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Anti-Corruption NGOs as Think Tanks: The Effect of Transparency International UK on the UK Bribery Act 2010

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Abstract

While anti-corruption scholars have analyzed and explained theoretically citizen-based anti-corruption approaches, studies on one of the most important aspects of a leading anti-corruption non-governmental organization (NGO) has been limited: the role of Transparency International (TI), in particular national branches of TI, as a think tank. Drawing on data from an interview with a former head of TI in the UK (TI-UK), this study will conduct a preliminary review and analysis of the effects of TI-UK in anti-corruption policymaking. The analysis shows that TI-UK was not only involved in the drafting of legislation but also had an impact on the outcomes during the legislation and initial implementation processes. This study is expected to contribute to understandings of anti-corruption policymaking processes and development of theories and practices of anti-corruption reforms.

Keywords

Anti-Corruption; Policymaking; Transparency International; UK Bribery Act 2010; Process Tracing

Introduction

Academics, policymakers, domestic and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations have actively engaged in fighting against corruption across the world. The anti-corruption movement has been active mainly since the 1990s. These actors regard corruption as one of the most serious problems to be tackled in the world and have proposed and tried a variety of anti-corruption reforms including top-down reforms (i.e. national governmental reforms) and bottom-up reforms (i.e. NGO advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns).

Among these actors, NGOs have arguably the biggest potential to influence the success of anti-corruption policies in the future. After witnessing many failures of top-down anti-corruption reforms, increasing number of scholars started to study about the role of bottom-up approaches, namely approaches by NGOs, to fight against corruption (see e.g. Hough 2017). However, few studies pay attention to the role of NGOs as organizations that can provide practical knowledge on anti-corruption policies. Literature on evidence-based policies suggests that NGOs can provide practical knowledge during policymaking (Head 2008).

In addition, the role of the most well-known NGO in the study of corruption, Transparency International (TI), as a think tank¹ – which can influence anti-corruption policies by providing practical knowledge – has attracted little scholarly attention from anti-corruption researchers. Except for a recent ethnographic case study on TI Portugal and anti-corruption mobilizations (Lang 2021), there is few academic papers to my knowledge which consider TI, in particular national branches of TI, in terms of its capacity as an anti-corruption think tank.

Consequently, this study endeavors to conduct a preliminary review and analysis of the effects of NGO in anti-corruption policymaking at the national level rather than in anti-corruption social movements (i.e. Integrity Idol or I Paid a Bribe.com (IPAB)). Using a case study, this study examines the role of TI in the UK (TI-UK) in the process of the legislation of the UK Bribery Act 2010, on which a variety of actors – including TI-UK – actively lobbied to the UK parliaments under international pressure (Alldridge 2012; Hogge 2015; Harrison and Ryder 2016). How effective was TI-UK's advocacy campaign in the legislation process and initial stage of implementation of the UK Bribery Act 2010?

This research note will utilize an existing framework with causal process tracing methods proposed by Betsill and Corell (2001). Although the framework was originally proposed for the research of international environmental policymaking, this framework does not have a set of

¹ In fact, TI is ranked 53rd (2020 Top Think Tanks Worldwide) and 2nd (2020 Top Transparency and Good Governance Think Tanks) in *2020 Global Go To Think Tank Index* (McGann 2020).

requirements specific to environmental policies and thus it is also applicable to the study of corruption. The framework provides a series of questions which enable researchers to trace the process from NGOs' transmission of information to NGOs' effects on policy outcome. This study examines the effects of TI-UK on the UK Bribery Act 2010 by analyzing data from parliaments and NGOs, as well as a Skype interview with the former Director of TI-UK and other secondary sources. This preliminary study shows TI-UK played a significant role as a think tank in anti-corruption policymaking by participating and joining parts of negotiation processes and which suggests the potential for anti-corruption NGOs' impact on anti-corruption policies in other countries.

Actors of Citizen-Based Anti-Corruption

Citizen-based anti-corruption movements involve three actors: anti-corruption groups composed of activists, professional groups, and NGOs. Firstly, activists are one potential actor for anti-corruption movements. As actual cases show, anti-corruption activists can initiate movements individually (Rahman 2011) or collectively (TI Ukraine 2017). The second group of actors are professional groups. This includes journalists or lawyer groups such as Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media in South Korea (Kern and Nam 2008). Thirdly, NGOs can also be an actor to lead movements against corruption. For example, Integrity Idol's campaign in Nepal is one of the successful citizen-based anti-corruption movements run by NGOs in developing countries (Pattisson 2014; Hough 2017). This is a yearly TV program launched by TI Nepal and the program aims to "name and fame" (rather than "name and shame") those who fought corruption in interesting or unexpected ways.

Such anti-corruption actors and their bottom-up approaches have been explained theoretically by anti-corruption scholars. For instance, della Porta (2018) applies social movement theories – types of action, framing, and resources – to grassroots anti-corruption reforms. From a different theoretical perspective on organization management, Ang (2014) compares the history of IPAB in India and China and found the importance of professionalization and long-term strategies of NGOs in organizing effective anti-corruption movements.

Nevertheless, when focusing on the third actor of citizen-based anti-corruption (i.e. NGOs), there is a puzzle in that these cases and theoretical accounts do not cover one of the most important aspects of the most famous anti-corruption NGO: the role of TI, including TI's national branches, as a think tank. TI not only conducts awareness-raising campaigns and indexes countries' corruption scores, TI Secretariat in Berlin and some of TI's national branches also helps private companies and national governments to combat corruption through involving, consulting, or evaluating anti-corruption policymaking and implementation (della Porta 2018; TI-UK n.d.).

Advocacy and Lobbying in Anti-Corruption Policies and Beyond

Turning to literature on advocacy and lobbying, there are a number of studies which point out the importance of the “accumulation, organization, and transfer” of information (such as arguments, facts, and statistics) from lobbyists to policymakers (De Figueiredo 2002, 126; Weaver 1989). This is recognized and analyzed from the policymakers’ perspective: for example, Head (2008) argues that, in addition to scientific knowledge and political judgement, policymakers also consider practical knowledge provided by NGOs and think tanks (Head 2008, 5-7; see also Haass 2002).

However, while it is argued that think tanks have “a great advantage when working on practical problems” (DeMuth 2007) due to their channels to policymakers via personal consultations and interactions as well as their appointment to advisory bodies (Stone 2017, 152), the direct impact of such practical knowledge provided by think tanks on policymaking is still unclear. Thus, although the main aim of this research note is to contribute to understandings of the impact of anti-corruption NGOs on a national level, this research note also aims to contribute to the understandings of the direct effects of lobbying and advocacy in anti-corruption policies and potentially in other policies.

Framework, Methodology, and Case Selection

This research note applies the framework suggested by Betsill and Corell (2001), shown in Table 1. They suggest analyzing the *data type*, *data source*, and *methodology* to see the effects of NGOs on policymaking. Although the analysis in this research note cannot cover all the questions due to a limited number of primary sources, this study will examine the **transmission of information** and behavior of other actors (*data type*) based on primary texts, secondary texts, and interviews (*data sources*).

