign in 2018 with the Social Liberal Party, he purported himself as an outsider to the political system. To capture the likes of opportunistic politicians like Bolsonaro, Barr offers an

⁵⁹ Robert Nyenhuis, "Populism in South America: Democratic Panacea or Pitfall?," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 78, no. 3 (May 2019): 720, DOI: 10.1111/ajes.12276.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 721.

⁶¹ Kirk A. Hawkins, *Venezuela's Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 251-253.

⁶² Kenneth M. Roberts, "Populism, Political Mobilization, and Crises of Political Representation," in *The Promise and Perils of Populism: Global Perspectives*, eds. Cynthia J. Arnson and Carlos de la Torre (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013), 37-61.

⁶³ Robert R. Barr, "Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics," *Party Politics* 15, no. 1 (2009): 33, DOI: 10.1177/1354068808097890.

intermediate category: the maverick. A maverick “is a politician who rises to prominence within an established, competitive party but then either abandons his affiliation to compete as an independent or in association with an outsider party, or radically reshapes his own party.”⁶⁴ Though mavericks are not outsiders in their relationship with the party or political system, they may utilize anti-establishment discourse to appeal to garner the plebiscite.

Rueda criticizes the political-strategic approach to populism based on three dysfunctions: selective rationalism, leader-centrism, and normative bias.⁶⁵ Rueda first examines how axioms of the political-strategic approach are shared with the rational choice theory, which, in the discipline of political science, proposes that rational actions are based on calculated self-interest.⁶⁶ Rueda challenges the notion that populists are driven solely by rational power-seeking rather than policy-seeking, or at least that populists are more inclined than other non-populist politicians in this way. The underlying assumption of the leader-centrism of the political-strategic approach is that voters are unorganized and passive, and the demand-side of populism matters less than the supply side.⁶⁷ Rueda contests the clarity, simplicity and operationalizability of leader-centrism and claims that it can be “fatal” to the conceptualization of populism. Lastly, Rueda chides the problematic normative bias of how populists are contemptuously defined and consistently treated in an illocutionary manner.⁶⁸ As previously mentioned, this normative bias extends beyond political-strategic definitions of populism and is widespread in the literature.

Socio-Cultural Approach to Populism

The third and final conceptual framework detailed by *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* is a socio-cultural approach whereby populism is understood as fundamentally relational. Populism, in this approach, is “characterized by a particular form of political relationship between political leaders and a social basis, one established and articulated through ‘low’ appeals which resonate and receive positive reception within particular sectors of society for social-cultural historical reasons.”⁶⁹ Populism is not a top-down phenomenon, but is based on a reciprocal relationship between leaders and supporters, and stands in opposition to “high”

⁶⁴ Barr, “Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics,” 34.

⁶⁵ Daniel Rueda, “Is Populism a Political Strategy? A Critique of an Enduring Approach,” *Political Studies* 69, no. 2 (2021): 167-184, DOI: 10.1177/0032321720962355.

⁶⁶ George Klosko, Edward N. Muller, and Karl Dieter Opp, “Rebellious Collective Action Revisited,” *The American Political Science Review* 81, no. 2 (June 1987): 557-558, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1961968>.

⁶⁷ Rueda, “Is Populism a Political Strategy?,” 176.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁶⁹ Pierre Ostiguy, “Populism: A Socio-Cultural Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford University Press 2017), 73.

ways of doing politics. Ostiguy details this high-low dimension in a working paper and describes politicians on the “high” as restrained and proper, in behavior and procedure, and politicians on the “low” as more down-to-earth and personalistic.⁷⁰ In regard to the left-right cleavage, the high-low dimension is neutral or “orthogonal,” which together create a two-dimensional political space of positions and appeals. Ostiguy concedes that what *The Oxford Handbook of Populism* describes as a socio-cultural approach has also been convincingly described as approaching populism as a political style. This subsection details Knight, Moffitt and Tormey, and Tormey’s contributions to this approach.

Knight suggests that populism connotes a political style that “implies a close bond between political leaders and led” and may become more politically effective and relevant in some periods and places than others.⁷¹ This political style characteristically involves a rapport with the people, whether genuine or gimcrack, an “us-versus-them” framing of reality and a period of crisis and mobilization. However, Knight asserts that populism can exist in “normal” times and the mobilization of populism is no more emotional or irrational than other forms of mobilization. The nomination and invocation of “the people” is also not confined to populism, even though it is often stressed in definitions of the term. Knight identifies that much of the typical rationality around populism is crudely empiricist and has not been subjected to rigorous theoretical analysis.⁷² For this reason, Knight advocates for using populism as a nominalist and instrumentalist term based on historical processes.

Moffitt and Tormey criticize the discursive, ideological, and strategic approaches to populism and propose an inductive model of populism as a political style.⁷³ They criticize populism as a thin-centered ideology on the grounds that, unlike other thin-centered ideologies, there are no key philosophers or theoreticians seeking to “thicken” the ideational density of the concept. This claim is undermined by the fact that some scholars, like Bešlin et al., have made the process of “thickening” a focal point of their project.⁷⁴ Regarding populism as a discourse, Moffitt and Tormey contest the notion that populism can be measured as a set of words and

⁷⁰ Pierre Ostiguy, “The High and the Low in Politics: A Two-Dimensional Political Space for Comparative Analysis and Electoral Studies,” Kellogg Institute Working Paper #360, 2009, https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old_files/documents/360_0.pdf.

⁷¹ Alan Knight, “Populism and Neo-Populism in Latin America, Especially Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 30 (1998): 223-248.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 225.

⁷³ Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey, “Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatization and Political Style,” *Political Studies* 62 (2014): 381-397, DOI: 10.1111/1467-9248.12032.

⁷⁴ Milivoj Bešlin et al., “Political Populism from the Fringe to the Mainstream: A Conceptual Framework,” *Populist Rebellion Against Modernity in the 21st-Century Eastern Europe: Neo-Traditionalism and Neo-Feudalism (POPREBEL) Working Paper no. 4 (2020), 4-5.*

ultimately assert the discursive approach is a methodological approach, not a primary framework. Though the discursive approach to populism is quite populist, particularly in the study of charismatic populist leaders, Moffitt and Tormey they argue that the visual, performative, and emotional aspects of the populist appeal are lost when the approach relies on chosen coded language.⁷⁵ Lastly, they dispute populism as a political strategy or organization since these definitions tend to omit stylistic and ideational elements of populism and often leave out the classic referent to populism of “the people.”⁷⁶ Ultimately, they propose thinking of populism as a “political style.” Moffitt and Tormey define a political style as, “the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations.”⁷⁷ Political styles can be populist, authoritarian, technocratic or post-representative, and each of these have a unique repertoire of performance. Moffitt and Tormey argue that, in lieu of ideology, discourse, logic, or strategy, they focus on performance because populism is “performed and enacted” and when populists claim to speak on behalf of “the people,” they demonstrate that performance within a political style is a feedback loop that impacts and is impacted by “the people” they are trying to bring into being.

In defining populism as a political style, Moffitt and Tormey contend that their inductive approach is not attempting to capture an ideal type of populism. Rather, they stress three features that should be considered as the sum of its parts and not in isolation from one another. These three features are an appeal to “the people,” an impetus from the perception of crisis, breakdown, or threat, and “bad manners.”⁷⁸ The appeal to “the people” has been described by several scholars in the previous sections, but the latter two features are unique to the definition of populism as a political style. Crises, breakdowns, and threats are only useful to populists when they can demonstrate to “the people” that these warrant decisive and immediate action by them alone. The instrumentalization and utilization of issues and crises means that populists tend to favor short-term, swift action. In relation to the appeal to “the people,” the feature of “bad manners” refers to the fact that much of the populist appeal is that they stand in opposition to what Ostiguy describes as the “high” way of doing politics.⁷⁹ Moffitt and Tormey conclude that conceptualizing populism as a political style allows us to consider, especially with this third feature of “bad manners,” how politicians across the political spectrum use performance to garner support.

⁷⁵ Moffitt and Tormey, “Rethinking Populism,” 385.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 387.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 391-392.

⁷⁹ Ostiguy, “Populism,” 73-74.

Tormey's book *Populism: A Beginner's Guide* offers five characteristics of populism as a form or style of politics.⁸⁰ Populism, according to Tormey:

1. Sees the fundamental antagonism in society as one between 'the people' (good) and 'the elites' (bad)
2. Frames the political context in terms of a 'crisis' that highlights the inadequacy of the political establishment
3. Offers a redemptive vision rather than a policy-driven, technocratic, or problem-based approach
4. Centres on a charismatic figure who claims to possess extraordinary powers of leadership
5. Deploys a blunter, more confrontational, more direct use of language, or 'plain speaking'

Tormey pinpoints with the first characteristic the most distinctive feature of populism, but notably ascribes normative meaning to the antagonistic groups with the "good" versus "bad" dichotomy. Populism, in this case, is intertwined with a moralistic imagination of politics wherein there is an imagined, unified good against evil elites. On the second point, as previously discussed, populism gains traction when "politics as normal" fails or when leaders or movements can convince people that there is some crisis requiring radical change. Thirdly, populism rejects the "traditional" channels of policymaking and presents a more direct, simplified style of politics. On his fourth point, Tormey calls attention to the likes of Trump, Le Pen, Perón, Bolsonaro and others who fit this template of the personalistic, charismatic leader, but Tormey claims that it is probably more accurate that populism lends itself to a "particular *kind* of leadership" or discourse.⁸¹ Fifth and lastly, Tormey deems populism to be an "extraordinary" form of politics that is emotive, blunt, and even vicious and hateful.⁸²

"Other" Approaches and Reflections on Populism

In the previous sections, I detail relevant scholarship on populism by dividing the literature into three approaches: ideational, political-strategic, and socio-cultural. However, not all definitions of populism fit neatly into one of these categories. Barr combines elements of the political-strategic and socio-cultural approaches, and examines appeals designs to build support, the location of political actors respective to the political party system, and the links

⁸⁰ Tormey, *Populism*, 17-18.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 29-31.

between citizens and politicians.⁸³ Ultimately, he defines populism as a combination of appeals, location and linkages and describes it as “a mass movement led by an outsider or maverick seeking to gain or maintain power by using anti-establishment appeals and plebiscitarian links.”⁸⁴ The plebiscitarian linkage distinguishes populism from clientelism and the intermediate category of the maverick allows us to differentiate populist politicians from “outsiders.”

Jan-Werner Müller’s short book *What Is Populism?* also offers a persuasive description of populism that does not fit well within any of the three approaches from the *Oxford Handbook*. Müller’s contribution does not fit well within the approaches because he argues that populism is not a structured doctrine, but more of a corrective socio-psychological claim based on the evaluation of policy. He writes that populism involves, “*moralistic imagination* of politics ...that sets a morally pure and fully unified [but fictional] ... people against elites who are deemed corrupt or in some other way morally inferior.”⁸⁵ It follows this logic that populists are anti-pluralist and to restore the supposedly betrayed will of the people, they are willing to use anti-liberal, anti-democratic, and unconstitutional means to restore it. Müller explains that populism as a “moralistic imagination” is not a structured doctrine, but a socio-psychological claim intended as a “corrective” for politics that is too distant from the people.⁸⁶ Müller’s scheme does not involve individuals or parties like left-wing American Senator Bernie Sanders because “populist” is not synonymous with “anti-establishment” and challenging the status quo does not make someone a populist. Sanders, SYRIZA, and the Indignados, just to name a few examples, do not treat the people as a morally pure, united front, and exclude those who do not fit within this.

Scholars in Carlos de la Torre’s edited volume *The Promise and Perils of Populism* concur that populism is a discursive political strategy, resting upon the Manichean dualistic ethic, but in one of the chapters of the volume, Jansen conceives of populist mobilization as a political project.⁸⁷ Jansen defines a “political project” as a “concerted and sustained set of political activities—a package of mobilizational and discursive practices—that maintains a degree of enduring coherence, both in terms of its rhetorical underpinnings and its ongoing

⁸³ Barr, “Populists, Outsiders and Anti-Establishment Politics,” 33.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸⁵ Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 19-20.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁷ Carlos de la Torre, ed., *The Promise and Perils of Populism: Global Perspectives* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2014).

enactment.”⁸⁸ Populism can operate in a mobilizational and discursive domain, but the populist project should refer only to those political projects that have both popular mobilization and populist rhetoric. Jansen thus creates a bridge between political-strategic or mobilization-centered definitions and those anchored in discursive strategies.

