29. Left and right

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter's goal is to map the main contemporary theories and debates around left and right populism. To do so in a clear and systematic way is somewhat of a challenge. On the one hand, there is a nascent consensus on populism being a 'distinct form of politics' (Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019: 6). This form can be characterized as a type of discourse (Laclau 2005), a logic (Prentoulis 2021), a frame (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021), a bodily style (Moffitt 2016), a strategy (Weyland 2017) or a thin ideology (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). All these approaches, however, share a view of populism as *a way of doing politics* that can be combined with different contents. If this is indeed the case, differentiating between left and right populism should be straightforward, and the main debate should only be about the most suitable methods.

However, the consensus regarding the issue is thinner than one might expect. Grounds for substantive disagreement remain, not only on issues of method, but on the very existence of the object of study. The first section of this chapter, then, will be dedicated to answering the question of whether there are, in fact, such things as left and right populisms. Three possible answers to this question will be presented and assessed: firstly, that all populisms are necessarily republican in nature (thus 'of the left'); secondly, that all populisms are by definition illiberal, authoritarian and incompatible with democracy (thus 'of the right'); and lastly, that populism is a form of politics that can adapt to and advance diverse ideological contents.

The second section of the chapter will proceed in accord with the third position, that it makes sense to speak of right and left populisms as different varieties or embodiments of the same phenomenon. Finally, we will discuss the concept of 'punching downwards' and 'punching upwards' populism as complements to left and right. In the final section some further comments on the differences in normative weight between left populism and right populism studies are developed.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE LEFT AND THE RIGHT AND THE FIELD OF POPULISM STUDIES

To distinguish between left and right should be easy given that these concepts are supposed to be the structuring principles of our modern political systems; however, to do so is harder than it looks. The left/right labels were coined at the time of the French Revolution, when pro-Crown delegates sat on one extreme of the Assembly and revolutionaries on the other. Later, the left came to be identified with pro-working-class parties or movements, especially Marxist ones. The right, broadly speaking, became identified with conservative parties or movements, those that were associated with the elite and sought to sustain prevailing hierarchies.

After the failure of the Soviet Union, as liberal democracy overtook the globe, and as changes in the modes of production weakened the very idea of a working class, the distinction between left and right became rather blurred. Political parties across the spectrum seemed to accept the inevitability of market relations and liberal party democracy. In a seminal text, Norberto Bobbio (2015) presented the idea that the distinction between left and right is now fundamentally about equality: the left's goal is furthering social and economic equality through political means, while the right accepts social inequality as natural, unavoidable and even desirable (Levitsky and Roberts 2012: 5). The right, moreover, feels more comfortable today with illiberalism and authoritarianism if those are instrumental in upholding social hierarchies that they see as threatened.

The question of the relation between populism and the left–right dichotomy is connected to the global geography of cases in some fundamental ways. Unlike other political phenomena, such as democracy, liberalism, constitutionalism or even parliaments, there is no valid normative definition of the concept from which to proceed deductively, and populists do not call themselves so, unlike the leaders or theorists of the modern ideological traditions of liberalism, Marxism and conservatism. Rather, scholars work inductively: spurred by their interest in real-world cases, they move towards stylized concepts. So, there are two related but distinct scholarly traditions: those that work primarily with North American and European cases, and those that do so with Latin American, Asian and African cases.

This has been the case from the very beginning of the research on populism in the modern era. The so-called 'classic' approach to populism was developed in response to the rise of figures like Kemal Ataturk in Turkey, Getúlio Vargas in Brazil, Juan Domingo Perón in Argentina or Juan Francisco Velasco Alvarado in Peru. Based on these cases, political sociologists such as Seymour Martin Lipset (1959), Gino Germani (1963) and Octavio Ianni (1965) defined populism as a political movement with a base formed by newly urbanized industrial workers and a high- or middle-class leadership, which pushed for redistribution. At the end of the last century, when the whole region moved to the left again, the association of populism with the left was strengthened even more. Populist outsiders were able to capitalize on the delegitimation of traditional parties and popular anger in Venezuela (Hugo Chávez), Argentina (Néstor and Cristina Kirchner), Bolivia (Evo Morales), Ecuador (Rafael Correa) and Paraguay (Fernando Lugo). This reinforced the notion that populism is naturally, maybe even necessarily, of the left.