In terms of methodology, this research note will use certain elements of causal process tracing methods (i.e. Straw-in-the-Wind Test, Hoop Test, Smoking-Gun Test) (Collier 2011; Ricks and Liu 2018).² These tests correspond to the questions in *data type* in Table 1. Delivering information from NGOs to policy makers (*NGO participation: activities, access, and resources*) and actual discussion on the proposal from NGOs in the negotiation process (*process in goal attainment*) would provide evidence to confirm the relevance of NGOs in the policymaking process (Straw-in-the-

² There are two elements which this research note will not cover: Doubly-Decisive Tests and additional process-tracing tests after the initial investigations. Although Doubly-Decisive Tests and additional process-tracing can help to confirm hypotheses and eliminate other alternative rival hypotheses (Collier 2011; Ricks and Liu 2018), this study will not conduct these tests due to limited available information and difficulties of examining alternative factors in the complex policymaking process.

Wind Test and Hoop Test respectively). If an NGO's proposals change the drafts of the bills (*outcome in goal attainment*), that would be regarded as evidence to confirm the impact of NGOs in the anti-corruption policy legislation (Smoking-Gun Test).

As for the case selection, this study will analyze the effect of TI-UK on the case of the UK Bribery Act 2010. TI-UK is chosen because of its active engagement in policy recommendations, as a former senior anti-corruption advisor at the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK who reviewed the history of this struggle over anti-corruption policymaking in the UK stated:

TI could always [...] point to an example somewhere in the world where a way of working had been found by a TI Chapter. [...] [I]t marks TI out from many other NGOs who merely shout that a problem needs attention (Obe 2020, 9).

Regarding anti-corruption policies in the UK, this study analyzes the UK Bribery Act 2010 which criminalizes private sector bribery, bribery of foreign public officials, and most notably, facilitation payments (UK Bribery Act 2010; Hough 2017). The UK Bribery Act 2010 is "among the strictest legislation internationally on bribery" (TI-UK n.d.) and "is still considered the international gold standard of anti-bribery legislation, alongside the US Foreign Corrupt Practices Act" around 10 years after the legislation (TI-UK 2021).

The UK Bribery Act 2010 is also one of the most important and impactful cases in UK anti-corruption laws where many actors including TI-UK in addition to DFID – a traditional actor which aims to influence anti-corruption policies of aid recipient countries (Obe 2020) – were involved in the policymaking process. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there was international pressure for the UK government to enact UK Bribery Act 2010 (Alldridge 2012; Hogge 2015; Harrison and Ryder 2016), which may be one of the important factors that enabled NGOs to get "buy-in" from the government (Verdenicci and Hough 2015).

Available reports in the legislation process which include TI-UK's claims and suggestions, research papers on the advocacy campaign of TI-UK as well as information gained from an interview with Robert Barrington³ – the former Director of TI-UK – are used as sources of analysis. Analyzing the case of TI-UK under UK Bribery Act 2010 legislation using the framework of Betsill and Corell (2001) supports theory development of anti-corruption reforms in the UK and potentially in other countries (Mahoney, 2010).

³ He is currently a professor at the University of Sussex (the Sussex Centre of Studying Corruption). The interview was held on March 27, 2020 (via Skype).

Analysis

Starting with the Straw-in-the-Wind Test, TI-UK's involvement in the drafting of legislation shows that TI-UK had *access* to influence the UK Bribery Act 2010 during the legislation process. TI-UK had *access* to comments on the draft of the Act. Through the form of written answers to the questions asked by the committee (*resource*), TI-UK was able to show their disagreement with clause 4 on "legitimately due" test and clause 13 on parliamentary privilege, and make a suggestion on clause 5 that the government can consider penalty enforcement through civil society organizations rather than through legal enforcement (House of Lords and House of Commons 2009). Namely, many of TI's opinions were based on rational and practical knowledge of the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention,⁴ which requests that the UK resolve issues that can only be dealt with by legislating a comprehensive bribery act (Barrington 2020, 8).

In addition, according to the interview with Barrington, TI-UK utilized two more channels of *access* to influence members of parliament in spite of an opposing lobbying campaign from British business organizations (such as Confederation of British Industry (CBI)) and a media campaign by the Evening Standard which is generally supportive of business interests and was against the UK Bribery Act 2010⁵. He recalled in the interview that the first additional source of access was the provision of briefing notes by TI-UK to members of parliaments and the second was meetings with politicians. He also noted in his working paper:

We did not publish these [the rebuttals against CBI's arguments] at once, but held them back and drip fed them in at key moments of the parliamentary debates – usually in the form of briefing papers which we circulated to those we knew had an interest or influence or were likely to speak in the debates (Barrington 2020, 8).

Regarding the latter access, Barrington stated in an interview that TI-UK utilized its position of “expert, independent, and neutral” and succeeded in cooperating with supportive members in the House of Lords as advisors. This helped TI-UK to connect with important policymakers such as ministers, including the Minister of Justice. In other words, as visualized in Figure 1 on the policymaking process of the UK Bribery Act 2010, TI-UK succeeded in having strong channels to not only policymakers in general, but also relevant ministers through the members in the House

⁴ According to Barrington's working paper, CBI and TI were “the main protagonists outside parliament” during the legislation process of the UK Bribery Act. From his point of view, CBI – the main opponent of the bill – made “itself [CBI] look trivial and ill-informed”, after CBI argued “because the lower limits of hospitality were not defined, a company might face prosecution for offering even a cup of coffee in a meeting with a public official” (Barrington 2020, 11).

⁵ In an interview with the author via Skype on March 27, 2020.

of Lords. This evidence clearly confirms *participation* of TI-UK in the UK Bribery Act 2010 (i.e. it passes the Straw-in-the-Wind Test).

Table 1: The framework of the analysis of the effects of NGOs on policymaking

	Intentional transmission of information	Behavior of other actors
Data Type	<i>NGO participation</i> <i>Activities:</i> What did NGOs do to transmit information to decision makers? <i>Access:</i> What opportunities did NGOs have to transmit information? <i>Resources:</i> What sources of leverage did NGOs use to transmit information?	<i>Goal attainment</i> <i>Outcome:</i> Does the final agreement contain text drafted by NGOs? Does the final agreement reflect NGO goals and principles? <i>Process:</i> Did negotiators discuss issues proposed by NGOs (or cease to discuss issues opposed by NGOs)? Did NGOs coin terms that became part of the negotiating jargon?
Data Source	<i>Primary texts</i> (e.g. draft decisions, country position statements, the final agreement, NGO lobbying materials) <i>Secondary texts</i> (e.g. media reports, press releases) <i>Interviews</i> (e.g. government delegates, observers and NGOs) Researcher <i>observations</i> during negotiations	
Methodology	<i>Process tracing</i> What were the causal mechanisms linking NGO participation in [anti-corruption] negotiations with their influence?	

Source: Betsill and Corell (2001, 79); removed the data source which are specifically on international environment policies.