Instead of adopting one of the three approaches to populism (ideational, political-strategic, socio-cultural), Taggart maintains that populism has six principal themes:⁸⁹

1. Populism is hostile to representative politics
2. Populists tend to identify themselves with a heartland that represents an idealized version of their community
3. Populism lacks core values
4. Populism is a reaction to a sense of extreme crisis
5. Populists are self-limited by reliance on charismatic leaders and a curbed period of being ‘political’ and institutionalized
6. Populists tend to be highly chameleonic

Taggart affirms that taken together, these six features demonstrate how populism can manifest as a short-lived, but significant political force. In particular, he highlights that representative politics is both a source of frustration fueling populism, but it is also the mechanism through which populists express frustration and garner support.⁹⁰ The fifth of Taggart’s six principal themes points to the fact that populists will reluctantly engage in representative politics because without the institutions of representative politics -- parties and interest groups -- populist movements are difficult to maintain. Barr and Taggart are not the only authors to go outside of the boundaries of the ideational, political-strategic, and socio-cultural categories to define populism, but their contributions offer interesting examples of how these boundaries might be made fuzzy or even circumvented.

Section 2 reviewed, analyzed, and criticized many important contributions to the literature on populism. The analyses from Laclau, Canovan, Mudde, Weyland, Knight and other scholars in this section and beyond have expanded the breadth and depth of research on populism.

⁸⁸ Robert S. Jansen, “Populist Mobilization: A New Theoretical Approach to Populism,” *Sociological Theory* 29, no. 2 (June 2011): 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23076372>.

⁸⁹ Paul Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” in *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, eds. Yves Mény and Yves Surel (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 62-80.

⁹⁰ Taggart, “Populism and the Pathology of Representative Politics,” 78-79.

Overview of Nativism

In this section, I shift focus from populism to a concept less-frequently utilized in popular media, but equally as interesting and significant: nativism. The concept of nativism has been used in various academic disciplines, such as anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology, and linguistics, and I discuss some psychological and historical definitions, but I focus on conceptualizations within political science. Nativism was coined in the mid-nineteenth century in the United States and originally meant favoring the interests of natives over immigrants.⁹¹ In the 1830s and 1840s, as famine and revolution drove unprecedented numbers of immigrants from Europe to the United States, discontent grew amongst white, native-born Americans, along with fears that immigrants would undercut wages and eclipse the voting bloc of native-born men. Nativism, particularly against Roman Catholic and Irish immigrants, catalyzed the formation of the Know-Nothing Party (also known as the Native American Party and American Party) and the codification of anti-immigrant policies.⁹² Nonetheless, the positioning of immigrants or “outsider” ethnic groups as threatening long predates the term’s coinage and the emergence of the Know-Nothing Party.

This section is broken down into two following subsections. First, I detail several conceptualizations and definitions of nativism, such as those offered by Mudde, Fry, Daigle, Neulen, Hofeman and others. I consider the connotations of race and ethnicity here in definitions of nativism. Second, I examine the application and evolution of the concept of nativism within the American context, given that this is where it originated. I begin my inquiry with Higham’s seminal work *Strangers in the Land* and discuss the intersection of xenophobia, racism, nationalism, and nativism.

Defining Nativism

Nativists, as they are understood in the discipline of psychology, believe that some concepts, beliefs and/or capacities are “native” to the mind.⁹³ Essentially, nativism as a psychological doctrine entails the denial of empiricist psychology (at least to some extent), and for extreme nativists like Leibniz and Descartes, empiricism is flawed because experience

⁹¹ Brian N. Fry, *Nativism and Immigration: Recalculating the American Dream* (New York: LFB Scholarly Publishing LLC, 2007), 2.

⁹² Lorraine Boissoneault, “How the 19th-Century Know Nothing Party Reshaped American Politics,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, 26 January 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/immigrants-conspiracies-and-secret-society-launched-american-nativism-180961915/>.

⁹³ Fiona Cowie, “What Nativism Is (I): The Hypothesis of Special Faculties,” in *What’s Within? Nativism Reconsidered*, ed. Fiona Cowie (London, Oxford University Press, 1999).

cannot cause ideas.⁹⁴ In sociology, nativism is defined quite differently. The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* defines nativism as “the negative, ethnocentric responses of native-born populations towards immigrants”⁹⁵ This definition more closely mirrors how nativism is understood in political theory, as it is similarly defined in the *Dictionary of Social Sciences* as “a strong form of ethnocentrism, generally directed against immigrants as the alleged causes of larger socioeconomic problems.”⁹⁶ While the psychological and sociological definitions of nativism are compelling, in this section I concentrate on conceptualizations of nativism within political science.

As previously mentioned, since its coinage in the nineteenth century, the term “nativism” has changed and accrued new meaning. In the first chapter of *Nativism and Immigration*, Fry defines it as,

“A collective attempt by self-identified natives to secure or retain prior or exclusive rights to valued resources against the challenges reputedly posed by resident or prospective populations on the basis of their perceived foreignness.”⁹⁷

Fry argues that since the meaning of “native” and “foreign” are negotiated through collective processes, the status of “native” depends less on formal citizenship status and more on the meanings that people attribute to it. Anderson’s influential *Imagined Communities* reflects a similar idea related to the concept of nationalism, as he asserts that nations are socially constructed, and the nation is an “imagined” political community.⁹⁸ Fry emphasizes that often the symbols selected by “natives” are connected to or can be attributed to the images and ideas they hold of their imagined community. Nativism is triggered by a sense that whomever these people are that have been understood and possibly institutionalized as “foreign,” they are a threat to the “native” people. Fry highlights the importance of differential power and states that nativism hinges on “a sense of group position, a perception of threat, and sufficient power to police and enforce proprietary claims.”⁹⁹

Mudde constructs a broad characterization of nativism, informed by historical and anthropological definitions, and claims that it is,

⁹⁴ Fiona Cowie, “What Nativism Is (II): The Mystery Hypothesis,” in *What’s Within? Nativism Reconsidered*, ed. Fiona Cowie (London, Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁹⁵ John Scott and Gordon Marshall, eds., *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*, 3rd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁹⁶ Craig Calhoun, ed., *Dictionary of the Social Sciences* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁹⁷ Fry, *Nativism and Immigration*, 5.

⁹⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 6-7.

⁹⁹ Fry, *Nativism and Immigration*, 6.

“An ideology, which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group (“the nation”) and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state.”¹⁰⁰

Mudde, similarly to Fry, stresses that the determination of who is “native” and “foreign” is subjective and may be contested. Furthermore, Mudde argues that this minimum definition allows the term to be applicable in the context of post-communist Europe, since it can “accommodate the xenophobic nationalist reactions to (so-called) indigenous minorities from parts of the majority populations.”¹⁰¹ Mudde positions nativism at the core of his conceptual framework and constructs a ladder of abstraction of the “family” of nativist ideologies wherein ascending the ladder means moving from the basis of nativism towards the extreme right.¹⁰² Importantly, Mudde places nativism in conversation with terms it is often conflated with: nationalism, the radical right and extreme right, and demonstrates that between each of these ideologies, there is a key additional feature.

According to Daigle, Neulen and Hofeman, nativism emphasizes the difference between natives and non-natives in societies and is characterized by the “us” versus “them” cleavage.¹⁰³ The “us” versus “them” cleavage in this case tends to be based on origin and/or national identification. Yet, this cleavage is not necessarily rooted in historical grievances, but hinges upon the articulation and activation of fear and perceived threat. Fear that a non-native out-group will overtake one’s culture or country is a powerful rhetorical and policy tool for nativist politicians and parties. Daigle, Neulen and Hofeman differentiate between economic threat, nativism and populism and argue that these three indicators must be analyzed individually to understand the rise of and support for anti-establishment, right-wing parties in Europe.¹⁰⁴

Though this subsection does not detail all possible conceptualizations of nativism, Fry, Mudde, Daigle, Neulen and Hofeman’s interpretations provide us with a foundation of how “nativeness” and “foreignness” are recognized and even manipulated in the formulation of nativist ideology and policies. Nativism has been traditionally used by North American scholars, but this section demonstrates how it is applicable in a broader frame outside of America, particularly as it is interconnected with confrontational forms of nationalism.

¹⁰⁰ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 24, see Table 1.2 “Ladder of abstraction of nativist ideologies.”

¹⁰³ Delton D. Daigle, Joséphine Neulen, and Austin Hofeman, *Populism, Nativism, and Economic Uncertainty: Playing the Blame Game in the 2017 British, French, and German Elections* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Daigle, Neulen, and Hofeman, *Populism, Nativism, and Economic Uncertainty*, 11.

Nativism in the American Political Context

From the conception of nativism in the mid-nineteenth century to the 2016 election of Donald Trump, whom Mudde describes as a nativist, this concept of nativism has played a key role in American politics.¹⁰⁵ While Trump certainly stands out for his nativist, xenophobic rhetoric and policies, nativism has informed American politics and immigration policy long before Trump's election. According to *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*, in American history, "nativism has functioned as a form of nationalism predicated on the exclusion of perceived foreign elements" and dates to the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Nativism, as a function of nationalism, has manifested in policies of discrimination, as well as through violence. Though scholars like Guia have applied the concept in the European context to understand anti-immigrant discourse and movements,¹⁰⁷ given the epistemological roots in the American scholarship, it is important to acknowledge the origin of this concept and how the structure of the concept has been shaped by its origins. Guia acknowledges that there is still a gap in the conceptualization of European nativism, particularly since the literature is lacking a seminal study, like John Higham's.

In *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham's famous study of nativism, nationalism, and ethnic prejudice in the United States, he concludes that nativism,

"Should be defined as intense opposition to an internal minority on the ground of its foreign (i.e., 'un-American') connections. Specific nativistic antagonisms may, and do, vary widely in response to the changing character of minority irritants and the shifting conditions of the day; but through each separate hostility runs the connecting, energizing force of modern nationalism."¹⁰⁸

Higham consequently demarcates nativism as an ideology and a defensive form of nationalism. In the United States, the three overlapping nativist traditions are anti-Catholicism, racism, and anti-radicalism. Anti-Catholicism was prevalent in England even before American colonization, but became widespread in the 1830s with a wave of Catholic immigrants from Germany and Ireland. Samuel F.B. Morse, known primarily for developing Morse code, wrote in his 1835 *Foreign Conspiracies Against the Liberties of the United States* that Catholics were

¹⁰⁵ Friedman, "What is a Nativist?"

¹⁰⁶ Peter N. Stearns, ed., *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World* (London: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ Aitana Guia, "The Concept of Nativism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Europe," European University Working Papers, 2016, https://www.mwpweb.eu/1/218/resources/publication_2596_1.pdf

¹⁰⁸ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 4.

criminals, lunatics, and drunkards.¹⁰⁹ Immigrants were similarly negatively associated with radicalism and problems in schools and government. I discuss later the importance of racism in American nativism. Higham correlates the nativist antagonisms in the United States between 1860 and 1925 with periods of social, political, or economic strain.

Michaels argues, to Higham's point on defensive nationalism, that "as nationalism turns into nativism...it becomes also a kind of pluralism. From the standpoint of the 'native,' this must involve the repudiation of any attempt to blur differences."¹¹⁰ Michaels' book, *Our America*, complicates the assumed shift in early twentieth-century America from racial essentialism to cultural pluralism and argues, in fact, that it was the reverse. Racial essentialism -- the belief that racial groups possess underlying, unalterable "essences," traits and abilities -- and Michaels asserts that even as culture was used as a euphemism for race, claims of identity continue to be based on essentialism. Michaels concludes that the paradigm shifts from universalist racism to "nativist modernism."