The reality was the opposite in the North Atlantic cases. Analysts who looked at populism through a European, or even North American (plus Australia and New Zealand) lens, from the 1980s onwards have tended to downplay the distributive and economic aspects of populism while focusing on its nativism, xenophobia and paranoid nationalism.

This does not mean that, for example, all European populisms are right wing or that all Latin American populists are or were leftist. That is not the case. The success of neoliberal South American populists like Carlos Menem (Argentina) and Alberto Fujimori (Peru) was one of the causes behind the creation of the category of 'neoliberal populism' in the 1990s (Weyland 1999). More recently, former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro has also given credence to the idea that right-wing populism is a viable option in the Latin American context. Similarly, left-wing populism has existed, and even thrived, in the North Atlantic. Europe saw a surge of left populism in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008–2009. Parties like SYRIZA (Greece) and Podemos (Spain) and leaders like Jeremy Corbyn (United Kingdom) sought to channel the anger of the 'Indignados' movements against austerity measures pushed by the

European Central Bank and the propping up of private banks. The appearance of viable left populist experiments, like Podemos and Corbynism, reinvigorated European research on the topic. The growing awareness of the multiplicity of populist embodiments has pushed the whole field into greater refinement and robustness. Many ground-breaking works have subsequently focused on questions such as: What is *truly* populism? How can its political form be distinguished from its ideological content? And what conditions might explain the difference in outcomes?

IS POPULISM NECESSARILY FROM THE LEFT OR FROM THE RIGHT?

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the idea that populism is 'a *form* of political discourse, performance, or strategy' (Vergara 2019: 222, emphasis added) has become as close to a consensus as is possible in the contentious sub-field of populism studies. Ernesto Laclau's formulation in *On Populist Reason* was extremely influential in this respect, arguing that while populist antagonism serves an 'ontological' function, its particular 'ontic contents' are ultimately contingent and 'this function can be performed by signifiers of an entirely opposite political sign' (Laclau 2005: 87). If this is true, then it would be correct to speak of left and right populisms.

However, there are two possible objections to this argument. The first states that populism in itself is fundamentally plebeian and republican (McCormick 2001) and, as such, it is necessarily counterhegemonic; for this vision, speaking of 'right' populism is a misnomer. For Camila Vergara, populism is necessarily plebeian, as it 'springs from the politicisation of wealth inequality in reaction to systemic corruption and the immiseration of the masses, an attempt to balance the scales of social and political power between the ruling elite and the popular sectors' (2019: 239). Jorge Alemán (2016: 25) goes even further and identifies populism with the condition of possibility of a collective transformative will and, as such, as coetaneous with democracy. 'Plebeian' populist movements share three characteristics: they involve (1) coalitions of support based on 'those who experience deteriorating material conditions to the point of oppression and whose interests are not being represented by traditional parties' (Vergara 2019: 240); (2) a populist leader 'who delivers emancipation from socioeconomic oppression' (Vergara 2019: 229); and (3) a set of policies that seek to 'improve not only the material conditions of the popular sectors through redistribution via land reform, progressive taxation, subsidies, and public goods, but also to increase the symbolic and political status of the masses' (Vergara 2019: 229).

According to this approach, what is usually referred to as 'right-wing populism' should instead be recognized as ethno-nationalism, or even as something closer to the classical idea of totalitarianism (Vergara 2019: 243). Therefore, according to this approach, the category of populism should be reserved for what are usually called left-wing populisms.

The position stating that the term populism should be reserved for plebeian, redistributive movements has gained momentum in the last few years, but it is still in the minority. The inverse position has historically moved close to being hegemonic in the field of populism studies, although it is arguably losing ground of late. This is the approach that considers populism to be fundamentally illiberal, anti-democratic and oppressive and, as such, it expects all populisms to be, or end up being, right wing.

Many books and articles share this approach; among them, the works of Jan-Werner Müller (2016), Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2019), Roger Eatwell and Matthew Goodwin (2018) and Loris Zanatta (2018). These authors (and many others) seem to share Müller's view that: 'In addition to being antielitist, populists are always antipluralist. Populists claim that they, and they alone, represent the people' (2016: 3). In this view, while some historical examples of populism might seem to be born out of the struggles of the dispossessed classes against elitist oppression, and while those might have had some successes in redistributing resources and expanding some political rights, all these elements are ultimately an unsustainable mirage. Sooner or later, when push comes to shove, the totalizing tendencies of populist mobilization and the personalistic style of leadership will collide with pluralism, liberalism and ultimately democracy (Stankov 2021; Wodak 2015; Zanatta 2018). Óscar García Agustín sums up the most pessimistic position (which he does not share): 'from this perspective, there is no distinction between right and left, given that both sides question the essence of liberal democracy: the representative system and the constitutional and institutional realm' (2020: 2).