Table 2: TI-UK's memorandum and impact

Clause	TI-UK's Memorandum	Result
Clause 4 (3)(b) Bribery of foreign public officials	"In TI(UK)'s view, the test should be removed from Clause 4, and not replaced by a requirement that the payment be 'undue' or 'improper'. The OECD Convention requires that payments to foreign public officials be criminalized; and that should be our standard. We doubt the risk that "innocent" conduct will be criminalized, because prosecutors are unlikely to prosecute if the circumstances are plainly innocent. The risk is the far greater one that companies will make payments to foreign public officials under cover of 'fuzziness' of domestic law, or a spurious legal opinion. "	"Legitimately due" test was removed from the Bribery Act 2010. Bribery Draft Legislation: P Bribes F if, and only if – <u>(b) the advantage is not legitimately due to F, or (if offered, promised or given to another person as mentioned in paragraph (a)) it would not be legitimately due if offered, promised or given to F.</u> Bribery Act 2010 (clause 6 (3) (b)): P Bribes F if, and only if – <u>(b) F is neither permitted nor required by the written law applicable to F to be influenced in F's capacity as a foreign public official by the offer, promise or gift.</u>
Clause 5 Failure of commercial organizations to prevent bribery	"Clause 5 should be turned into a civil regulatory regime for imposing fines on companies rather than imposing a criminal offence."	TI's suggestion was not reflected on the Bribery Act 2010 (clause 7).

Table 2: TI-UK's memorandum and impact (cont'd)

Clause	TI-UK's Memorandum	Result
Clause 13 Authorization of intelligence services	“TI(UK) opposes the entire Clause 13 of the draft Bill. ... The OECD Working Group on Bribery is aware of no provision of law anywhere whereby bribery is expressly sanctioned. While we welcome the Government's openness in acknowledging that bribery may be used by the security services, we have the gravest doubts as to whether any worthwhile long-term national interest is served. If the security services can make a case for such an “opt-out”, they should present it for appropriate parliamentary scrutiny; and it should form no part of any general law of bribery.”	Removed from the Bribery Act 2010

Source: Ministry of Justice 2009, 27; House of Lords and House of Commons 2009, 284-285; UK Bribery Act 2010, 6-7.

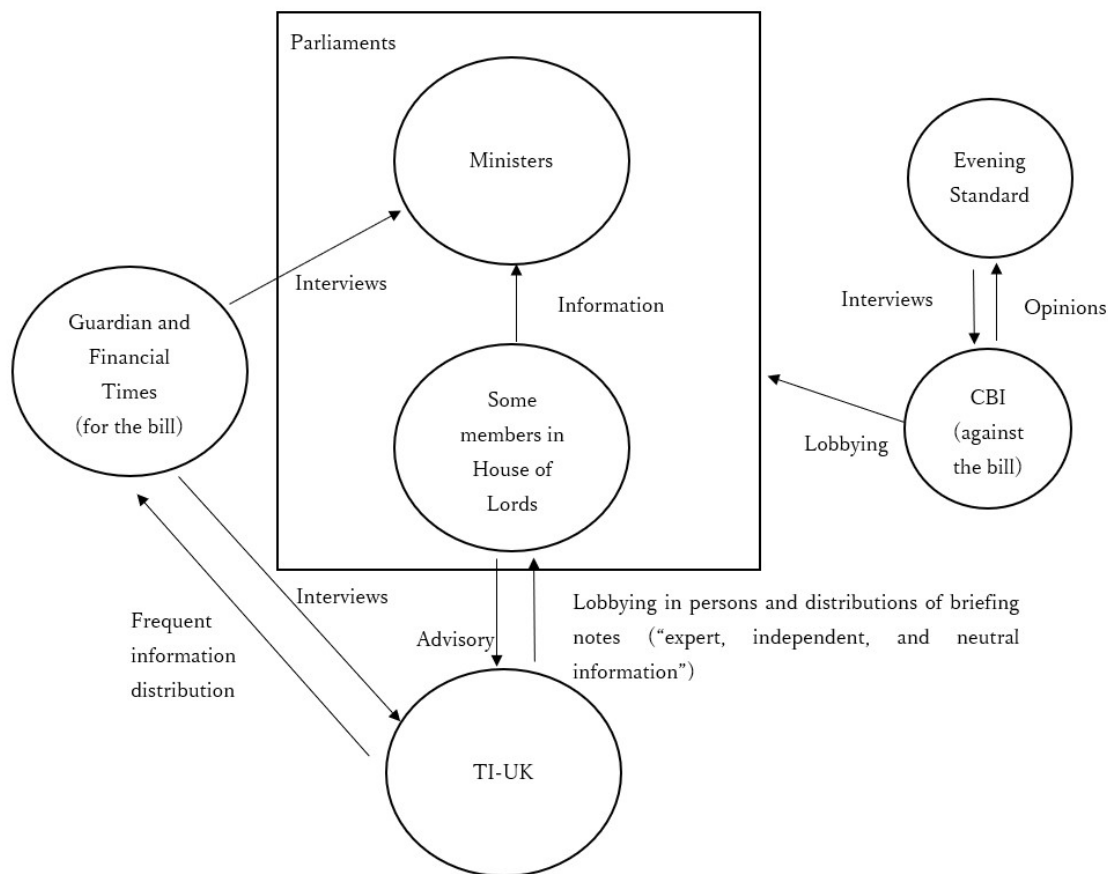
For the second test, the Hoop Test, there is enough evidence for passing the test in that the members of parliament discussed the issues with members of TI-UK in a special committee for an official guidance for companies in the future implementation of the UK Bribery Act 2010 (*process*). Barrington – the Director of TI-UK at that time – explained in the interview that he and another member of TI-UK were also members of the special committee in the parliament with selected parliamentarians which was designated to discuss what to include in the official guidance and how specific the guidance should be.

Thirdly, as for the *outcome*, there is some evidence to conclude TI-UK has enough influence to pass the Smoking-Gun Test (i.e. enough effects on the outcomes). One of them is the extent of reflection of TI-UK's comments, most of which were in accordance with the OECD Anti Bribery Convention, in the UK Bribery Act 2010. As shown in Table 2, the final version of the UK Bribery Act 2010 does not include two clauses (clause 4 “legitimacy due” test and the entire clause 13) opposed by TI-UK through the memorandum although TI-UK's suggestion on

clause 5 (legal-enforcement-base punishment) was not reflected in the final decision (House of Lords and House of Commons 2009; UK Bribery Act 2010). Given that the opinion on clause 5 was a “suggestion” rather than “disagreement” and another successful outcome of the final official guideline, these outcomes are enough to show that the opinions of TI-UK were reflected in the UK Bribery Act 2010.

Another piece of evidence is TI-UK’s influence over the final decision of the official guidance of UK Bribery Act 2010 which was published in 2011. According to the interview with Barrington, not just TI-UK was involved in the negotiation process of the official guideline, but also TI-UK managed to lead the special commission to publish the official guidance which is quite similar to the one TI-UK suggested right after the legislation of UK Bribery Act 2010.

Figure 1: A simplified visualization of anti-corruption network in the legislative process of the UK Bribery Act 2010



Source: Author.