Mudde claims that while Europeans tend to use terms like xenophobia, racism or "ultra-nationalism," Americans capture the phenomenon of "xenophobic nationalism" through the idea of nativism.¹¹¹ Unlike xenophobia, racism or ultra-nationalism, nativism is "an ideology that wants congruence of state and nation—the political and the cultural unit. It wants one state for every nation and one nation for every state. It perceives all non-natives ... as threatening." Further, Mudde describes that non-natives are not exclusively people, but can also be non-native ideas. Delimiting the "us" (natives) is a difficult and strategic endeavor to garner political support, so the "them" (non-natives) tends to be more frequently described. The "them" or the Other is what Friedman describes as the "unspoken inverse" of the natives. Mudde's final thoughts are that one of nativism's singular, narrow vision of who "the people" are contradicts the American commitment to pluralism.

American nativism, in Kaufmann's analysis, must be understood in reference to an "American" dominant national ethnic group, the Protestant Anglo-Americans, and how nativism was constructed around the boundaries of the myths and symbols of this group.¹¹² The national ethnic group in the United States that "imagined" the territory as its homeland was

¹⁰⁹ Samuel F.B. Morse, *Foreign Conspiracies Against the Liberties of the United States* (New York: New York Observer, 1835).

¹¹⁰ Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1995), 69.

¹¹¹ Interview with Mudde in Friedman, "What is a Nativist?"

¹¹² Eric Kaufmann, "American Exceptionalism Reconsidered: Anglo-Saxon Ethnogenesis in the 'Universal' Nation, 1776-1850," *Journal of American Studies* 33, no. 3 (1999): 438-440, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27556685>.

Anglo-American Protestants and the American sense of civic community was underpinned by a sense of this group as the American ethnicity.¹¹³ Kaufmann utilizes the term “nativism” in his examination of the development of the Anglo-American ethnicity, but he would later describe it as a “crude” term. He advocates for “majority-ethnic nationalism,” “which applies to people who consider themselves native to or settlers of a country” and wish to protect their demographic predominance in said country.¹¹⁴ The process of ethnogenesis is ongoing and negotiated, but the rooting of Anglo-American Protestants to the territory that would become the United States and the creation of myths and symbols surrounding that process continues to inform understandings of the American national identity.

The most persistent and successful form of nativism in the United States is racism. Higham identifies racism as one of the three most prominent nativist traditions in America, along with anti-Catholicism and anti-radicalism. Racism is the cornerstone of nativist policies like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and 1924 Immigration Act.¹¹⁵ Galindo and Vigil argue that American nativism against people of color from Latin America and non-European countries sits at the intersection of racism and defensive nationalism.¹¹⁶ Under the guise of defensive nationalism, policies, and patterns of discrimination against Latin American, Asian, and African immigrants are normalized in the United States. Galindo and Vigil assert that this “racialized nativism” against non-European immigrants is driven by fears of linguistic diversity undermining national unity, multicultural policies favoring people of color and undermining American meritocracy, and concerns over immigrants draining public resources.¹¹⁷ Nativism in the United States, according to Ortiz, works in tandem with racism and the black-white binary and “is premised on the idea that Others coming into the nation have to assimilate into the dominant Anglo culture through the elimination of their foreign traits.”¹¹⁸ Ortiz asserts that it is shortsighted to analyze contemporary American nativism and Anglo prejudice without considering the impact of racism.

This brief overview of scholarship on nativism in the United States demonstrates how the phenomenon is interconnected with nationalism, ethnicity, and race. The literature on nativism in the United States more broadly illuminates the intersection of the concept with

¹¹³ Kaufmann, “American Exceptionalism Reconsidered,” 443-444.

¹¹⁴ Friedman, “What is a Nativist?”

¹¹⁵ Stearns, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern World*.

¹¹⁶ René Galindo and Jami Vigil, “Are Anti-Immigrant Statements Racist or Nativist? What Difference Does it Make?,” *Latino Studies* 4 (2006): 420, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.lst.8600224>.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 423-424.

¹¹⁸ Camilo M. Ortiz, “Latinos Nowhere in Sight: Erased by Racism, Nativism, the Black-White Binary, and Authoritarianism,” *Rutgers Race and Law Review* 13, no. 2 (2012): 29-64.

other *-isms* (i.e., racism and nationalism), and how it often overlaps and corresponds with these phenomena. Moreover, it exemplifies how the nativist in-group is delimited, on a conceptual and policy level. Though nativism has been an important theme in US history, the ideology of preserving or protecting natives from non-native people and ideas extends well beyond the American borders, and draws compelling parallels with populism.

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Frame of Reference and Contextual Umbrella

In the Introduction Chapter, I explained the origins of my interest in populism and why I chose to examine it in comparison with another concept, but an important question remains: Why nativism? Considering the plethora of other concepts related to populism, including nationalism and xenophobia, why would I choose nativism? The answer to this question is two-fold.

The usage of nativism in relation to the pushback to Irish Catholic immigration in the early- to mid-nineteenth century is the concept's root in the American political tradition, but it has since been expanded to describe parties, individuals, and movements from around the world. In a 2020 article written by Takis Pappas, populism and nativism are clearly divided by ten indicators: geographical locus, ideological stance, view of society, political goals, political methods, leadership traits, party organization, power capture, performance in office, and core democratic idea.¹¹⁹ In approximately two sentences per indicator (one for populism, one for nativism), Pappas outlines in simple terms what differentiates populism from nativism. The simplicity of Pappas' blog post and the very clear delineations he creates left me with more questions than answers, including the broad question that would come to guide this research: Why are these distinctions so important for research in political science? Moreover, how do these definitional and conceptual debates inform empirical, positivist research?

Contrary to Pappas' clear delineation of populism and nativism is Eirikur Bergmann's 2020 analysis titled, "Understanding Nativist Populism."¹²⁰ Bergmann argues that the convergence of nativism and populism has created a new form of *neo-nationalism* across Europe and America. Bergmann borrows elements from Margaret Canovan and Cas Mudde's definitions of populism, and John Higham's definition of nativism, and amalgamates them into *nativist populism*, or "the politics which separates outgroups from those who are considered as constituting 'the people.'"¹²¹ Bergmann asserts that *neo-nationalism* best describes this convergence of nativism and populism. The entanglement of the communicative tools, tactics and post-truth politics distinguishes *neo-nationalism* from the nationalism of the Enlightenment and Romantic periods. *Nativist populists* put forth a threefold claim in their

¹¹⁹ Takis Pappas, "Populism vs. Nativism: 10 Indicators to Tell the Two Apart," *Pappas Populism*, 13 May 2020, pappaspopulism.com/populism-versus-nativism/.

¹²⁰ Eirikur Bergmann, "Understanding Nativist Populism," *Neo-Nationalism* (2020): 29-52, DOI: 10.1007/978-3-030-41773-4_2.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

support of “the people:” a discursive external threat to the nation, an accusation that domestic elites are betraying the people, and possibly siding with aggressors, and a discursive creation that they are in the position to defend “the people.”¹²²

Bergmann’s analysis highlights the conceptual connections and differences between nativism and populism, but in his effort to explicate contemporary, “staunchly nationalist,” illiberal parties and leaders, he dilutes the concepts of populism and nativism. These phenomena are distinct, and treating nativism and populism as component parts and *neo-nationalism* as the whole obscures the important nuances between these concepts. I want to explore the similarities between them without completely whitewashing populism as nativism, or vice versa, or creating a new concept altogether.

Concepts and Conceptual Analysis

Concepts are widely understood as the building blocks of thoughts. They are important for the categorization of ideas and ongoing learning.¹²³ The ontological debate in philosophy over what concepts are is generally split into two camps: one proposes that concepts are mental objects or representations, while the other supposes they are abstract objects.¹²⁴ The former view comes primarily from the *Representational Theory of the Mind* (RTM) and it follows from this that concepts are constituents of propositional attitudes.¹²⁵ This view has been challenged by the claim that many things can be thought about, but not imaged, or are heterogenous and cannot be subsumed by a single image.¹²⁶ The latter view does not see concepts “in the mind,” but as abstract objects or “Fregean senses” that are mediated through thought, language and referents. A mixed view of concepts aims to capture the strength of the two primary traditions in the study of concepts and suggests that mental representations can be combined with senses.

Theories of concepts stand in respect to two assumptions, conforming to Weiskopf’s logic: the *Singularity Assumption* and the *Uniformity Assumption*.¹²⁷ The latter posits that “for every concept that can be conceptually represented, there is such a thing as the unique category

¹²² Ibid., 50.

¹²³ Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, “Concepts,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2021 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/concepts/#ConConAna>.

¹²⁴ Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence, “The Ontology of Concepts — Abstract Objects or Mental Representations,” *NOÛS* 41, no. 4 (2007): 561-593, DOI: 10.1111/j.1468-0068.2007.00663.x.

¹²⁵ Margolis and Laurence, “Concepts,” in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

¹²⁶ David Pitt, “Mental Representation,” *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/mental-representation/>.

¹²⁷ Daniel Aaron Weiskopf, “The Plurality of Concepts,” *Synthese* 169, no. 1 (2009): 145-173, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40271295>.

of that category,” and the latter assumes, “all concepts belong to a single psychological kind.”¹²⁸ I examine these assumptions in the following chapter in my effort to unpack the challenges of creating definitional agreement, and consider the negation of these assumptions: conceptual plurality. Can we assume that the concept of populism is in fact a single kind of entity, or is there a plurality of meaning? Though I only offer a very short explication of the ontological dispute over the label and meaning of “concepts,” it illuminates that concepts are complex entities. Daigneault argues that even as we might be able to recognize a concept when we see one, assessing it, improving its structure, or comparing it to another concept is difficult, particularly within the social sciences.¹²⁹

Conceptual analysis is the philosophical study of these building blocks of thought.¹³⁰ More specifically, conceptual analysis aims to elucidate complex ideas by systematically breaking them down into their component parts. According to Johan Olsthoorn, this type of study can take at least four forms: 1) finding a proper definition for a term; 2) searching for theoretically relevant conceptual distinctions through disambiguation; 3) exploring connections between different concepts; and 4) studying conceptual change or design.¹³¹ To seek conceptual refinement of populism, I adopt the third form of conceptual analysis and introduce nativism. Concepts, Olsthoorn argues, are not self-standing, independent entities, but rather, there are important “conceptual connections – links to other concepts entailed by the concept itself, following logically from the internal structure of the concept.”¹³² On the other hand, as Levitsky demonstrates in his analysis of institutionalization and Peronism in Argentina, the failure to make conceptual distinction leads to issues for causal analysis.¹³³ Thus, as we make connections between concepts, we must also acknowledge distinction and existing ambiguities.

The disambiguation of populism is an ongoing debate in political science and political theory, but still many competing conceptualizations and approaches continue to be articulated for it. As previously mentioned, my aim is not to add to that list of definitions and approaches. Instead, in Chapter V, I aim to show, through the third approach Olsthoorn identifies, that there is a nexus between populism and nativism. These two independently intelligible concepts, taken together, can however help us identify what the central protagonists of ideational

¹²⁸ Ibid., 149.

¹²⁹ Pierre-Marc Daigneault, “Introduction to the Symposium ‘Conceptual Analysis in Political Science and Beyond,’” *Social Science Information* 51, no. 2 (2012): 183, DOI: 10.1177/0539018412437103.

¹³⁰ Johan Olsthoorn, “Conceptual Analysis,” 153.

¹³¹ Ibid., 154.

¹³² Ibid., 161.

¹³³ Steven Levitsky, “Institutionalization and Peronism,” *Party Politics* 4, no. 1 (1998): 77-92.

populism are identifying. Moreover, I aim in Chapter IV to demonstrate, in line with Weiskopf's endorsement of pluralism,¹³⁴ that conceptual plurality and the discovery of reliable generalizations does not render concepts to be unfit objects for study.

This meta-level analysis of the contestable, normative concepts of populism is novel, but the approach has been used for the analysis of other concepts, including democracy. Collier and Levitsky's Working Paper titled, "Democracy 'with Adjectives,'" interrogates the two-faceted challenge of developing differentiated approaches or conceptualizations of democracy to capture diverse country case studies; and to extend the analysis so it is externally valid and generalizable to a larger number of cases, while avoiding "conceptual stretching."¹³⁵ Collier and Levitsky argue that as scholars attempt to analyze new political regimes in Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the former communist world, they confront two potentially contradictory goals, often leading to a number of subtypes of democracy, such as "authoritarian democracy" or "protodemocracy."