So, in this view, any differences between left and right populism in terms of their economic and social policies (distributive or neoliberal, inclusive or exclusive, republican or nostalgic) are dwarfed by populism's overpowering tendencies towards illiberalism, anti-pluralism and even totalization.

POPULISM: FORM AND CONTENT

However, these two contrasting positions (that populism is necessarily left versus that populism necessarily ends up being right) do not occupy the mainstream of populism studies. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, most authors researching the ideological dimensions of populism seem to agree on the fundamental insight that populism is *a way of doing politics* that can be used to advance different worldviews.

Three authors have been most instrumental in articulating this idea. Margaret Canovan has stated that: 'The many different ways in which the people, their interests and their antagonisms have been conceived make it futile to try to identify populism with any particular programme or social base' and that:

> populist mobilizations are usually linked to populist economic grievances of some kind; they normally have some sort of cultural dimension concerned with defending the people's values, and they are invariably political, claiming power for the people. Each one of these themes allows for a range of variations, while the various themes have themselves been intermingled *in many different ways*. (2005: 80, emphasis added)

Laclau presents the problem in similar terms, suggesting that scholars are often confronted with the following dilemma: 'either to restrict populism to one of its historical variants, or to attempt a general definition which will always be too narrow' (2005: 17). Elsewhere, he explicitly states that 'the language of populist discourse' can be 'Left or Right' (2005: 118). Chantal Mouffe (2019) brings greater detail to the notion in her description of the processes by which the populist logic was instrumental in solidifying a neoliberal hegemony during the 1980s, while trying to delineate the possibilities for a new leftist hegemony through the use of similar tools.

While restricting the use of the term populism to only the left or the right is a valid choice, affirming the distinction between form and content in populism opens up the scope of the field in terms of the possible comparisons of cases and categories.

LEFT AND RIGHT POPULISM

If one agrees with the position that populism is something like a form, strategy or articulation, that is connected to, but not identical to, a given ideology or set of policy preferences, then the next issue becomes how to differentiate between right populism and left populism. To establish the difference between right and left populism is at the same time an easy task and a seemingly impossible one. On the one hand, it seems intuitively self-evident that movements like Venezuelan *Chavismo*, Argentine *Kirchnerismo*, the Bolivian Movimiento al Socialismo or the Spanish Podemos are different from cases like Viktor Orbán, Donald Trump or Giorgia Meloni. However, none of these movements was or is trying to follow a pre-set socialist or conservative model; on the contrary, programmatic eclecticism is a feature, not a bug, in populist articulation.

Left populisms can and do pursue policies which look 'right'. For instance, some Latin American populists such as Rafael Correa and Hugo Chávez shared a paternalistic and traditional view of gender roles, which precluded them from pushing for abortion rights (see Dingler and Lefkofridi 2021). Conversely, right-wing populists engage in 'welfare chauvinism' and demand further expansion of social benefits, if only for 'the right people' (Greve 2019). Right populisms have learnt to articulate some elements of traditional 'left' discourse, like claiming to defend the economic rights of the industrial working class against a predatory financial elite. Economic discourse also usually defines populism as fundamentally unsound in fiscal terms. Petar Stankov (2021), however, finds an inconclusive relation between fiscal discipline and populist and non-populist governments.

Most analysts agree, then, that it is not possible to identify one single 'policy menu' as the defining characteristic of populism. It is possible, however, to anchor the distinction in their orientation towards equality (Levitsky and Roberts 2012: 5). Left populisms seek to promote 'equality and social justice' (García Agustín 2020: 10), and 'whereas the left champions a more equal society, the right deems inequality not only inevitable, but also legitimate' (Katsambekis and Kioupkiolis 2019: 12). Equality in this sense goes beyond economic equality to include political equality and expanded participation (García Agustín 2020: 10). But the orientation towards equality or inequality must be understood as a very general *perspective for action* and not as a commitment with a clearly delineated and cohesive ideological government programme. Also, there are several dimensions to equality: the socio-economic one probably comes to mind first, but the demands for ethnic and racial, gender and sexual diversity equality have become as central, if not more, as basic social justice (Barros and Prado 2020).