Conclusion

There is increasing academic and practical interest in the role of NGOs in fighting against corruption. Using the causal process-tracing analysis in the case of TI-UK with the framework of Betsill and Corell (2001), this analysis showed TI-UK not only involved in the drafting of

legislation but also had an impact on the outcomes during the legislation and initial implementation processes. TI-UK provided practical knowledge to policy makers for policymaking, especially policy amendments and decisions, under the international pressure on the UK government in anti-corruption reforms. This analysis also hints at the potential of anti-corruption NGOs' impact on anti-corruption policies in other countries, depending on other domestic and international factors such as the level of democracy (Kolstad and Wiig 2016). Furthermore, this study succeeded in providing valuable interview data from the former Director of TI-UK, aside from data from the draft and the final versions of the UK Bribery Act 2010 and other secondary sources. In the context of the study of lobbying and advocacy, this study also suggests that NGOs as think tanks can directly affect targeted policies, especially in terms of policy amendments and decisions.

As this research note does not cover sources related to other relevant actors aside from TI-UK, the relative effects of TI-UK in comparison to other actors involved in the policymaking process – such as civil servants, other politicians, legal specialists, and academics, and the applicability of findings in this study to anti-corruption NGOs in other countries should be addressed in future research to better understand their effects on anti-corruption policies in the UK and beyond.

Disclaimer

The views, thoughts, and opinions expressed in this research note are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the organizations that the author is affiliated with.

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Building Legitimacy: The Role of Political Myths in the Presidential Campaigns of the Early 90s in Romania

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Abstract

After the collapse of the communist regime in Eastern Europe, political parties were faced with the necessity of building political legitimacy. This research aims to find out how political myths were instrumentalized by political leaders during the presidential campaigns in order to gain popular support. In the first part, the article focuses on defining “myth” as a legitimizing political instrument. In the second part four political myths used in the early 1990s in Romania are being analyzed: the myth of the interwar period, the myth of original democracy, the myth of political reform and the providential man. The method used is political discourse and party platform analysis. The results suggest that, during the early 90s, different political groups tried to build their legitimacy using political myths instead of rational politics, which ended up in their failure to address the real issues of a changing society.

Keywords

Democratic Transition; Legitimacy; Political Myths; Post-communism; Romanian Elections

Introduction

Myths have always been part of man's understanding of the world he lives in, including economics, religion, culture or politics. Humans have tried to explain nature, climate disasters, fate, the meaning of life and the unknown using mythology. As knowledge progressed, many would have thought that myths would likely disappear once humans will scientifically explain nature. But what if myths have never disappeared, but only took on other forms? And moreover, given that every human is a *zoon politikon* integrated into a political community, is it possible for myths to become instruments for political use?

The article aims to introduce the concept of “political myth” in the field of political sciences as an analytical concept for electoral campaign discourses and as a political tool for building legitimacy in the early 90s in Eastern Europe, with emphasis on the Romanian case. Consequently, another purpose of this article is to demonstrate that political myths were recovered and used by certain political parties in Romania in the 1990s in order to gain legitimacy and implicitly change the relationship of power in their favor. Therefore, taking into consideration that the main function of the use of myths was legitimation, this article will focus its analysis on the myths used in electoral periods. The reason behind this is that election campaigns tend “to maximize the instrumentalization of mythical narratives in order to attract massive support from voters”⁶ (Ionașcu 2012, 233). The political campaigns the present study addresses took place in 1990, 1992 and 1996. The aim is to determine whether the newly founded political parties used political myths during the first post-communist elections in the 90s to gain credibility in order to prevail over political opponents.

This article contributes to the existing research by pointing out that certain myths are dependent not only on a specific political context, but also on the historical memory of different groups with symbolic power in society, such as the former political prisoners or old liberal political figures. Moreover, it shows that political groups in the 90s determined the content of memory in order to interpret the past in a legitimizing manner. Emphasizing the Romanian case, the study tries to identify the presence of myths in the political discourses or programs of the leftist National Salvation Front (FSN) on one side, and the National Liberal Party (PNL), Romanian Social

⁶ Although the focus of the article is primarily on the political myths created by political authority, scholars share the idea that leaders are not the only creators of symbolic representation. In fact, myth-makers (political elites) and myth-believers (voters) share a common political and cultural background which enables them to assign common meaning to a certain historical event. Emilio Gentile claims that “leaders are not alone in the process of artificial production of myths and rituals in order to control the masses”, arguing that “the *fideist* interpretation accepts that myths and rituals can be spontaneous expressions of the masses, produced by their need of faith and beliefs, myths they will transmit by devotion to a leader or to an ideology that promises them well-being and salvation” (Gentile 2006, 7-8).

Democrat Party (PDSR) and Christian Democratic National Peasant's Party (PNTCD), confederated in 1991 in the center-right Democratic Convention (CD/CDR), on the other side.

As for the article structure, the research displays a theoretical framework around the concepts of “myth” and “social imaginary”, followed by an analysis of the transition from myth to political myth in the context of the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the last decade of the 20th century. The second part deals with four political myths used in the first election campaigns of the post-communist Romanian democracy: the myth of the interwar democracy, the myth of original democracy, the myth of political reform and the providential man. These myths are important not only for properly understanding the socio-political framework of post-communist Romania, but they also apply to the former states of the ex-Soviet space due to their similar pattern of use in the public discourse. The case study concerning Romania is relevant for this type of study because it was part of the same political system with other states in Central and Eastern Europe, therefore their transition to democracy was influenced or even determined by their communist legacy. The focus on the Romanian case is based on the particular brutal nature of the communist regime in the last decade of the 20th century, in opposition to the liberalization of the regime in neighbor states such as Hungary, Poland or Czechoslovakia. In Romania, there was no possibility for a political opposition to emerge during the rule of communist leader Nicolae Ceausescu. As a consequence, citizens were lacking political socialization and electoral tradition when the regime collapsed. In the absence of a political authority which would ensure a peaceful transition to democracy, political parties used myths as instruments for filling the legitimacy void.

Literature Review

The sources can be divided in two different categories: primary sources and secondary sources. The first category includes the discourses of party leaders, televised presidential debates, political platforms, memoirs and newspapers. The second one consists of secondary sources, which are analyses done by scientists, historians, sociologists and anthropologists of international renown. The theoretical foundation of the political myth has been laid by Ernst Cassirer, Henry Tudor, Chiara Bottici, Christopher Flood, Peter Ricketson and Vladimir Tismăneanu. Although multiple Romanian researchers (Vladimir Tismăneanu, Alina Mungiu-Pippidi, George Voicu, Cristian Bocancea, Cristina Tanasoiu and Lucian Boia) applied the concept of political myths in their works, two of them contributed in a more significant way: Daniel Șandru in *Hypostases of Ideology in Political Theory* (2014) and Alexandra Ionașcu's *Fight for Legitimacy. Political Myths in Electoral Campaigns* (2012). The element of novelty Șandru introduced in his research was the “processual character of the imaginary” (Șandru 2014, 72), referring to political myths as changing structures depending on the political context instead of being permanent categories. However, Ionașcu

(2012) argued that political myths tend to slowly dissolve along with the process of professionalization of politics and democratic consolidation that occurred in the late 90s. The reference to “professionalization of politics” conveys the process of placing experts in strategic key positions, such as economics, contrary to arbitrary and politically motivated appointments which were lacking expertise in that specific field.