It would be shortsighted to introduce populism outside of the framework of democracy because populism is often posited as a malaise or problem for democracy. Both populism and democracy are rooted in and stress the importance of "the people." Yet, populism is widely understood to be a sobering internal challenge to liberal democracy. The liberal democratic political order, according to Galston's characterization, rests on the republican principle of popular sovereignty, takes a constitutional form, incorporates the civic egalitarianism and majoritarian principles of democracy, and the liberal principle of constrained majoritarian decision making.¹³⁶ The threat, Galston argues, is not to democracy, but the dominant form of liberal democracy and the formal, bounded institutes necessitated by constitutionalism. Individual rights and majority rule – the two main components of liberal democracy – have a complicated relationship, since they can be separated, and liberal democracy requires a delicate maintenance between these. Populists justify themselves by the democratic sense of majoritarianism (leaders representing "the people), but populism is not bound to constitutionalism. The connection between democracy and populism is further explored in Chapters IV and V.

¹³⁴ Weiskopf, "The Plurality of Concepts."

¹³⁵ David Collier and Steven Levitsky, "Democracy 'with Adjectives': Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," Kellogg Institute Working Paper #230, 1996, https://kellogg.nd.edu/sites/default/files/old_files/documents/230.pdf.

¹³⁶ William A. Galston, "The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy," *Brookings Institute*, 17 April 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-populist-challenge-to-liberal-democracy/>.

The concern over conceptual stretching that Collier and Levitsky pinpoint also underscores Sartori's "ladder of abstraction."¹³⁷ Sartori proposes the ladder of abstraction as a systematic framework that starts from specific, concrete concepts and as you climb, the concept becomes more abstract and general. Sartori's framework draws upon a taxonomic hierarchical system of classification wherein each category has a clear boundary, and all members share a set of defining properties. While some, like Collier and Mahon, Jr., argue that this classical framework of categorization may be applied too strictly, Sartori, Collier, Levitsky and Mahon, Jr. agree that conceptual stretching may become an issue when a concept does not fit new cases or cannot adapt to changes over time.¹³⁸ The amorphous, vague, and minimalist conceptualizations of democracy attempt to incorporate as broad of a number of cases into a contrived, and oft-erroneous understanding. I structure my analysis similarly to Collier and Levitsky. To provide a baseline understanding of nativism and populism, I introduced various and relevant definitions and conceptualizations in the Literature Review. I then introduce the challenges of creating and utilizing the normative and contestable concept of populism. Here, I further unpack the normative implications of positioning populism as antithetical or "dangerous" to democracy.

Ideational Protagonists of Populism

I consider the ideational protagonists of populism in comparison with nativism. This is not because I deem this approach to be superior to socio-cultural or political-strategic approaches, but because nativism, as it is defined by Mudde, Daigle, Neulen, Hoffman, and Higham in the previous chapter, is an ideology. To compare populism as a political strategy or style to nativism as an ideology would erroneously assume that these concepts are similarly based on the narrative or style of being an "outsider" and a rapport between "the people" and leaders. In line with Olsthoorn's rubric for conceptual analysis, I narrow my focus here by first differentiating the genus within the concept that I want to research. Conceptual claims of connection are also best regarded as conditionals, and for the comparative analysis in Chapter V of nativism and populism, the conditional is as follows:

If we adopt the approach that populism is an ideology based on antagonism between

¹³⁷ Giovanni Sartori, "Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics," *The American Political Science Review* 64, no. 4 (1970): 1033-1053, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1958356>.

¹³⁸ David Collier and James E. Mahon, Jr., "Conceptual 'Stretching' Revisited: Adapting Categories in Comparative Analysis," *The American Political Science Review* 87, no. 4 (1993): 845-855, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2938818>.

an in-group and an out-group, *then* it follows that we may compare ideational conceptualizations of nativism with populism.

To avoid the conceptual pitfall of unnecessarily discarding certain arguments or definitions, I look at several different ideational conceptualizations from McRae, Laclau, Mudde, Kaltwasser, Stanley, Schroeder, and Canovan. I pay particular attention to Canovan's conceptualization of "the people," since the concept of "the people" closely informs the populist ideology, and Mudde and Kaltwasser's definition from *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Additionally, I highlight Mudde's 2004 contribution, "The Populist Zeitgeist," since he very clearly here proposes populism to be an ideology that separates society into two antagonistic groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elites." The choice of scholars here is largely based on theoretical nuance. Many scholars research populism, but not all specialize in the formation of the concept itself, and instead focus more on the utilization of it.

Limitations of Research Method

The scope of this research is focused on the conceptualization of populism and the cross-conceptual analysis between ideational definitions of populism and nativism. There are many different potential avenues in which research on this topic of populism has been and could be conducted, including utilizing a case study (of a country, party, or individual politician/leader), analyzing the supply and demand side of populism, and assessing the impact of populism on public opinion, policy, and democracy. The scope of methodologies and approaches to the study of populism is vast, particularly since the phenomenon has emerged in diverse country cases and has been approached using interdisciplinary methods. Within the limited scope of this research project, I decided to focus strictly on the meta-level theorization of populism, since, as I alluded to in the Introduction Chapter, this step in the research is often glossed over in favor of using the term "populism" for empirical analysis. Moreover, for the second part of my analysis, I even further limit my scope by focusing in on ideational conceptualizations of the concept. Understanding how populism is translated into a tool for empirical analysis and methodological work requires analyzing both the philosophical, abstract approach that I have adopted in this research, and the methodologies that operationalize it.

CHAPTER IV: CHALLENGES TO THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF POPULISM

Analysis Introduction and Roadmap

The wide breadth of research on populism discussed in the Literature Review and the vast scope of conceptualizations of it leads me to the following research questions:

What are the challenges for creating an unambiguous theory of populism? What are the ontological dilemmas that confront political scientists and theorists as they attempt to define populism? What epistemological tools can we use as political theorists to bridge the gap between these different conceptualizations?

I argue that the two main challenges to the theorization of populism are the normative assignment of value to the concept and its contestability. Despite the challenge that normativity and contestability present for the theorization and eventual empirical application of populism, I demonstrate that through conceptual analysis and cross-concept comparison, we can find concordance between diverse conceptualizations. In the next chapter, I bring nativism into conversation with populism and advance the idea of the “us” versus “them,” in-group/out-group tension as the paramount nexus between populism and nativism.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. I first define normative concepts, and then discuss how and why populism is a normative concept. I analyze here the challenges that normativity causes for analysis. Just as normative or evaluative concepts carry theoretical challenges, so do contestable concepts. To not further complicate the existing web of overlapping, competing and contradictory theories of populism, I assess the challenges of constructing and utilizing normative and contestable concepts separately. I analyze first how populism has been constructed in normative terms and the challenges and consequences of that conceptualization. I frame the former type of concept (normative) in a broader conversation about the epistemological and methodological tension between political theory and political science. On the latter type of concept (contestable), which I assess in the second section, I unpack the strengths and weaknesses of populism’s contestability, and frame my analysis through the philosophical doctrine of ontological relativism. This delineated form of relativism provides a frame for reflection on the diverse, and sometimes incompatible ways of categorizing populism.

In the third section, I offer concluding thoughts on the constitutive ambiguity and polemical structure of populism, and reiterate the importance of populism’s relationship with democracy. I stress the essential feature of both democracy and populism, the “demos” – i.e., “the people” – and the challenge not of creating a single specific theory or theoretical

framework for populism, but of integrating different approaches and synthesizing between definitions.

Normative Concepts

By definition, normative concepts not simply informative, but also appraisive and evaluative. Eklund divides the question of what it is for something to be normative into two sub-questions: first, what is it for a *property* or *fact* to be normative; second, what is it for a *linguistic expression* or *concept* to be normative.¹³⁹ On the latter question of expressions and concepts, Eklund favors the idea that the normativity of these is largely based on the features of its use — or its normative role. According to this logic, there may be normative *properties*, but concepts are not in and of themselves, inherently normative, since it is the role they play that may be normative. More specifically, this role is understood as an *expression of an attitude*, i.e., to either recommend or prohibit. Eklund further specifies though that the coarse, two-pronged dichotomy of “good” versus “bad,” negative versus positive, that is typically used to conceptualize normative roles is less useful than a more *fine-grained* view that draws further distinctions between the roles of these terms.

While Eklund clearly asserts that not all concepts are normative, Pietrzyk-Reeves conversely outlines that, from the perspective of normal political theory, no concept simply, or objectively describes reality.¹⁴⁰ Concepts provide meaning to the social world and therefore are also evaluative or prescriptive. She further explains, in line with Minker’s 2015 analysis,¹⁴¹ that, “A normative approach to the concept of the political focuses on a positive evaluation of the meaning of a valuable political order whereas a critical approach is meant to uncover injustice, tensions and contradictions of social structures.”¹⁴² Pietrzy-Reeves illuminates a cornerstone of normative political theory: theorization is both descriptive and prescriptive. A normative theory is concerned with what *ought* to be, rather than simply what *is* or *has been*.

Challenge of Populism as a Normative Concept

The appraisal of complicated political concepts, such as populism, means that political actors, journalists, and scholars alike may outwardly reduce them as tools of approbation or

¹³⁹ Matti Eklund, “Normative Concepts,” in *Choosing Normative Concepts*, ed. Matti Eklund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 64.

¹⁴⁰ Dorota Pietrzy-Reeves, “Normative Political Theory,” *Teoria Polityki* 1 (2017): 173-185, DOI: 10.4467/00000000TP.17.009.6588.

¹⁴¹ Kamil Minker, “Główne Problemy Konceptualizacji Pojęcia Polityczności,” *Studia Politologiczne*, 37 (2015): 50–74.

¹⁴² Pietrzy-Reeves, “Normative Political Theory,” 179-180.

condemnation. Populism has been polemically characterized in academic research as “contagious,”¹⁴³ “gendered” and “dangerous.”¹⁴⁴ The conceptualization, usage, and application of populism from many scholars frames the concept in normative terms. There are “good” kinds of populism, and “bad” kinds, or populism is the “bad” that aims to undermine the “good” of democracy. However, what are the consequences and challenges of this assignment of normative meaning to populism? How does the evaluative nature of conceptualizations of populism influence its study? In this subsection I first offer some examples of notable normative definitions and analyses of populism before unpacking the challenges and consequences of this choice in the scholarship.

John Lukacs’ reflections on ascendant populism and demagoguery in *Democracy and Populism: Fear and Hatred* is a memorable affirmation that democracy has been undermined by governance in the name of “the people.”¹⁴⁵ Governance in the name of “the people,” however, is only in title, because Lukacs describes populist politics and populist parties as angry “manipulators.”¹⁴⁶ The way Lukacs chronicles populism to be a tyranny of the majority and manifestation of a dishonest political class clearly positions populism to be antithetical to liberalism and democracy. Membership to “the people,” which is a center point of most definitions of populism, can be exclusionary and even dangerous, as politics in the name of “the people,” aka populism, ultimately aims to serve the rulers. Although *Democracy and Populism* offers interesting insights into the transformation of left and right and the emergence of what Lukacs sees as nationalistic populism, we must be mindful of the impact of the evaluative hyperbolic language that Lukacs uses throughout the book and the visceral feelings he articulates about populism.

Mueller, to specify the *normative core* of populism or *populist ideology*, assesses whether populism can be corrective to democracy or democracy-enhancing.¹⁴⁷ Ultimately, Mueller argues that, given the normative core of its ideology, populism is incompatible with the democratic legitimation of political authority. Similarly, in his “Reflections on Populism,” Müller distinguishes that the word populism has come to signal “both anxieties by liberals

¹⁴³ Jens Rydgren, “Is Extreme Right-Wing Populism Contagious? Explaining the Emergence of a New Party Family,” *European Journal of Political Research* 44, no. 3 (2005): 413-437, DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6765.2005.00233.x.

¹⁴⁴ Julie Mostov, “Populism is Always Gendered and Dangerous,” *Frontiers in Sociology* 5 (2020), DOI: 10.3389/fsoc.2020.625385.