ANTAGONISM, NOT PROGRAMME

Left populism and right populism are not so easily distinguished by their programmes or modes of organization. Movements that started as anti-elitist, redemptive and strongly popular might evolve into authoritarian experiences, such as Venezuelan Chavismo. Right-wing pop-

ulisms have adopted and learned to wield some tropes of the twenty-first-century left, such as anti-corruption rhetoric (Donald Trump's 'Drain the swamp!' slogan) or the rejection of neoliberal free market tropes.

However, there is no denying that left and right cases do not 'look alike'. In fact, case studies reveal two main discursive repertoires which are quite distinct. They can be called 'punching up' and 'punching down'. All populisms are antagonistic. They are usually anti-elitist; however, while antagonism can be presented as the 'low' rising against the 'high' and educated (Ostiguy 2017), the identification of the other of populism with 'the elite' is by no means universal or automatic. There are broadly two definitional possibilities: one in which the elite is defined as 'those above' in socio-economic terms (financial sectors, businessmen, large agricultural or cattle owners, banks, large media) – always of course articulated or functional to foreign interests. They are the 'rich and powerful', the oligarchy, the bourgeoisie and, in this respect, they are closer to the traditional Marxist or leftist definition of the adversary.

In the 'downward-punching' paradigm, the main adversary is not located above, but rather below and outside: it is the foreigner, the alien, an external contaminant that threatens the purity of the true, simple, God-loving people. Usually, there is an elite component that is allied or complicit with the foreigners: intellectuals, liberals, feminists, 'East Coast intellectuals', Euro-bureaucrats. However, they are not the primary source of antagonism. This particular repertoire is closely related to the more extreme right-wing ideologies, and very compatible with them.

Ideology is secondary to antagonism: it might make sense, for instance, for a certain leader to combine distributive policies but reject feminist demands for reproductive rights when those demands are said to be supported by the upper and most educated classes if the goal is not to be seen as 'of the left' but to antagonize 'those above'. Conversely, anti-neoliberal sentiment might be compatible with right-wing rhetoric if neoliberalism is equated with technocrats and international bureaucracies.

However, it is important to note that research on these topics must take the fundamental hybridity, flexibility and situational nature of populism into account. Populist leaders, movements and governments might move from one strategy to the other rapidly, sometimes even to the point of self-contradiction.

A COMPARISON OF APPROACHES

As a way of summarizing the state of the art on the research on left/right populism, I have built a comparative matrix for five widely read approaches: ideational, discursive, political performance, political strategy and frame: the ideational approach defines populism as a thin-centred ideology that pits the people against the elite and is Manichean and moralistic (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017); the discursive approach defines it as social discourse that creates *a people* through the dichotomization of the political space into an 'us' and a 'them', in which the figure of the leader (in most cases) or a common identity or another 'empty signifier' becomes the signifier for the 'us' (Laclau 20005; Panizza, 2005); the political performance approach centres on the public performances of leaders that mobilize cultural signifiers of the 'low' and vulgar and act out anti-elitism (Moffitt 2016; Petrović-Lotina 2021); the political strategy approach focuses on the way in which political entrepreneurs establish direct relation with constituents and bypass established parties (Weyland 2017); and the frame approach

reviews the tropes and interpretative frames that populist leaders use to persuade the public (Heinisch and Mazzoleni 2021).

As is plain to see, there is ample diversity in the scope, definitions and methods used by each one of these schools of thought. Because studies on populism are 'flavoured' by their inductive genesis, scholars of the Global South and Latin America in particular tend to view populism as connected with strong leaders and the left, while those from Europe and the United States see it as linked to movements and parties, and with a much higher prevalence of right-wing cases. Because of this diversity, researchers might find one or the other more naturally suitable for different objects of study. Table 29.1 summarizes the core differences.