Methodology

The methods used in this research come from political science, history and anthropology since all these offer a different perspective on political myths. As for this particular research, the method used is political discourse, presidential speeches and party platform analysis as means for gaining legitimacy. This method allows a better understanding of the relation between written and spoken language and the political context of the 90s, especially during the presidential and parliamentary elections from 1990, 1992 and 1996. It also helps to establish how political myths delivered by politicians responded to the general need for reformation. During the elections, politicians used symbols to idealize the party they were endorsing in order to mobilize the voters. The politicians were also members of the society they lived in and thus, they shared the same socialization and consciousness with the voters. Having common understandings, norms and needs, their ability to consciously (or even unconsciously) mobilize voters with alike minded habitus was very high.

On one hand, this method identifies how political language can produce meaning for its audience if the symbols used are still alive in the collective memory of a nation. Discourse analysis emphasizes the contextual meaning of language and how political groups use language to achieve specific effects, such as political legitimation as a compensation for the authority void left by the disappearance of the Communist Party. On the other hand, this method has its limitations. Although discourse analysis has recently gone through a quantitative turn, the analysis is limited to the most popular discourses due to space shortage. Another weakness is that discourse and speech analysis only focus on what the politicians say or write and tend to neglect if they later acted in accordance with their political claims. There is usually a significant difference between political discourse and reality – such as fake promises, imaginary claims or unrealistic expectations – and this method lacks the instruments of establishing if political claims were on the same line with their later implementation in society.

Defining Myth and Social Imaginary

The Enlightenment assumption that myths would be replaced by scientific rationality has not come to pass (Ricketson 2001, 3). Science and reason have not replaced myth. Instead, myths and ideologies became more sophisticated and complex when secular political systems emerged in

the 19th century, which is why scholars argued that political myths are a constituent part of modernity (Tismăneanu 1998, 10). Myths are created through the collective memory and tradition of a community which “constructs an image of the past and gives that past both normative values and authenticity” (Ricketson 2001, 11).

In order to better understand the relation between myths and ideologies it is required to offer a brief explanation for each of them. Ideology and myths are elements of imaginary (Șandru 2014, 73). The “social imaginary” is defined as a socio-political construct that establishes symbolic mechanisms through which it seeks to ensure balance in community either by appealing to force or by political legitimacy⁷ (Șandru 2014, 74). In short, the “social imaginary” is a constituent part of every modern society and contributes to the projection of social reality using symbolic structures. The social imaginary is the broader image in which ideology manifests itself as the prerogative of the political authority.

Ideology is considered to be the core concept of social imaginary. Its function is to offer meaning and significance using mythical constructions in a legitimizing manner for the political authority (Șandru 2014, 75). It also possesses the power to establish symbolic relationships between individuals and groups. For example, nationalism is an ideology that offers different groups of people a sense of solidarity with a broader “imagined community” – the nation – which is represented by particular symbols, attitudes, community behaviors, beliefs, values, traditions, language and a common history (Anderson 2006, 6-7). As a result, ideology uses the symbolic abstraction of shared experiences of the community to convey a broader sense of solidarity. Therefore, ideology prevails and myth follows as its legitimizing tool.

While being already stated that myth is the legitimizing tool of ideology emanating from authority, this part will elaborate on what exactly is a myth. Myths are narrative structures that possess a “strong capacity for integration and simplification, showing a tendency to reduce the diversity and the complexity of the phenomena at a specific axis of interpretation” (Tanasoiu 2005, 113). Henri Tudor argues that “a myth is, by definition, a story, that is a narrative of events in dramatic form” (Tudor 1972, 16) considered to be the true representation of historical events: “A living myth is invariably intended as a *vera narratio*, a plain account of what actually happened” (Tudor 1972, 123). Bruce Lincoln emphasized that the narrative told by a myth must “possess both credibility and authority” and thus a strong narrative’s claims “are made not only to the status

⁷ Charles Taylor defined the “social imaginary” as factual and normative: “By social imaginary, [...] I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are not normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations”. Taylor also emphasizes that ordinary people “imagine their social surroundings in images, stories, and legends”, which create common understandings that makes “possible common practices and widely shared senses of legitimacy” (Taylor 2004, 23).

of truth, but what is more, to the status of paradigmatic truth” (Lincoln 1989, 24). The most important part of this idea is that “truth narratives” frame the historical understanding of past events and are able “to inspire collective loyalties, affinities, passions, and actions” (Tismăneanu 1998, 15), gathering and mobilizing people around its collective meaning.

Myths play a major role in every society. Myths connect society with its symbolic structures (Șandru 2014, 76). The power of myths is to institute certain realities, passed on in turn by certain social groups - rural, urban, media, political class, intellectual elite, military, students and others. Myths have a normative and empirical character, contributing to the establishment of a relationship between individuals and groups, of which the most visible is the political power relation. Myths can be both progressive (Sorel 1975) and regressive (Cassirer 2008) and they should not be “taken as expressing an absolute truth, because there is always the possibility that they contain an inadequate form of knowledge” (Bottici 2007, 176).

Defining Political Myth

What exactly is the difference between a myth and a political myth? Multiple scholars sought to define political myths and shed light on the difference between myths and political myths. According to Christopher Flood (2002, 44), “political myth is an ideologically marked narrative that claims to provide a true assessment of a set of past, present, or predicted (future) political events and is accepted as valid, in essence, by a social group”. Chiara Bottici (2007, 180) argues that a certain myth becomes a political myth when the story it tells “comes to make significance of the specifically political conditions for a certain social group or society”. By political conditions she meant the conditions “concerning the struggle for the distribution of power and resources which can, as a last resort, have recourse to physical force” (Bottici 2007, 180). In short, the political myths serve as a shared narrative that answers a need for significance and provides legitimacy to a certain political group in its struggle for political control.

In this regard, the understanding of political myths was also operationalized by Henri Tudor (1972, 124) who argued that political myths were believed to be true not because the historical evidence is compelling but because they “make sense of men’s present experience”. Moreover, it is not the political content of the myth that makes it political, but the fact that it gives meaning to a group in direct reference to its conditions of existence. In fact, the myth offers significance to a political condition of a certain group in society, such as a political party or a civic association. Another interpretation of the political myth was provided by Ricketson, who described it as “a ritualized presentation of the collective memories and traditions of a society in terms of a political present” (Ricketson 2001, 2). In “mythical time” the past becomes an essential component of present social realities, being part of “the struggle for memory against forgetting”

(Ricketson 2001, 2) which is in fact an institutionalized battle over the way the past is represented in the present.