¹⁴⁵ John Lukacs, *Democracy and Populism: Fear and Hatred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹⁴⁷ Axel Mueller, “The Meaning of ‘Populism,’” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, nos. 9-10 (2019): 1025-1057, DOI: 10.1177/0191453719872277.

about democracy and by democrats about liberalism.”¹⁴⁸ Müller contends populism to be “profoundly illiberal” and a “directly undemocratic understanding of representative democracy” that should not be thought of as potentially corrective or redemptive for democracy.¹⁴⁹ Müller’s imagination of populism assumes that the internal logic of representing and defending the *demos* will not actually match with a leader’s policy choices.

Müller’s contribution in *What is Populism?* exemplifies the normative framing of the relationship between democracy and populism. Müller describes populism as a “degraded form of democracy that promises to make good on democracy’s highest ideals (‘Let the people rule!’).”¹⁵⁰ Müller sees populism as a response to the contemporary crisis of representative democracy, a “peril,” as he describes it, that leads to the populist anti-pluralist and “exclusionary” claim to represent the people.¹⁵¹ The representative claims of “the people” are conceived to manipulate and present, from above, a particular, anti-plural vision of society. Laclau and Müller agree that the populist’s goal should be to increase the spaces of possible representation,¹⁵² but they differ in their interpretation of the representational character of populism. For Laclau, representation is not unidirectionally imposed from above, rather it is the area in which identities are performed and constituted.¹⁵³

Mouffe¹⁵⁴ and Laclau,¹⁵⁵ in contrast to Lukacs, Mueller, and Müller, promote the idea that populism has the capacity to recover and deepen democracy. According to Mouffe, the “populist moment,” or the crisis of neoliberal hegemony and post-democracy, created an opportunity for leftist populism to radicalize democracy and combat the inequalities resulting from neoliberalism. Mouffe follows Laclau’s imagination of populism from *On Populist Reason* that populism is not a catastrophic outcome or failure of democracy. Since populism in Laclau’s logic is based on a plurality of “contents,” rather than a fixed ideology or strategy, it is not necessarily adversarial towards democracy. Mouffe specifies that the populist conflict exists in shared normative and institutional spaces as an “agonism,” or struggle between

¹⁴⁸ Jan-Werner Müller, “‘The People Must Be Extracted From Within’: Reflections on Populism,” *Constellations* (Princeton University), 2014 March, <https://www.princeton.edu/~jmueller/Constellations-Populism-JWMueller-March2014-pdf.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁰ Jan-Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 6-11.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁵² Lasse Thomassen, “Representing the People: Laclau as a Theorist of Representation,” *New Political Science* 41, no. 2 (2019): 329-344, DOI: 10.1080/07393148.2019.1596687.

¹⁵³ Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London: Verso, 2005).

¹⁵⁴ Chantal Mouffe, *For a Left Populism* (London and New York: Verso, 2018), 5.

¹⁵⁵ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*.

adversaries.¹⁵⁶ Both Mouffe and Laclau agree that right- and left-wing variants of populism need to be theoretically differentiated.

In Kaltwasser's analysis of Latin American populism, which he understands as both a discourse and ideology, he argues that the relationship between populism and democracy in Latin America is ambivalent.¹⁵⁷ One of the lessons Kaltwasser presents that we can learn from the scholarship on Latin American populism is that normative judgements should be on a case-by-case basis, rather than implying that populism is naturally good or bad. In that vein, Kaltwasser, unlike Lukacs, Müller, Rydgren, and Mostov, asserts that "populism in itself is neither a threat nor a corrective to democracy" and populism can have a positive or negative impact on democracy.¹⁵⁸ Kaltwasser demonstrates that, while many scholars rely on a normative version of populism, populism by its very nature is not necessarily antithetical or harmful to democracy. The Manichean distinction between the pure, virtuous people and the corrupt elites is a moral and normative view, but this distinction does not necessarily mean that populism should be conceptualized and utilized based on a normative judgment.

The normative valence of populism does not come without challenges and consequences for conceptualization and theorization. The normative assignment creates challenges for discerning a clear conceptual difference between the *description* of populism, and a *prescription* of how democracy should function *in opposition to* populism. Populism, as we have seen in Lukacs, Mueller, and Müller's arguments, is reasoned to be an aberration or disruption from how democratic politics is properly and "normally" conducted. The tenth of Pappas' ten potential conceptual and methodological drawbacks to the study of populism is related to the burden of normativity, or what he describes as "normative indeterminacy."¹⁵⁹ Populism is laden with the aforementioned normative implication of being either a threat to democracy ("bad") or corrective to it ("good"). From the negative point of view, populism has been conceived of as an "aberration" of democracy and antithetical to liberalism. Populism is conflated with the contingent democratizing force of some movements and leaders, even as it promotes a novel understanding of democracy, the people, and representation. If populism is called "democratic," based on the contingency that it may, under certain circumstances, have democratic impacts, it binds theories of populism to non-neutrality towards democracy.

¹⁵⁶ Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*, 91.

¹⁵⁷ Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, "Latin American Populism: Some Conceptual and Normative Lessons," *Constellations* 21, no. 4 (2014): 494-504, DOI: 10.1111/1467-8675.12125.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 502.

¹⁵⁹ Takis S. Pappas, "Modern Populism: Research Advances, Conceptual and Methodological Pitfalls, and the Minimal Definition," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia on Populism* (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.17>.

Similarly, if populism is something that must be overcome to revitalize and renew democracy,¹⁶⁰ it is still being theorized in pursuit of a normative “ought” and is laden with a normative expectation of how populism should be working in relation to democracy.

Laclau’s enduring approach to populism offers an example of the challenges that a strong normative valence creates for theorization. Laclau’s post-foundationalist work simultaneously aims to explain the phenomenon of populism at an ontological level, while also offering examples of it. He distinguishes between the ontological and the ontic, and writes:

“I have neglected the question of democratic institutional arrangements, and that this results from my exclusive emphasis on the ontological side of the question and my concomitant lack of consideration of the ontic aspects. My answer is that a general theory of democracy can only specify its constituent dimensions, but has to be very cautious about their institutional articulation. Precisely because this articulation is a contingent historical matter, it cannot be determined at the level of a general theory of democracy.”¹⁶¹

Laclau articulates a broader issue in political theory that is acute in the theorization of populism that, since there is no way to construct normative prescriptions before a political situation occurs, the normative political theory will be necessarily constrained by the current state of affairs or trajectory of affairs. The functional constraint, as it is described by Erman and Möller, requires a domain of application that specifies these contextual concerns and consequently informs the governing principles of a phenomenon.¹⁶² For populism, this is the stance it takes towards democracy and popular sovereignty, namely whether it can be democracy-enhancing or democracy-degrading.

Despite the challenges that the normative brings to political ontology, the normative has a place in political theory and normative political theory is still feasible. The “ideal” normative theory provides a model case for a system or process, like democracy or populism, and then theorists and empirical researchers can assess the counterfactual and compare what actually is with the model of what “ought” to be. Empirical research can be guided by normative political theory. In the case of populism, this involved tracing democratic politics back to its normative origins of the moral foundations of democracy and the duties of representatives and citizens. As Riker persuasively argues in *Liberalism Against Populism*, the

¹⁶⁰ See Pierre Rosanvallon, *The Populist Century: History, Theory, Critique* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021).

¹⁶¹ Ernesto Laclau, “Glimpsing the Future,” in *Laclau: A Critical Reader*, eds. Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart (New York: Routledge, 2004), 298.

¹⁶² Eva Erman and Niklas Möller, “A World of Possibilities: The Place of Feasibility in Political Theory,” *Res Publica* 26 (2020): 1-23, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11158-018-09415-y>.

democratic expectation that electoral institutions will directly translate public opinion into policy almost never reflects the reality of how democracy functions.¹⁶³ The populist “fantasy” then of translating the will of the people into policy is unattainable.¹⁶⁴ Thus, the theorization of populism is constrained by the normative and evaluative positioning of it as a function, failure, or aberration of democracy.

Normative Concepts and the Tension Between Political Science and Political Theory

Though political theory and empirical political science do not necessarily oppose one another and may often be used together within one study, the question of normative concepts and theories elucidates the ongoing tension between these disciplines. Political theory combines insights and approaches from the humanities and social sciences, and is often understood as a part of a normative intellectual paradigm. The empirical propositions of political science, or “positive” approach is concerned with what *is* rather than what *ought to be*. Peter Laslett famously declares on the first page of his introduction to *Philosophy, Politics and Society* that “for a moment, anyway, political philosophy is dead.”¹⁶⁵ This declaration about the death of political philosophy became a widely-cited explanation of how the modernist modes of positivism and behavioralism of post-war Oxbridge philosophy came to be categorically separate and dominant over normativism. Two years later, Robert Dahl expresses a similar sentiment, and wrote, “In the English-speaking world, where so many of the interesting political problems have been solved (at least superficially), political theory is dead.”¹⁶⁶ Laslett and Dahl’s sentiments embody the trend of the political scholarship of the 1950s and 60s wherein political philosophy was largely disregarded.

Since Laslett’s pronouncement in 1956 that “political philosophy is dead,” scholars like John Rawls and Michael Shapiro have challenged this trend and reversed it. Rawls’ celebrated 1971 publication, *A Theory of Justice*, advances the ideas of Rousseau, Kant, and other philosophers, and theorizes *justice as fairness* in liberal societies.¹⁶⁷ Rawls was credited by *The New York Times* journalist Marshall Cohen for making “the most penetrating contribution to systematic political philosophy since John Stuart Mill” and renewing political philosophies.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶³ William H. Riker, *Liberalism Against Populism* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 1982).

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

¹⁶⁵ Peter Laslett, “Introduction,” in *Philosophy, Politics and Society: First Series*, ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1956), p. vii.

¹⁶⁶ Robert Dahl, “Political Theory: Truth and Consequences,” *World Politics* 11, no. 1 (1958): 89-102.

¹⁶⁷ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 17.

¹⁶⁸ Marshall Cohen, “The Social Contract Explained and Defended,” *The New York Times*, 16 July 1972, https://www.nytimes.com/1972/07/16/archives/a-theory-of-justice-by-john-rawls-607-pp-cambridge-mass-the-belknap.html?_r=0.

While Rawls is credited with the repopularization of political philosophy, Shapiro's contribution comes in the form of a criticism over the dominance of the "anachronistic philosophical ideal of objectivity" amongst positivist theorists.¹⁶⁹ In *Language and Political Understanding*, Shapiro advocates for a "reoriented perspective" that involves meta-theoretical analysis. Shapiro considers the ontological dualism that connects logical positivist theorists and claims that the goal that these theorists share of separating themselves from the subjects they observe or analyze is a fruitless goal. *Language and Political Understanding* notably pinpoints some of the weaknesses of logical positivism, but has been criticized for utilizing a relativist premise that there is "no transcendent standard."¹⁷⁰ Even as some scholars continue to stress the supposedly axiomatic separation of "empirical" and "normative" theory, this separation has been challenged. Moon argues that the normative tasks of political theory underlie explanatory theories and challenges the idea that political theory must be "objective."¹⁷¹ Moon connects normative and empirical theories through a "common dependence on a model of man," which he designates as a part of a conceptual framework in which behaviors are described.¹⁷²

Though it is not his explicit intention, Laslett's analysis encapsulates the ongoing epistemological debate between political theory and political science. Sir Isaiah Berlin's approach from his 1962 essay reflects a similar question to Laslett's, and is simply titled, "Does Political Theory Still Exist?" In Berlin's assessment, political theory does not "satisfy conditions required by an independent science," as normative questions remain "obstinately philosophical." The questions that humanistic political philosophers aim to answer are conceptualized as concerned with value, while the sciences are focused on falsifiable theory and fact. Grant follows the thought that the educative mission of study in the humanities does not need to be reduced to the positivist frame of constantly growing the sum of discoveries through research. Normative questions of value are not necessarily antithetical to or opposing facts, and scientific questions cannot be untangled from uncertainty or subjective speculation. Grant ultimately suggests, "suggest provisionally that the former seeks to explain meaning and

¹⁶⁹ Michael J. Shapiro, *Language and Political Understanding: The Politics of Discursive Practices* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ Harold Sarf, review of *Language and Political Understanding: The Politics of Discursive Practices*, by Michael J. Shapiro, *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 12, no. 1 (1984-1985): 137-140, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23262702>.