Table 29.1 Summary of approaches to populism research

	Ideational	**Discourse**	**Political performance**	**Political strategy**	**Frame**
Focus	Parties/leader	Leaders/movements	Leaders	Leaders	Leaders
Geographical origins	Originally Western Europe; now global	Originally inspired by Latin American populist leaders; now global	Global	Latin America	Western Europe
Core elements	People/elite; moral antagonism; association with other ideologies	Creation of a 'people' through a discourse that constructs a solidarity chain	Performance of anti-elitism, bad manners, performance of crisis	Rejection of parties, direct relation with masses	A frame in which the people are in need of defending and that promises radical change
Compatibility with liberalism	Ultimately, no	Possible, if tensioned	Problematic, but possible	Problematic, but not impossible	Possible
Inclusive/exclusive	Ultimately exclusive	Inclusive, or at least heterogeneous	Possibilities for inclusion	Ultimately exclusive	Possibilities for inclusion
Views populism as more naturally of the…	Right	Left	Left and right	Left	Right

As can be inferred from the above summary, some of the approaches were originally developed in close connection with one particular set of cases, and therefore seem to be employed more frequently for a given region. For instance, South American left populisms, and Peronism in particular, informed some of the writings of Laclau and Mouffe, who are considered to be the founders of the discursive approach. Laclau's influential book, *On Populist Reason*, was published in 2005, when the wave of left South American populism was reaching its apex, and was a theoretical response to it. Mouffe, on her part, sought to develop an explicitly programmatic framework with *For a Left Populism* (2019). It is thus not surprising that many of the writings on the possibilities and limits of the left populist experience are oriented by her work. On the other side of the spectrum, the first works of Mudde (2007) were born out of his research on populist radical right parties in Western Europe, and it is not a surprise that this approach has been widely utilized to look at parties at the right end of the spectrum.

One must not take this logic to the extreme, however. As the 'ideational' approach became more popular, other researchers expanded and adapted the ensuing definitions and methods using them to analyse a wide variety of cases, left and right, from all corners of the globe (Hawkins et al. 2019; Hellman 2017 for East Asia, for instance). The same happened with the

Laclauian approach, which is now being applied to left and right populism alike (i.e. Palonen 2018). The so-called performative approach has been applied to an equal number of left-wing (see Mbete 2021) and right-wing (see Baykan 2021; Aiolfi 2022) cases.

NORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS

A central cleavage between the different traditions is the issue of populism's compatibility with democracy and liberalism. Scholars that focus on left populism or 'upward-punching populism' see them as compatible, at least as a possibility. As stated, some view populism as republican and democratic in essence (Biglieri and Cadahia 2021; Vergara 2019); not necessarily liberal, but certainly not illiberal. Populism is seen as connected with the mobilization of the *demos*, the *plebs*, within the public space, to fight the status quo; therefore, it would be incorrect to use the term 'populism' to refer to political regimes that are fundamentally preoccupied with maintaining or even strengthening social hierarchies. Thus, a significant number of scholars of left populism tend to be sympathetic, if not to the actual historical examples, at least to the project of left populism as a feasible political project to be theorized and/or improved. Giorgos Venizelos and Yannis Stavrakakis (2022), for instance, offer a rigorous attempt to clarify the two distinct components of left populism. The *left* part has to do with three dimensions of inclusion and exclusion: the material dimensions ('who is included/excluded from the material redistribution of resources'); the political dimension ('who is included/excluded from processes of participation and social rights'); and the symbolic dimension ('who is included/excluded from the symbolic and cultural pillars of a community') (2022: 4). The *populism* dimension has to do with the 'formation of a salient *collective identification* through which heterogeneous social demands and exclusions find a way to establish links allowing them to challenge effectively the status quo'; people-centrism and anti-elitism play a central role in the articulation (2022: 3).

Marina Prentoulis defines populism as a 'logic that divides the political space into two camps and challenges the establishment (electorally or in the streets, peacefully or not)' (2021: 4); left populism in this view is 'a serious attempt to find what is in the best interest of the majority, the 99 percent' (2021: 5). Prentoulis (2021: 32) and García Agustín (2020: 10) view three key characteristics as key to left populism: transversality, inclusiveness and participation. Even Mudde acknowledged that 'some parties are best classified as social populists… social populism combines socialism and populism, and is thus a form of left-wing populism' (Mudde 2007: 48).

Many of the more hopeful readings of populism seem to be focused on the possibilities of truly global or transnational populist movements, which are less associated with leaders and national borders (Aslanidis 2018). Mark Devenney (2020) speaks of 'transnation' to characterize the current moment, when there is a nascent transnational people 'struggling with translation beyond the adscription of nationalist politics', but it is not fully developed yet; García Agustín (2020) claims that populism must come up with a definition of sovereignty that is 'not only limited to the nation state' (2020: 70), and Alexandros Kioupkiolis (2019) explores diffused, 'bottom-up' movements under the term 'populism 2.0'.