Daniel Șandru (2014) offers a more elaborate definition on the meaning of political myth. He argues that “political myths are narrative structures of the imaginary, which gives meaning to the projections that groups and individuals manifest in society, allowing the interpretation of social reality in accordance with the values they share in a given context” (Șandru 2014, 52). The structural complexity of modern society requires a symbolic mediation of the relationships that groups and individuals maintain with their own political experiences (Șandru 2014, 77). This idea implies that symbols like national unity, strong leadership, freedom and others are the bearers of social values shared in a society in certain periods of time. For example, Șandru (2014) argues that “tolerance” and “pluralism” are two of the most integrated social values in today’s international political order. These values manifest through political statements, speeches, articles, discourses, political campaigns and so on. They became intrinsic to the common understanding of democracy.

As for these definitions, political myths are means in the struggle for power, shared narratives of communities and symbolic mediators between groups and political experiences. They are resilient. They will adapt and readapt along with changes in society, taking into account the political division, economic context, cultural and social background and even historical memory. A political myth comes from authorities and promotes practical purposes – including legitimacy – and it is successful only when it is believed to be a true story of the past. Finally, when assumed that political myth is a prescriptive narrative, its value does not depend on the degree of its historical accuracy but on the extent to which its story is believed and its goal is achieved. The goal was to legitimize the political actors in early 90s by establishing descent from prestigious groups in the past (or present) – revolutionaries, political prisoners, persecuted intellectual figures or political dissidents. In short, the myth is both a tool and a space where the performative act of power takes place.

Political Myths in Post-communist Romania

This section defines the political context in which the power engaged in mythmaking processes. The context can be described as what Pierre Bourdieu called the *habitus* “a system of durable dispositions structured to function as long-lasting principles which generate practices and perceptions in accordance with certain living conditions which created them and the habitus itself” (Bourdieu 1990, 54).⁸ Applying this definition to power relations in society, one can argue that

⁸ This is a synthesized definition. In Pierre Bourdieu’s (1990, 54) words: “The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles which generate and organize practices

each individual has its own *habitus* and his own mythology⁹. These are used in order to gain power in society by maintaining or shifting the existing relations of power. Power relations are based on a particular symbolic order. As Bourdieu (1987, 13) suggests, the symbolic power is manifested through the performative power of the official discourse of authorities. The “given context” or the *habitus* of the aftermath of the 1989 revolution was an authority void which was to be filled by emerging political parties. This historical fracture induced “a cultural trauma” of political uncertainty and social anxiety (Sztompka 2000, 452). As so, myths became the main providers of a sense of coherence and continuity in the chaos of the democratic reconstruction.

The article started from the premise that the fundamental attributions of political myths are the call for action and the reinforcement of identities and meanings. When referring to contemporary Romania, post-1990 analyses attested the existence of political myths, confirming that “the life of any community is organized around mythical constellations” (Boia 2001, 30). It is self-evident that the ideological framework of the post-communist Romanian society originates in previous socio-historical contexts, those being the pre-communist interwar period (1918-1945) and mainly the communist regime (1945-1989). In this regard, Romanian scholars¹⁰ argued that in the first years of the post-revolutionary Romania there was a state identity crisis caused by the lack of legitimacy which induced civic and political confusion. This favored the emergence of political abuses. Such violent episodes were the “mineriade” from 1990, 1991 and 1999, when miners from the Jiu Valley were called upon by authorities to disperse opposition protesters.

Moreover, the people who overthrew communism in 1989 were the same ones who were adapting, working and surviving inside the system a year before. Their dissatisfaction was related more to economic needs rather than to a pro-democratic civic stance. In terms of political education, the majority of the population was lacking the practice of free elections and had no civic and pluralist tradition. The communist regime has tried to repress every dissident voice using the Securitate secret police; therefore, it successfully created the typology of a “submissive citizen” (Verdery 2003, 44) with no political education. In this changing social and political landscape, the shock waves of the 1989 Revolution produced effects not only at the level of economy, culture and politics, but also in the social imaginary. Voters had little knowledge in terms of political representation and thus they became exposed to populism.

In the early 1990s, the new post-communist states, characterized by social atomization and fragmentation, witnessed the dissolution of traditional identities and thus the emergence of

and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them”.

⁹ Mythology defined as the sum of all political myths a political or social group use to legitimize itself in the public sphere.

¹⁰ Mentioned in the literature review.

political abuses (Ionaşcu 2012, 232). Political parties have used myths both as referential discourse and as a way to persuade the electorate. As a referential discourse, political parties followed their interwar legacy as it was the only one identity which would radically oppose the communist dictatorship. As a way of persuading the electorate, voting campaigns maximize the use and instrumentalization of myths both as elements of legitimacy and as narratives in order to attract massive support from the electorate (Ionaşcu 2012, 233). In this particular context, the political parties used symbolic structures to simplify the ideas delivered to the voters and gain authority and legitimacy on the basis of one stable understanding of the past.

In the following section the research will address four political myths identified in the political discourse of the authorities and party leaders in the early 90s.

The Myth of the Interwar Democracy

The first political myth is *the interwar period as a founding moment of the post-communist democracy*. Political scientist Cristian Bocancea identified three types of political messages after the 1989 revolution: a mobilizing and triumphant discourse of the ruling power (FSN), a contesting message from the opposition (PNL, PNTCD) and a moralizing message of both groups depending on their political stance (Bocancea 2002, 114). On this background, the revolution itself was claimed by each of these political groups in order to gain legitimacy: the representatives of the authority (FSN) claimed to be natural emanation of the revolution, while the representatives of the opposition claimed that the revolution has been stolen by former communists and ex-nomenklatura members which seized power in an abusive manner. After that, the mythical element emerged when the “historical parties” – National Liberal Party (PNL), Christian Democratic National Peasants’ Party (PNT-CD) and Romanian Social Democrat Party (PSDR) – tended to legitimize themselves by calling for the re-establishment of a historical link between the “confiscated present” and the interwar past. This imaginary bridge links the interwar period between 1918-1945 with the revolutionary Romania of 1989 as a natural continuity. In fact, the interwar legacy was the only identity available for the “historical parties” to grasp on. They used their own habitus to enable an existing, but silenced, memory of the repressed politicians in the past.

The interwar period was imagined as the Romanian golden age of democracy *par excellence* and it became a political narrative due to its usage in the discourses and programs produced by the representatives of “historical parties” and other intellectual and dissident groups. For example, the Liberals claimed their historical heritage by stating that “PNL continues the tradition of its founders of the country” (Ionaşcu 2012, 243) highlighting that “the interwar period was a prolific one for Romania and for the liberals, who promoted the agrarian reform, the unitary administrative organization, a new electoral legislation and measures to restore the economy” (available at pnl.ro).

The Christian-Democrats, gathered around the emblematic figure of Corneliu Coposu, stated: “We were never disbanded. We continued to consider ourselves an existing political party and we clandestinely campaigned as a party, which does not recognize an abusive abolition made by the Soviet army” (Coposu 1996, 147). Back in 1990, Coposu was 76 years old. He experienced the dissolution of Iuliu Maniu’s National Peasant Party in 1947 and later spent 17 years in detention during the communist regime. After the 1989 Revolution, Coposu became a *lieux de memoire* (Nora 1989, 12) as a symbol of an anti-communist oppressed dissident.