¹⁷¹ Donald J. Moon. "Values and Political Theory: A Modest Defense of a Qualified Cognitivism," *Journal of Politics* 39, no. 4 (1977): 877-903, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2129932>.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 902.

significance, whereas the latter seeks to explain mechanisms of cause and effect.”¹⁷³ Though posited by some scholars to be importantly different and separate from empirical political science, the normative questions that drive humanistic, philosophical research importantly help inform and shape the concepts utilized in political science.

Contestable Concepts and Ontological Relativism

Conceptual confusion in political science causes difficulty in theoretical and empirical analyses. As I mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, Gallie’s introduction of the idea of “essentially contested concepts” in 1956 offered an explicit definition and seven criteria for identifying and understanding such concepts. Conceptual *contestation* exists beyond what Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu describe as conceptual *confusion*.¹⁷⁴ All concepts are open to contestation, yet, what makes some “essentially” contested is that they are fraught with intrinsic and irresolvable conceptual disputes. Schedler proposes that conceptual *confusion*, on the other hand, may arise from three possible sources: “confusing relations between terms and meanings (ambiguity), confusing relations between meanings and referents (vagueness), and confusing stipulations of meaning (definitional defects).”¹⁷⁵

Scholars like John N. Gray have criticized Gallie’s approach, on the ground that it “must precipitate its proponents into a radical (and probably self-defeating) skeptical nihilism” and that it may problematically lead to conceptual or moral relativism.¹⁷⁶ Relativism is the claim, view or doctrine that standards of reasoning and truth, right and wrong, vary between historical and cultural contexts.¹⁷⁷ A relativist, in contrast to a dogmatist or skeptic, claims that there is no objective truth to be discovered or known. Conceptual relativism is a delineated form of relativism and metaphysical doctrine wherein ontology is “relativized to conceptual schemes, scientific paradigms, or categorical frameworks.”¹⁷⁸ Gray connects Gallie’s thesis of an essentially contested concept to the idea of an “open-textured” concept, which may not be immunized to doubt, due to its indeterminacy, and to a complicated conceptual framework. He warns that, by understanding how a concept’s essential contestability derives from either its

¹⁷³ Ruth W. Grant, “Political Theory, Political Science, and Politics,” *Political Theory* 30, no. 4 (2002): 580-581, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3072622>.

¹⁷⁴ Collier, Hidalgo, and Maciuceanu. “Essentially Contested Concepts.”

¹⁷⁵ Andreas Schedler, “Concept Formation,” in *International Encyclopaedia of Political Science*, eds. Bertrand Badie, Dirk Berg-Schlosser, and Leonardo A. Morlino (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2011), 7.

¹⁷⁶ Gray, “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts,” 343.

¹⁷⁷ M. Baghramian. “Relativism: Philosophical Aspects,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, eds. Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes (Elsevier Ltd, 2001),

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/relativism>.

¹⁷⁸ Baghramian, “Relativism.”

open texture or a place in an incommensurable conceptual framework, we understand that essential contestability might lend itself to conceptual relativism.¹⁷⁹

Clarke equally contends with Gray that the notion of essentially contested concepts is mistaken and risks “introducing a radical relativism into all discourse using such disputable concepts.”¹⁸⁰ Radical relativism, according to Ferrari and Zeman, attempts to account for “phenomena that opposite views are unable to explain.”¹⁸¹ In MacFarlane’s radical view of relativism, truth needs to be relativized to a “context of assessment,” or a situation in which a use of a sentence might be assessed, and a “context of use,” or a situation in which a sentence might be used.¹⁸² Clarke establishes that, as a minimum for certain concepts, Gallie and Gray would agree that there are issues in meaning or application. However, he takes issue with the lack of distinction between an essentially contested concept and a case of polysemy or homonymy. Moreover, in his response to K.I. Macdonald’s analysis on power as essentially contested, Clarke discovers that “essentially contested” and “essentially contestable” are often used interchangeably, since the word “contestable” refers to a property of the word itself, while “contested” attributes importance to the concept, rather than the concept. To claim that a concept is essentially contested rather than contestable, in Clarke’s view, means that one commits to the radical relativist interpretation, unless they can claim that they have “won” the “essential contest” and their position is superior. Ultimately, Clarke concludes that the notion of an essentially contested concept is mistaken because, “To say that a concept is essentially contested is to claim that conceptual disputes reflect social disputes.”¹⁸³ Only through the introduction of radical relativism can we make sense of the notion of an essentially *contestable* concept, and thus Clarke advocates for the abandonment of references to essentially contested or essentially contestable concepts.

Clarke takes issue with the relativist ontological proposition that reality is not distinguishable from our thoughts or experiences. Ontological relativism juxtaposes critical realism, which is the perspective or philosophical branch that distinguishes between the “real” and “observable” world. In this perspective, “reality exists independent of the human mind

¹⁷⁹ Gray, “On the Contestability of Social and Political Concepts,” 342.

¹⁸⁰ Barry Clarke, “Essentially Contested Concepts,” *British Journal of Political Science* 9 (1979): 122-126.

¹⁸¹ Filippo Ferrari and Dan Zeman, “Radical Relativism, Retraction and ‘Being at Fault,’” in *New Frontiers of Truth*, eds. Fabio Bacchini, Stefano Caputo, and Massimo Dell’Utri (United Kingdom: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 80-102.

¹⁸² John MacFarlane, *Assessment Sensitivity: Relative Truth and its Applications* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2014), 60.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 125.

regardless of whether it is comprehensible or directly experienceable.”¹⁸⁴ While Clarke highlights the problematic aspects of relativism, as a philosophical doctrine, relativism helps to make sense of empirical diversity outside of the burden of trying to discern who is “right” and “wrong.” On the question of contestable concepts like populism, the relativist perspective allows us to grapple with unsettled disagreement, because, consistent with Rovane’s chapter in *Mind, Meaning, and Knowledge*, relativism is not motivated by a search for universal truth. Rather, alternative understandings are *normatively insulated* from one another, and there is thus the possibility of multiple Ideas existing without one having to be *the* correct idea.¹⁸⁵ A core insight about relativism that could guide approaches to contestable concepts is embracing claims of co-variance, so that in a certain epistemic system, variable *x* relies on *y*.

Populism as a Contestable Concept and Conceptual Pluralism

Terminological debate and imprecision are not uncommon within political science, but as scholars, should we be content with the general-purpose, vast-encompassing typology in which populism is currently fitted? Mudde asserts that populism is “undoubtedly” an essentially contested concept, since scholars contest the essence and usefulness of the concept within political science.¹⁸⁶ But what does this mean for the development and usage of the concept?

Despite the internal difficulties and potential methodological challenges discussed here, I adopt the viewpoint that *contestable* concepts are still empirically and theoretically useful. The purpose of Gallie’s analysis was not to legitimate endless disputes over appropriate meaning or definition, but to recognize that the contested status of these concepts allows for the possibility of understanding them within their own frameworks.¹⁸⁷ Regarding populism, one way of approaching it, outside of the binary of exact and inexactness, is to adopt what Deleuze and Guattari, who borrow from Husserl, the idea of an “anexact object.” Deleuze and Guattari denote concepts to be “anexact” when their essence is “vague and fluent, distinct both from the circle and things that are round.”¹⁸⁸ Arditi incorporates the notion of anexactness into

¹⁸⁴ Merry-Jo D. Levers, “Philosophical Paradigms, Grounded Theory, and Perspectives on Emergence,” *SAGE Open* (2013): 1-6, DOI: 10.1177/2158244013517243.

¹⁸⁵ Carol Rovane, “How to Formulate Revisionism,” in *Mind, Meaning, and Knowledge: Themes from the Philosophy of Crispin Wright*, ed. Annalisa Coliva (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 238-268.

¹⁸⁶ Cas Mudde, “Populism: An Ideational Approach,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁸⁷ Gallie, “Essentially Contested Concepts.”

¹⁸⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Athlone Press, 1988), 367.

his assessment of populism's contestability.¹⁸⁹ Though the idea of an anexact object may appear to be paradoxical, the requisite condition of anaxactness is that the object cannot be standardized with a definite truth-value. Particularly since populism is understood to be interconnected with other concepts like democracy and nationalism, it follows that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to formulate a single modality or possible mode of populism.

Meaningful contestation is a cornerstone of political philosophy, and though I cannot do justice to all the nuances of the complicated conceptualizations and debates over conceptualizations of populism, it is the *nature* of the debate that illuminates the utility of the term. If essentially contested concepts are those that as phenomena may only be understood in the context of the ideals they articulate or embody, they are consequently open to contestation. For instance, value-laden definitions of democracy, as opposed to minimum, positivist, empirical definitions, would be oriented towards the *ideal* of democracy, which is concomitally associated with complex elements of human rights, freedom, and equality. The disaggregation of the concept of democracy into its component parts, some of which are evaluative and others descriptive, might allow scholars to then find the most "contestable" aspects. However, theoretical analysis of multifaceted concepts like populism and democracy can operate at the disaggregate and aggregate level, and the value of contestability that might emerge from one component part is attributed to it as a whole.

The plurality of competing conceptions in the scholarship on populism paradoxically, according to Gallie's logic, is inherent and means that an attempted statement of the all-encompassing, necessary conditions of a contested concept is not feasible. The contestability of populism has been treated lightly by scholars, since as previously mentioned, they tend to refer to it before quickly returning to the conceptualization that serves their analysis. Accepting the contestability of populism necessitates acceptance that there is a plurality of what populism means. Steve Smith best explains that theoretical pluralism means that:

theories... are like different coloured lenses: if you put one of them in front of your eyes, you will see things differently. Some aspects of the world will look the same in some senses, for example, shapes, but many other features, such as light and shade of colour, will look very different, so different in fact that they seem to show alternative worlds.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

¹⁹⁰ Steve Smith, "Introduction: Diversity and Disciplinarity in International Relations Theory," in *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*, 2nd edition, eds. Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

Some definitional questions in political science and theory, just like questions in the natural sciences, do not have a single, objectively true solution. Pluralism of conceptualizations do not necessarily become relativistic, since a diversity of viewpoints does not equate to the relativistic position that all conceptual interpretations are equal. Berlin, in a 1998 essay, explicitly states that pluralism is not relativism, because pluralism allows for respect between systems of values that are not necessarily hostile towards one another; relativism, on the other hand, holds that my views are mine, yours are yours, and neither of us can claim to be right.¹⁹¹ Conceptual pluralism instead forces us to tackle what is at stake for methodology and analysis for the definitions we construct.

Reflections on the Challenges of Conceptualizing Populism

Populism's original circumscribed application has been transformed over the past sixty to seventy years in academia to describe and categorize various charismatic leaders and regimes, including Peronism in Argentina, Boulanger in late-nineteenth century France, and more recently, Zuma in South Africa, Modi in India, and Trump and Sanders in the United States. Yet after this vast extension, or conceptual stretching, of populism across a variety of leaders and cases of popular mobilization, scholars are left with the questions: Is populism still useful to us or is it an overused epithet?¹⁹² Has the concept become so wide-reaching that its heuristic utility is lost? Why is it so difficult to create a cohesive definition for this concept? To address these broad questions of populism's analytical and conceptual utility, I assessed first the challenge of the concept's normative construction, particularly as the consequences of scholars have posited as detrimental or antithetical to democracy, and then I analyzed populism's contestability, utilizing Gallie's influential theorization of "essentially contested concepts." The conceptual pitfalls that persist in the literature also include a lack of historical or contextual specificity, since perceptions of populism differ based on historical contexts they are situated in (e.g., U.S. populism of the nineteenth century versus twenty-first century European populism), and vary based on the historical and geographic position of the scholar studying it.¹⁹³

The implications of how populism is framed by democratic politicians and journalists is clear: populism is something that must be stopped to save democracy. The self-referential,

¹⁹¹ Isaiah Berlin, "Isaiah Berlin on Pluralism," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. XLV, Number 8 (1998), <https://www.cs.utexas.edu/~vl/notes/berlin.html>.

