

Editorial

One of the major problems of political science and sociology research in respect to populism is determining the term itself. Meanwhile, the repeated complaint about its polysemy belongs to the rhetorical introduction to almost every text dealing with populism. Populism is seen as a fuzzy, ambiguous term that means everything and does not explain anything.¹ The word is used as a *passe-partout* for the description of different phenomena. Already Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner pointed to the ambiguity of the phenomenon and the multiplicity of the term. This also includes the question regarding the exact object. Therefore they wanted to know whether populism was a movement, a doctrine, or even a type of political psychology, and sought for the similarities among different so-called populist movements – from the Russian and North-American populism of the 19th century via the European and African populism of the 20th century all the way to Peronism in Argentina.² Rightfully so, Yves Mény and Yves Surel also complain about the polymorphic and anarchist application of the concept. Here, the words populism or populist are being used with yet another meaning if they describe the actions, the attitude, and the statements of political actors.³

The fuzziness of the term populism, however, is also caused by the nature of the phenomenon itself. For populism changes in different historical or rather socio-cultural situations and mingles with other political phenomena such as fascism, authoritarianism, neo-liberalism, and democracy. Or it deforms itself in the face of the mass media influence of antipolitics and politainment.⁴ As a flexible and adaptable phenomenon, populism can merge with different ideologies, economic and social policies. It is not only found in the right and the left

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- 1 See among others: Pierre-André Taguieff, *Le populisme et la science politique. Du mirage conceptuel aux vrais problèmes*. In: *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 56 (1997), pp. 4–33; Margaret Canovan, *Populism*, New York 1981, pp. 3–4; Paul Taggart, *Populism*, Buckingham 2000, pp. 2–3; Francisco Panizza, *Introduction. Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*. In: Id. (Ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, London 2005, pp. 1–31, here 1–2; Frank Decker, *Die populistische Herausforderung. Theoretische und ländervergleichende Perspektiven*. In: Id. (Ed.), *Populismus. Gefahr für die Demokratie oder nützliches Korrektiv?*, Wiesbaden 2006, pp. 9–32, here 12.
 - 2 Cf. Ghita Ionescu/Ernest Gellner, *Introduction*. In: Id. (Ed.), *Populism. Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, London 1969, pp. 1–5.
 - 3 In the original: “Les mots ‘populisme’ ou ‘populiste’ sont employés de manière plus extensive encore lorsqu’ils désignent l’action, l’attitude ou les déclarations de tel ou tel personnage politiques, dont les références démocratiques ne sont pas pour autant remises en cause.” Yves Mény/Yves Surel, *Par le peuple, pour le peuple. Le populisme et les démocraties*, Paris 2000, pp. 12, 9.
 - 4 Cf. Paula Diehl, *Populismus, Antipolitik, Politainment. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit neuen Tendenzen der politischen Kommunikation*. In: *Berliner Debatte Initial*, 22 (2011), pp. 27–39.

extremes of the party landscape but has long since taken a place in the center of the political spectrum and in liberal or rather neo-liberal parties.⁵ Very different political actors such as Hugo Chávez (left populism), Jürgen W. Möllemann (media populism), and Jörg Haider (right populism) can be understood as being populist.

Not least because of the different manifestations of populism has the term become conceptually flexible.⁶ This may also have motivated Pierre-André Taguieff to dissociate himself from the term populism. Nevertheless, he tried to continue working on the populism contours.⁷ Not wanting to surrender to the “semantic disorderliness”⁸ which accompanies populism takes strong pillars to support the term, the theoretic attempt, and the methodology. Which then are the main characteristics of populism? What is the relationship between populism and democracy? How can a political actor, a political movement, and a party be investigated in respect to populism? The present edition gives some answers to these questions. The authors gathered here have devoted themselves to the difficulties any research in the field of populism is faced with. They make methodical suggestions, contextualize the phenomenon within the history of ideas, and give orientation points for its evaluation from the theoretical and the methodical view.

The essay by Hans Vorländer introduces the difficulties of political science regarding the boundaries of the phenomenon. Here, the ambivalences of populism and its complicated relationship to democracy play an important role, for the evaluation of its effect on democracy appears by no means to be clarified too. In this way, some of the important characteristics of populism from the current state of research are summarized, and it is shown what a contradictory effect populism can have in respect to the principles and practices of modern democracy.

Herfried Münkler takes up this point, working with the ambivalences of populism in relationship to democracy from the perspective of the history of ideas. He points out that populism can only be defined and evaluated when it is compared with a concept of democracy. Paolo Pombeni devotes himself to a central pillar of populism, the appeal to the people and its importance as the source of legitimization for politics, and attributes the phenomenon to the creation of modern democracy.

5 For the alliance between populism and liberalism/neoliberalism see Kurt Weyland, *Neo-Populism and Neo-Liberalism in Latin America. Unexpected Affinities*. In: *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 31 (1996), pp. 3–31. For the populism of the center see: Marcel Lewandowsky, *Populismus der Mitte. Das Beispiel New Labor*, Marburg 2010.

6 Karin Priester, *Definitionen und Typologien des Populismus*. In: *Soziale Welt*, 62 (2011), pp. 183–196.

7 Pierre-André Taguieff, *L'illusion populiste. Essai sur les démagogies de l'âge démocratique*, Paris 2007 (2002), p. 159.

8 Taguieff, *L'illusion*, p. 161.

Lorella Cedroni, Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, and Paula Diehl make methodological and term-theoretical suggestions. A “morphology of populism” is developed by Cedroni with the help of Michael Freeden’s ideology theory and politico-linguistic approaches. Rovira Kaltwasser pleads for a strong and minimal concept of populism, which could be pragmatically employed by empirical research. Paula Diehl’s attempt is equally pragmatic. Yet, this time the suggestion goes into the opposite direction. She develops a multidimensional and gradual populism concept, which subdivides the phenomenon into three dimensions.

All of the herein printed texts are the partial results of a discussion that has been ongoing since 2009 between scholars from Germany, France, and Italy. They have met in Bologna, Berlin, and at Lake Como in the context of the “Populism between Fascism and Democracy” DFG-project and discussed possible theoretical and methodical suggestions for populism research. This would not have been possible without support by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, and the Villa Vigoni. My sincere thanks go to all of them as well as to the members of the project.

Aside of the central subject area, this edition also contains a contribution by the historian Frank Hirschinger from Halle dealing with a special chapter of GDR-antifascism: the falsification of antifascist biographies for reasons of political propaganda. The author demonstrates this using the example of Bruno Hinz, a well-known member of the “International Brigades” in Spain, whose life story was disguised beyond recognition in order to turn him into a hero of the fight against fascism.

Paula Diehl