The myth of the interwar democracy can be understood using what Vladimir Tismăneanu calls “the mechanism of historical compensation”. In his word, “when conventional identifications fall apart and old belief systems become vacuous, there is a normal tendency for symbolic compensation” (Tismăneanu 1998, 35). This compensation is an idealistic projection of a past period rather than a realistic approach to it. Constructing an ideal past is of great importance in order to understand the psychological attraction of a political myth that offers a compensatory sense of common identity and meaning at the opposite end of a chaotic present. The “interwar democracy” had a special place in the social imaginary mainly because it was perceived as a prosperous period. It was associated with a prominent cultural elite, a functional democracy, an expanded territory of Greater Romania and a serving monarchy, which were all removed when the communists seized political power with the help of the Soviet army. If one takes a realistic approach to the historical reality, the unrealistic compensation unveils itself with all its shortcomings. The interwar period was not homogenous nor perfect. In fact, it had a lot of negative sides including the intellectual support for fascist and communist movements, false electoral procedure (the king appointing the prime minister before the elections), economic setback, high rate of unemployment, political crimes and the establishment of authoritarianism under the rule of king Carol II in 1938 (Schmitt 2016).

The Myth of Original Democracy

Another myth is the *original democracy* narrative. If “historical parties”¹¹ sought legitimacy in the early 90's by appealing to the tradition of their interwar origins, the National Salvation Front founded on 6th February 1990 and led by the ex-minister of the Communist Youth Ion Iliescu and other former communist cadres adopted a different strategy. The Front had no past political background nor a historical legacy. Iliescu portrayed the Front as “a political movement of broad social support that seeks the reorganization and profound renewal of Romanian society” (CFSN proclamation to the nation 1990) without any connection to past legacies. The rhetoric of political renewal aims to mark a radical break with the communist past and also redirect the voters’ attention

¹¹ The ‘historical parties’ are considered to be the liberals, Christian democrats and social democrats.

from the opposition claims of interwar continuity: “The Front seeks a total and irrevocable rupture with the communist system and its ideology” (CFSN proclamation 1990).

The *original democracy* idea was mentioned by the first post-communist Romanian president, Ion Iliescu in early 1990 in the broader context of the first presidential campaign from May 1990. The National Liberal Party (PNL) and the National Christian Democratic National Peasant’s Party (PNTCD), the main opposition parties at that time, threw Radu Câmpeanu and Ion Rațiu in the presidential race against the National Salvation Front’s neo-communist leader, Ion Iliescu. Both Câmpeanu and Rațiu had returned to Romania only after the Revolution, focusing their campaign discourse on Romania's move towards a Western-type democracy. They managed to attract the sympathy of right-wing intellectuals, but the rural majority was genuinely terrified by the prospect of a president “with a bow tie and Western speech” as Câmpeanu and Rațiu were both “lacking internal credibility” (Gallagher 2004, 112). The FSN's propaganda apparatus had spread the idea that Romania do not need a Western democracy model, as Ion Iliescu and his team would build an “original democracy”. The slogans like “We don't sell our country!” and the rumors according to which the opposition wanted to “offer the country on a plate” to the western powers, to close the factories and leave the Romanians without jobs had spread panic among rural voters (Ionașcu 2012, 264). The results of the first free scrutiny in post-communist Romania resulted in a crushing victory in favor of the Front. Ion Iliescu won 85,07% of the votes, while Radu Câmpeanu and Ion Rațiu only received 15% percentages together (available at: roaep.ro)

The myth of original democracy can be described as a tool of gaining legitimacy for the new organization of the state as well as an excuse for “original” political methods to seize and consolidate the power of a monopolistic and paternalist party. In fact, the sole purpose of this myth is to maintain the *status-quo* of power and to discredit the opposition parties. The original democracy was based on Front’s idea of a “general consensus” among Romanians under the rule of Ion Iliescu, meaning that no opposition parties and no political conflicts should interfere in the exercise of power (Bocancea 2002, 111). The political discourse of the neo-communists was fuelled by a nationalist and paternalist message which was in fact a continuation of Ceausescu’s discourse: the sacred national unity, the danger related to the loss of Transylvania in favor of the Hungarian minority and also the danger coming from within – opposition parties, students, NGOs and intellectuals. After winning the May 1990 elections, Ion Iliescu called the miners from the Jiu Valley to free the University Square in Bucharest from the so-called “hooligans” (as Iliescu described them) who were peacefully protesting the abuses of the National Front. On June 14 and 15, thousands of miners arrived in the capital and attacked the headquarters of opposition parties, civic organizations offices, publishing houses, Roma neighborhoods, and anti-FSN protesters

(Gallagher 2004, 115). The “original democracy”, a form of arbitrary authoritarian political behavior hidden under a democratic facet, was consolidating.

The Myth of Political Reform

The *political reform* myth might be the most persistent one in the Romanian public sphere. It is not restricted to the 90s only as it can even be found today in various political programs, public speeches and TV debates. This myth is part of the mythical constellation of the “saviour” (the reforms are portrayed as the only solution to solve social, economic and political problems) and the “unity” (the political authority pushed the rhetoric of radical reformation to unite the nation around a party modernization project) (Şandru 2014, 93). Although the state of democracy should not only be measured by the creation of political apparatus and institutions, but also by the consciousness of the society, the ideology reform was the clearest solution when such a drastic change occurred.

Back in 1989, it was self-evident that the fall of communism required a radical reconstruction of the state in order to establish a functional democratic regime. The political reform is related to institutional modernization and how political and intellectual elites understand to implement modernizing reforms. Shortly after the revolution, two visions on how democratization and modernization should take place emerged: a more conservative and skeptical approach from neo-communist National Salvation Front’s leader Ion Iliescu and a liberal and pro-capitalist reformist perspective from the opposition. The main directions of the reformist policies between 1990–1996 included the establishment of a “parliamentary democracy and the rule of law; a functional and modern market economy; social protection for disadvantaged categories; the relation with the cohabiting nationalities; Romania's integration in both the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization” (Cioabă and Nică 2004, 309).

In the 1990s, parties used the *catch-all* technique to fill the void of legitimacy by promising major reforms in a relatively short time. Ionaşcu argued that political actors compete in electoral promises to gain a favorable public image, which is part of the so-called “show politics” (Ionaşcu 2012, 263). In 1995, the new Democratic Convention leader Emil Constantinescu presented the “Contract with Romania”, a political document containing daring reforms which were to be adopted in the case of winning the 1996 elections. It stated that, withing 200 days from taking power, the party promised property titles for everyone, state-donations of properties to young workers, priests, teachers and doctors, pensions rightly recalculated, tax cuts, tougher penalties for crimes, administrative reform, infrastructure development and many more. Few of these promises were fulfilled, most being still unresolved to this day.