¹⁹² Roger Cohen, "It's Time to Depopularize 'Populism,'" *The New York Times*, 13 July 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13/opinion/populism-language-meaning.html>.

¹⁹³ Pappas, "Modern Populism."

complicated academic debate confirms that we cannot really speak of populism outside of our concepts of sovereignty, representation, and democracy. W.B. Gallie's scholarship on the contestedness of democracy, and the subsequent authors who have tackled democracy's contentiousness, agree that we will never stop arguing about the normative and descriptive ways in which we understand democracy. It follows from this logic that we will not soon stop debating populism either. Yet, hope is not lost for the utility of these terms. In fact, the corresponding challenge of contestability is a hallmark within the discipline of political theory and contestability points us toward the pluralization of conceptualizations of populism and the positivist objective of epistemology.

CHAPTER V: “US” VERSUS “THEM”: NATIVISM AND POPULISM

In this chapter, I focus on exploring the nexus between populism and nativism. I identify the *modus operandi* of “us” versus “them,” or in-group/out-group antagonism, that underpins ideational conceptions of populism and nativism. I trace the conceptual roots of this logic of identity formation and articulation to Tajfel and Turner’s theory of social identity and analyze the binary framework that binds these theories. As I discussed in the Methods Chapter (Chapter III), I pay particular attention to ideational definitions of populism here. As this research falls within the discipline of political theory, I am more interested in understanding the abstract ideas that form the basis of and connect both concepts; *i.e.*, the frame of otherness. I conclude this chapter by discussing a fundamental difference between the concepts of populism and nativism: the axes of antagonism. I unpack the “vertical” opposition of populism and the “horizontal” opposition of nativism, but also include Brubaker’s criticism of this one-dimensional space of contestation.

Populism And Nativism: In-Group/Out-Group Antagonism

Populism and nativism’s common *modus operandi* of in-group/out-group antagonism derives its logic from the identity articulation and discursive construction of the “other.” In-group favoritism and out-group bias or hostility have informed human interactions since the dawn of our species. Human groupings originally based on kinship evolved to groups based on shared language, religion, geographical location, and ethnicity.¹⁹⁴ Tajfel and Turner, the original theorists of social identity theory, argue that we divide the world into an “us” and “them” and these identity categories help us create meaning and respond to social situations.¹⁹⁵ The essential criteria for in-group membership, from a social-psychological perspective, are that individuals define themselves and others define them as members. Tajfel and Turner’s basic hypothesis is that “pressures to evaluate one’s own group positively through in-group/out-group comparisons lead social groups to differentiate themselves from each other.”¹⁹⁶ Tajfel correlates this process of stereotyping out-groups to the normal way in which people create cognitive shortcuts to organize the social world.¹⁹⁷ We rationally create

¹⁹⁴ Jim A.C. Everett, Nadira S. Faber, and Molly Crockett, “Preferences and Beliefs in Ingroup Favoritism,” *Frontiers in Behavioral Neuroscience* 9, no .15 (Feb. 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnbeh.2015.00015>.

¹⁹⁵ Henri Tajfel and John C. Turner, “The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behavior,” in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, eds. William G. Austin and Stephen Worchel (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1986), 283.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁹⁷ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

categories to assign meaning to a confusing and complicated world. Yet, people are liable to distort differences, and we tend to exaggerate the sameness within the same category and the differences between different categories.

Though the concepts of nativism and populism may not explicitly reference the social identity theory and the psychosocial process of stereotyping, these concepts provide us with an important basis for the in-group/out-group dynamics that inform the political theories. The concepts of nativism and populism are predicated on the formulation and articulation of an antagonistic relationship between an in-group and an out-group. Conceptualizations of populism highlight the cleavage between an in-group and out-group, but typically frame the in-group through the language of “the people,” or the *demos*. The commonality amongst the ideational protagonists of populism I identify in the Literature Review, which include McRae, Laclau, Mudde, Kaltwasser, Stanley, Schroeder, and Canovan, is that these scholars all denote the importance of “the people” to the populist designation of the in-group. Creating and defining the signifier of “the people” on a theoretical level is one of the paradoxes in the self-reflective discussions of democracy, popular sovereignty, and populism, since it requires the delimitation of the *demos* by the *demos*. The juxtaposition of “the people” with “the corrupt elite” is complicated by the fact that “the people” cannot be the sum total of the citizenry if they are at odds with another group within the same sovereign state. The popular indeterminacy that emerges in democracy leads Espejo to the understanding that “the people,” as a label for the *populus*, do not perfectly equate to the ruling sovereign, but are better formulated in ideological terms as a tool to foster a populist leader’s legitimacy.¹⁹⁸ “The people” is described by Canovan as an indeterminant label and one that is dangerously subject to be taken over and manipulated by a populist leader or party for the goal of exclusion.¹⁹⁹ The indeterminacy of “the people” can also lead the group to become an “us” based on national, religious, or ethnic identity.

The nativist ideology holds that foreignness, or perceived otherness, is antagonistic to “nativeness.” The “native” category likewise is subjective and contestable, as it is an often self-proclaimed, evolving group. The nativist cleavage typically makes a distinction based on origin or national identification, but it can also be based on or connected to race, language, religion, or customs. Though this cleavage may lead one to conflate nativism with ethnic nationalism,

¹⁹⁸ Paulina Ochoa Espejo, “Populism and the Idea of the People,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, eds. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Pierre Ostiguy (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2017).

¹⁹⁹ Canovan, *The People*.

definitions of nativism can also be civic, since civic conceptions of the “native” in-group focus on acceptance of the nation’s political creed. Equating nativism with ethnic nationalism or mono-culture nationalism erases the non-ethnic understandings of nativism. Nativism is connected to ethnocentrism, chauvinism, and alternative forms of nationalism, as Guia outlines,²⁰⁰ but it tends to be more dualistic than these other worldviews or ideologies. The antagonism of nativism can be juxtaposed with an alternative type of nationalism, which Higham names “America’s cosmopolitan faith.”²⁰¹ This concept of nationality highlights the diversity of America’s origins, and the egalitarianism and universality of its self-image and principles. The horizontal distinction Higham’s theory of nativism drew between the self-proclaimed “civil” native and barbaric “outgroup” contrasts cosmopolitanism and universalism.

The delimited group of “the people” or “natives” in definitions of populism and nativism rely on the existence or creation of some antagonistic “other” or out-group. The objective determination and theorization of these in-groups does not exist without a contradicting pole; i.e., the out-group. The outsider status, in the literatures on populism and nativism, is not necessarily inherent or natural, but hinges upon the formulation and articulation of the existence of this group as antagonistic. In Fry’s theorization of contemporary American nativism, this is interpreted as “perceived foreignness” through the lenses of symbolic interactionism and rational choice theory.²⁰² We assume, according to these theories, that collective perception of where the dominant in-group should stand in comparison to the out-group is influenced by both everyday interactions and an effort to create congruence with their leaders and spokespeople. Mudde and Kaltwasser comparably posit that the understanding of “the pure people” in populist theory is informed by the articulation of “the pure people” as antithetical to “the corrupt elite.”²⁰³ In line with Tajfel and Turner’s theorization of social identity, the awareness of the self and a positive distinctiveness of our own social group is interconnected with our views towards other groups.

The generalized notion that binds conceptualizations of populism and nativism is that these ideologies hold a binary, moralistic worldview or framework; i.e., the contestation between “us” and “them.” Mudde emphasizes that the insider-outsider divisions of populism are “moralistic rather than programmatic,” since, as discussed in the previous chapter, it relies

²⁰⁰ Aitana Guia, “The Concept of Nativism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Europe,” https://www.mwpweb.eu/1/218/resources/publication_2596_1.pdf

²⁰¹ Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 388.

²⁰² Fry, *Nativism and Immigration*, 10.

²⁰³ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism*.

on a *normative*, Manichean outlook wherein there is only “us” and “them.” The out-group is not only different though, but also “evil,” and thus fundamentally incompatible with the in-group.²⁰⁴ The Manichean framework between “the people and “the elites” that informs ideational conceptualizations of populism prescribes a dualistic view of the world as good and bad. Comparably, the framework for nativism is described by Guia as a “mechanism to re-draw boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and justify the maintenance of privilege for a particular group.”²⁰⁵ The identitarian support and preference for native people may be primarily driven by socio-economic concern, or a symbolic, patriotic anxiety, but it hinges upon the creation of these mutually exclusive groups.

For the conceptualization of nativism and populism, and the explanation of moral, in-group/out-group antagonism, the relation to democracy is important. While the previous chapter stressed the normative implications of populism being either deemed as “good” or “bad” for democracy, the most fundamental piece of populism’s relation to democracy is the interpretations of “the people” and “the majority.” The difference here lies in what Aristotle differentiated as majority rule – a way to make decisions – and the regime of the majority. The abstract, indeterminate nature of “the people” means that it can be employed to establish democratic legitimacy, and the facilitation of democratic popular sovereignty is connected with the idea of “the people.” The in-group/out-group dynamics of the nativist “natives” versus “non-natives” is based on a similar logic to that of the populist “the people” versus “the elites” logic, but contradicts the premise of equality for all citizens in a liberal representative democracy. Nativism’s ideal vision of nationhood is homogeneous, with the majority group of “the natives” comprising it. The nativist definition of the in-group, particularly as Mudde defines it,²⁰⁶ is flexible, and while the ideal of creating a homogeneous state for natives may seem undemocratic, this depends on the conceptualization of democracy you adopt. Defensive understandings of democracy highlight perceived threat, chauvinism, and fear of economic competition,²⁰⁷ which can theoretically be compatible with nativism. “Defense” of one’s in-group creates motivation to exclude or reject, and the orientation of “defensive democracy,”²⁰⁸ as Watts and Feldman term it, justifies exclusion *in terms of* democratic institutions. Democracy is important *and* thus it must be protected from outsiders.

²⁰⁴ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 541-563, doi:10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x.

²⁰⁵ Guia, “The Concept of Nativism and Anti-Immigrant Sentiments in Europe,” 13.

²⁰⁶ Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, 19.

²⁰⁷ Meredith W. Watts and Ofer Feldman, “Are Nativists a Different Kind of Democrat? Democratic Values and ‘Outsiders in Japan,’” *Political Psychology* 22, no. 4 (2001): 657, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3792481>.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 642.

It is worthwhile to note that the insider-outsider division and anti-pluralism that sits at the core of Mudde and Kaltwasser and Müller's definitions of populism is contested in some conceptualizations of populism. Mansbridge and Macedo, for instance, argue that anti-pluralism is not a core element of populism, and use the Podemos party in Spain as an example of a left-wing, self-identified populist party that insists on the plurality and diversity of people. Yet, Mansbridge and Macedo's argument about the Podemos party ends up contradicting itself, since they claim that the Podemos party today "sets itself forcefully against 'la casta' (the elites)." ²⁰⁹ There still, in this case, exists the Manichean opposition of the "good" people versus elites, even if Podemos claims to embrace pluralism. The antagonistic relationship against politically vulnerable outgroups, such as Jewish, Black, or foreign-born people, might be used as points of analysis in some examinations of populism. Yet at the conceptual core, regardless of whether it is in relation to right- or left-wing parties, there is a fundamental in-group/out-group antagonism.

Othering in political theory, as it is analyzed here in the language of in-group/out-group antagonism, is certainly not exclusive to the concepts of nativism and populism. The social order, or how people "live together" as a group, outside of the perfect ideal of an egalitarian society, is not neutral or equal. Some groups or individuals enjoy greater power over decisions, or favorable access to wealth and resources. According to Staerklé, the justification and legitimation from classic liberal democracy for this unequal social arrangement is the principle of individualism, and the assumption of individual responsibility for taking advantage of the free market. ²¹⁰ Othering, in this case, acts as a form of reinforcement for this social arrangement by portraying certain groups as subordinate or threatening to the existing social order. As it has been used in post-colonial theory, the theory and multidimensional, intersectional process of othering helps us understand how separation and degradation informs identity formation.

Vertical and Horizontal Appeal

Though the concepts of populism and nativism overlap in terms of the articulation of in-group/out-group antagonisms, I do not wish here to erroneously assume that they are synonymous or interchangeable. One of the core distinctions between these concepts is that definitions of populism tend to focus on the vertical antagonism (against those on top) between

²⁰⁹ Mansbridge and Macedo, "Populism and Democratic Theory," 64.