On the contrary, students of right populism do not share any type of normative disposition towards the topic. One might even say that they are mostly concerned or even repulsed by real-world examples of right-wing populism. Thus, most debates drawing on this tradition

seem to be focused on the threat it presents to the democratic order, and how to counterbalance or avoid them. The stronger consensus on the anti-democratic effects of right populism is predicated on the stronger conceptual overlapping between the core issues of right-wing populism. Mudde's definition, that understands parties and movements that fall under that category as sharing a common 'ideological core' that combines nativism, authoritarianism, and populism (Mudde 2007: 22) comes close to highlighting the two elements that are seen as more pervasive: nationalism and personalist authoritarianism.

Even so, there are definitional debates around the notion of right-wing populism itself. A salient one is how to distinguish between right-wing populism and fascism, and how to define the border or frontier between the two. Federico Finchelstein, for instance, argues that populism and fascism represent 'alternative political and historical trajectories', while being 'genealogically connected' (2017: 6), since they both appear out of contexts of crisis and see themselves as the one 'true' form of democracy. However, for Finchelstein, a frontier can be set: if populism moves from 'rhetorical enmity' to 'practices of enemy identification and persecution', one might recognize that as fascism (2017: 6). The step that goes from discursive and electoral antagonism to actual, physical violence and persecution seems to be an accepted boundary (see also de la Torre 2021).

One interesting issue is that, while scholars of left populism view the apparition of a global internationalist left populism as a project which is desirable but not yet realized, students of the right present the case that global right-wing networks seem to be stronger, in an undesirable manner. Jens Rydgren (2005: 413) and Dani Rodrik (2021), among others, have written about such 'international diffusion'.

Thus, the different orientations towards the normative possibilities of left and right populism with regard to democracy should be taken into account when making sense of both sub-fields.

CONCLUSION

This chapter presented three different perspectives on the issue of populism and the left–right dichotomy. First, it argued that all populisms are by nature plebeian, republican and, thus, of the left. Second, it suggesting that all populisms are totalizing and antagonistic and are, eventually, of the right. Third, it stipulated that populism is a form of politics that can adapt to and advance diverse ideological contents.

Starting with the first two perspectives, the projects advocating for letting go of the notions of 'left populism' or 'right populism' in favour of opposing populism to fascism, or populism to liberal democracy, seems overly reductive. For one thing, if one only calls 'populist' those examples that expand popular rights and strive for greater emancipation, one runs the risk of being seen as engaging in methodological cherry-picking by choosing to call populists only those cases that one considers to be 'good'. However, there is no denying that some movements that started as popular and plebeian (like Venezuelan Chavismo) became hierarchical and even authoritarian. Theorists need to take these cases seriously. It is necessary to be able to say something more than that they were never populists to begin with. On the other hand, the identification of populism with authoritarianism is also reductive, since it cannot see the impact of at least some populist experiences on the lives of popular classes, might misjudge the causes of their support and might also help to legitimate repressive anti-populist actions.

In addition, most analysts see elements that connect together populist examples from opposite points of the political spectrum: ways of speaking, acting and organizing; certain templates for explaining the world; a fighting, antagonistic spirit; and certain anti-elitist obsessions. As much as one might argue that they must be regarded as completely different from one another, it is unlikely that people would do so.

The third position has to do with viewing populism as a political form (a template, a frame, a type of discourse or strategy) that can be combined with almost infinite ideological contents. There is value in this proposition, since it broadens the universe of cases which might be compared and the criteria involved in such comparisons. However, maybe left and right do not capture the whole story. The concepts of 'punching upwards' and 'punching downwards' populism were thus introduced to complement this perspective. These categories emphasize that the antagonism towards a social other, which is either defined as the wealthy and powerful 'up' or the menacing and foreign 'down', structures policy preferences in ways that cannot be explained solely by the left–right dichotomy.

Finally, a few thoughts were presented on the different normative approaches to left and right populisms. While scholars that focus on the left cases (which are often taken from Latin America or the Global South, although recently also from Europe) are more sympathetic to the emancipatory potential of left populist movements, especially in their global or transnational possibilities, academics that study right populism view it as a fundamental threat to contemporary democracies. Somewhat paradoxically, the global connections of the right are viewed as a key component in this threat.

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