²¹⁰ Christian Staerklé, "Othering in Political Lay Thinking: A Social Representation Approach to Social Order," in *Culture and Political Psychology: A Societal Perspective. Advances in Cultural Psychology: Vol. 7*, ed. T. Magioglou (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2013), 6.

“the elites” and “the people,” while nativism is concerned with the horizontal antagonism (between the people) between “natives” and “non-natives.” Betz contends that “nativism extends populism’s appeal horizontally, set up as a conflict between the people, largely defined in ethnocultural terms and the Other.”²¹¹ Nativism relies on the inimical, horizontal construction of a “non-native” against “the native people,” while populism is concerned with the vertical juxtaposition of “the people” as an underdog and “the elite.”

These planes of vertical and horizontal opposition are a commonly used tool in structuring political relations. The polarities of vertical opposition, or high and low levels, are “value-loaded positions that distinguish the representative from the represented, the ruler from the ruled, the institutional figure from the citizen.”²¹² The horizontal spatial arrangement does not tend to be characterized by this relationship of command or control, but of patterns of relationship between peers or fellow citizens. The framework of horizontal and vertical politics, as it is applied to populism and nativism, requires the imagination of a collective and articulation of the part of the whole that are “the people.” If, for instance though, the collective subject of populism is formulated through this process of “othering,” it follows that the groupings of horizontal and vertical antagonism might become complicated or blurred. At its core, even if these horizontal and vertical boundaries are traversed, populism and nativism rely on the articulation of a heterogeneous group as a homogeneous, political “us” that is distinct from an opponent.

Although these axes of opposition provide a helpful image for the frames that create difference between theories of populism and nativism, Brubaker argues that the populist appeals to “the people” are productively vague and may simultaneously evoke plebs, the sovereign demos, and bounded community, and thus do not strictly lie as either vertical or horizontal opposition.²¹³ The populist opposition to elites, though often theorized as a form of vertical opposition, in Brubaker’s argument, is in fact more complicated and the understanding of a one-dimensional space of in-group/out-group antagonism does not best capture the frame of reference for populist discourse. Brubaker instead advances a two-dimensional frame of reference wherein the claims-making of populism sits at the juncture of the politics of inequality and the politics of identity. “The people” thus are not only constructed vertically in

²¹¹ Hans-Georg Betz, “Facets of Nativism: A Heuristic Exploration,” *Patterns of Prejudice* 53, no. 2 (2019): 132, doi:10.1080/0031322X.2019.1572276.

²¹² Stefano Boni, “Horizontal and Vertical Politics,” *Focal-Journal of Global and Historical Anthropology* 89 (2021): 96, <https://doi.org/10.3167/fcl.2020.072003>.

²¹³ Rogers Brubaker, “Populism and Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 26, no. 1 (2019): 44-66, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/nana.12522>.

relation to elites, but horizontally as a community bound within the polity against “internal outsiders.” Though Brubaker compares populist and nationalist discourses, his two-dimensional framework blurs the difference in the planes of antagonism for nativism and populism as well, since in his definition, the populist out-group may include different ethnoracial, cultural, and/or sexual/gender-based groups. Accordingly, although the vertical and horizontal forms of antagonism are a useful way to distinguish between populism and nativism, I agree with Brubaker’s point that the multivocal appeal and constitutive ambiguity of populism is inevitable and the delineation of a clear, unidimensional plane of contestation for the concept may be limiting. Conceptualizations of nativism similarly do not always clearly fall into the horizontal plane of appeal, particularly Mudde’s, which, in parentheses highlights those nonnative elements include persons and ideas.²¹⁴ He does not delimit here what these ideas are, other than that they are threatening to the homogeneity of the nation-state, so it would be impossible to say with certainty that they are solely characterized by relationships amongst citizens and not by relationships between elites and citizens.

Reflections on Nativism and Populism

Even though nativism and populism are distinct, they share the tendency towards ingroup favoritism and outgroup denigration. The “thinness” of populism as an ideology,²¹⁵ as well as its contestability and normativity, does not negate the reality of this theoretical connection with nativism. The Manichean propensity to divide the world into allegedly homogeneous, antagonistic groups underpins both theories. From a heuristic standpoint, these concepts have proven to be elusive and complicated, as well as historically and politically contingent. Their abstract, evaluative nature creates the problematic situation wherein they may be reduced to a negative representation of an in-group driven by resentment, especially as the concepts are used by political actors and journalists. Polemical overuse of populism and nativism also leads to their conflation, as does the combination of these concepts into ideas of “nativist populism.” Thus, even as I analyzed here the similarities between them, they should be understood as distinct concepts.

²¹⁴ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 19.

²¹⁵ See Mudde (2004) and Stanley (2008).

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

Findings and Contribution to Literature

This research largely focused on the interrogation of the state of the literature on populism, and in doing so I identified two main challenges to the creation of a conclusive definition of the concept: normativity and contestability. Populism, in both academic literature and popular news, is widely theorized to be malignant towards democracy, even as the ideological core of it—the people—is an important cornerstone of democracy and popular sovereignty. This narrows our scope to critically evaluate it and necessitates the creation of a counterfactual to populism that is not democracy. I also use this section on normativity to scrutinize the tension between political science and political theory. Though political theory is sometimes subsumed within the discipline of political science, they tend to adopt different approaches and the “positivist” or “normative” political theory is often positioned as inferior to empirical political science. Yet, the nexus between these disciplines is conspicuous, since concepts necessary for the formation of empirical research may originate from or may be derived from political theory.

The proverbial contestability of populism’s definition was well-known prior to when I began this research, but I analyzed the impact of that challenge using the frames of ontological relativism and pluralism. I concluded that pluralism in definitions, though challenging, is not necessarily something that must or should be completely overcome in favor of the formation of a single, unified definition. Gallie’s logic of “essential contestability” helped me here to illuminate that settling the debate on populism is a futile effort, so we can either lean into the plurality of approaches and conceptualizations of it or nix the concept altogether. I advocate for the former measure, since regardless of its contestability, populism has been used to describe a phenomenon of political othering that is widespread and important to study. The further disaggregation or specification of populism, however, could be a meaningful way in which scholars can provide greater definitional clarity. The elaboration of the “part/whole” scheme for populism could be a useful structure for further specifying the unit of analysis, but it is still likely that contradictions will arise.

The literatures on populism and nativism utilize a wide spectrum of approaches and definitions to analyze these concepts. At the level of discourse concerning the definitions of the concepts themselves, I hope that this inquiry into the challenges of the literature on populism and nexus between populism and nativism illuminates that despite issues of normativity and contestability, the utility of these concepts is not lost. However, as political

scientists and theorists, it is important to not only acknowledge conceptual debate, but delve into the consequences of the debate itself and the frequent reinvention or redefinition of the wheel. This practice in the scholarship of political theory is common and extends beyond the study of populism, as it is worthwhile to discuss that the reformulation of already existing concepts can be abstruse and unnecessarily reproduce or change existing artifacts.

The architecture of the debate on populism can be confusing and contradictory at times, but this may be attributed to the fact that unlike concepts such as democracy, populism is relatively new to political science and political theory scholarship. Until the 1950s, the concept of populism was largely restricted to the study of the 19th century People's Party in the United States and the group referred to as the *narodniki* from the Russian Empire. The usage and application of "populism" in these two instances was separate and at this point, no wider significance was attached to the concept. Only after Shils proposed the use of the term to describe anti-elitism more widely in the US in 1954 did the term become increasingly popular in the social sciences.²¹⁶ After the 1967 Conference on Populism at the London School of Economics failed to produce a conclusive definition of populism, scholarly interest grew even further. Though seemingly paradoxical, McRae, Shapiro, and Ionescu stressed at the conference that with the many overlapping or contradictory ideological, historical, and political aspects of populism, the definitional debate would not be exhausted in one discussion.²¹⁷ When you take this timeline in comparison to the study of democracy, which first appeared during the period of classical antiquity in Greece, and theorized by Aristotle in 350 B.C.E., it becomes possible to understand that the debate on populism could still even be in its infancy.

Avenues for Future Research

In future research, it would be interesting to use a similar methodology of conceptual analysis to compare either nativism and/or populism with other related concepts, such as nationalism, democracy, and anti-democracy (or authoritarianism), and xenophobia. Several scholars, including Bonikowski, Halikiopoulou, Kaufmann and Rooduijn,²¹⁸ have already contributed to this growing body of literature, by bringing these concepts into conversation and

²¹⁶ J.B. Allcock, "'Populism': A Brief Biography," *Sociology* 5, no. 3 (1971): 371-387, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42851097>.

²¹⁷ Isaiah Berlin et al., "To Define Populism," *Government and Opposition* 3, no. 2 (1968): 137-180, <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1111/j.1477-7053.1968.tb01332.x>.

²¹⁸ Bart Bonikowski, Daphne Halikiopoulou, Eric Kaufmann, and Matthijs Rooduijn, "Populism and Nationalism in a Comparative Perspective: A Scholarly Exchange," *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 1 (2019): 58-81.

further developing the comparative scholarship. Additionally, a thought-provoking comparison would be between nativism and non-ideational approaches to populism, i.e., either political-strategic or socio-cultural approaches, or those that do not fit within the *Oxford Handbook* framework. It may be assumed that the counterfactual of the conditional stated in the Methods Chapter (Chapter III) is that you cannot compare non-ideational definitions of populism with nativism, since nativism is widely understood as an ideology. However, it would be intriguing to investigate whether this is the case, especially since many of the non-ideational definitions of populism discussed in my Literature Review (Chapter II) still highlight an in-group/out-group antagonism.

Another avenue for future research would be to investigate the differences between nativism and populism via empirical research. How and when do populism and nativism appear? How can we distinguish when a party, movement or leader is populist and not nativist, or vice versa? Given that this research treats populism and nativism as distinct concepts, it would be worthwhile then to test this theoretical claim through empirical research. Daigle, Neulen and Hofeman's analysis of the 2017 British, French, and German elections offers an interesting example of how nativist and populist *attitudes* can be captured as independent variables,²¹⁹ and other projects, like the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, estimate party positioning on different issues and policies,²²⁰ but there is still an opportunity to introduce nativism as a concept separate from populism. Though this research was conducted at a theoretical level, as I mentioned in the Methods Chapter, there are a multitude of possible methodologies and approaches that can be adopted to study populism. Even within this narrowed theoretical framework, there are still more scholars, arguments, and definitions that I could have considered. Moreover, I could have gone beyond the discipline of political theory and given more weight to the notion of "othering" or in-group/out-group antagonism as these ideas are defined in political psychology and sociology.

The scope of this research was vast in the sense that I analyzed the formulation and articulation of nuanced, and sometimes contradictory concepts, but it was narrowed by the interrogation into the nature of the debate itself. The meta-level questions that guided my research may not always be explicitly discussed, but the questions of interpretation and meaning often lurk in the introduction or conclusion sections of analyses. It is only at a high

²¹⁹ Daigle, Neulen, and Hofeman, *Populism, Nativism, and Economic Uncertainty*.

²²⁰ Seth Jolly, Ryan Bakker, Liesbet Hooghe, Gary Marks, Jonathan Polk, Jan Rovny, Marco Steenbergen, and Milada Anna Vachudova, Forthcoming, "Chapel Hill Expert Survey Trend File, 1999-2019," *Electoral Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102420>.

level of abstraction that I was able to examine the consequences of conceptual and definitional pluralism, and create connections between siloed concepts. The plurality of meanings and approaches to populism, as demonstrated in this thesis, does not come without challenges, as does the reduction of populism to a political pejorative. However, plurality and normativity should not inherently be understood as forms of conceptual weakness. The epistemological and methodological approaches of probing the nature of the debate demonstrates that the traditional psychological understanding of concepts as a uniform kind of mental representation is perhaps too simplistic. We can see from the analysis of populism that pluralism can account for the multiple structures of concepts, without rendering them so disunified that they are useless. Though this perception of concepts clashes with the psychological tradition, pluralism can account for difference in approaches to populism whilst maintaining the contextually restricted generalizations.

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