However, while populist promises were flourishing in the early 90s, electoral programs tended to become more professional as the Romanian democratic system was consolidating during the last years of the twentieth century. After 2000, political platforms got rid of mythical promises and unrealistic reforms. This transformation was brought by the professionalization of politics and by introducing specific objectives in the economic sector, where there was little room for political manipulation (Ionaşcu 2012, 262). Such objectives were the integration into the European Union, the independence of the judiciary and fight against corruption.

However, despite political professionalization, the rhetoric of political reform was never abandoned during presidential campaigns. For example, the third president of post-communist Romania, Traian Băsescu, heavily relied on the urgency of reforming the state during the 2004 electoral campaign which ended up in his favor. He later won another round of elections in 2008. At first, the reason behind his reform rhetoric was the need to stop corruption and to resolve the slow economic growth of Romania. Later on, during his second presidency, Băsescu faced the effects of the 2007-2008 financial crisis and thus urged the necessity of reforming the state. He said that “the state looks like a very fat person who climbed on the back of a very slim and thin person” (available at mediafax.ro). At that particular moment, the state was unable to sustain budget expenditures under the pressure of the economic crisis, and president Băsescu claimed that the state reform involves an institutional reform, a constitutional reform, an educational reform and the reorganization of the health system (Şandru 2014, 94). Even late in transition, the myth of political reform was used in every televised debate or discourse, suggesting that the democratic transition was never accomplished.

The Myth of the Providential Man

The last mythical-political structure is that of the *providential man*, portrayed as the “savior of the nation” and the person from whom everyone expects to miraculously resolve the post-communist crises and shortcomings. The providential man is a manifestation of the “personalization of politics”, where parties tend to completely identify with their leaders – Ion Iliescu for FSN, Corneliu Coposu for PNTCD or Traian Băsescu for PDL. Şandru (2014, 95) emphasized that Romania has always had a “voivodal political culture” which can be identified by referring to a leader endowed with exceptional or even superhuman qualities, whether he is a ruler, monarch, marshal, secretary general of the communist party or president of the republic. While everything was going through a radical change, voters would identify themselves with politicians they were used to. Politicians who came back from the West only after 1989 were not considered as those who had similar habitus with the majority. They were strangers, their rhetoric was different, their clothing was more refined, therefore it was hard to trust and vote them. The general

impression was that the majority had difficulties identifying themselves with an unfamiliar figure. Instead, they chose the representatives they knew, which were associated with same habitus and social conditions, and that was a secure choice in an insecure environment. As mentioned before, the workers mocked Ion Rațiu's dress code, as he always appeared on the TV with a bowtie.

It is important to highlight that this particular political inclination towards a strong leader is not exclusively endorsed by the majority but also by the intellectual elites. Thus, the relationship between political authority and intellectuals during the 1990s was based on a *libido dominandi*¹², where the public intellectuals created and projected the image of the providential man in the person of the political leader they supported at that time (Șandru 2014, 96). This process of mythical construction is not unusual. Throughout the last century of Romanian history, the intellectuals projected the image of the saviour on some at least controversial figures who were considered providential in their particular social and political context such as the fascist leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, marshal Ion Antonescu, the authoritarian king Carol II and the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu. The intellectuals were a legitimizing factor of power in the service of authority, which is why political leaders sought to draw them on their side to strengthen their political image. In 1990s and 2000s each of the three presidents who came to power sought to identify themselves with the mythical image of the providential man: Ion Iliescu presented himself as the “guarantor of national consensus” in 1990 and 1992 and “defender of democracy” in 2000 (Gallagher 2004, 111); Emil Constantinescu created the image of the “pro-Western reformist” in 1992 and 1996, while Traian Băsescu portrayed himself as the “guarantor of the Constitution”, player-president and fighter against corruption in 2004 and 2009.

Conclusions

In conclusion, every society represents and communicates its past through mythical symbols. Political myths can also become powerful sources of legitimation for political elites, that “mask unresolved legitimacy issues” (Ricketson 2001, 10) and manipulate support for often false legitimacy claims. The political myths were the creation of various political and intellectual groups and were used in the specific socio-political context of the post-communist Romania in order to obtain a higher status in the struggle for power.

One should be aware that during a political transition the normative values of a society tend to dissolve and readjust. This results in an authority void and thus allow different political groups to build their legitimacy using political myths instead of rational politics. Myths offered a simulated form of legitimacy that could never be more than compensatory, leading to its failure.

¹² Translated as “the desire to dominate” or “lust for domination”.

This is the reason why the constant revaluation of historical narratives and the changing referential symbols during the transition made the myths used in early 90s obsolete. After 2000, the electoral programs tended to get more politically practical and gave up the explicit mythical elements that substantiated the partisan vision regarding the collective identity. The newer political programs replaced political myths with a technocratic perspective.

Moreover, political myths will never disappear as they will most likely always be replaced by other mythical structures when new political, economic or social projects will enter the public debate. Just as other scholars concluded, the post-communist political and intellectual world “will remain a battlefield between different, often incompatible myths” (Tismăneanu 1998, 15). The most cautious verdict is that political myths will always be present, but in different forms and shapes and serving various political, economic, social, and cultural purposes. In today’s society, the rise of nationalist, extremist and populist political parties brought back various mythical structures to legitimize political radicalism which, if not rationally deconstructed, can have detrimental consequences on the political system, on human rights and on democracy itself. It is the duty of academia, civic organizations, and every responsible citizen to prevent the misuse of political myths for any other purposes than knowledge. A promising direction for future research on political myths can be the focus on the transformative nature of the myth, concerning its ability to take on new forms which are always adapted to the struggles of today’s world.

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Developing a Theoretical Framework for Processing the Negative Information in Social Media: Analysis of Twitter User Interaction with Negative Political Misinformation

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Abstract

The author explores the fundamental aspects of the rational decision-making process with the aim of understanding that negative information has the possibility to distort processing of political information. This article further develops a theoretical framework of the relationship between negative information on social media and its receiver. This article conducts an empirical analysis to partially prove this framework with the Twitter texts spread by the Internet Research Agency (IRA). This analysis indicates that: (1) tweets containing negative information had more interaction than tweets containing positive information; (2) tweets containing anger-inducing content had more interaction than tweets containing fearful content. These results suggest that negative emotion would have a more significant effect on this process, and different negative emotions can have a distinct effect on information processing.

Keywords

Information Processing; Rationality; Emotion; Agenda-setting; Social Media

Introduction

A critical aspect of studying political behavior is gaining vital insights into how individuals are affected when processing the information required to make a political judgment. This entails attention due to the increased threats of misinformation which may distort the political behavior of individuals. Various elements of misinformation require deeper research into their effectiveness in distorting political behavior. Therefore, this article focuses on the role of emotion in processing political information and compares specific emotions to identify which emotions are more compelling in influencing political decisions.

Among the various providers of public information, the media is the main supplier of political information. In this regard this article introduces agenda-setting theory to demonstrate the ability of the media to sway the focus of individuals on an issue. Although agenda-setting theory mainly examines the relationship between traditional media and its audience, researchers have found that information shared on social media can have a similar effect on its viewers. Further research on agenda-setting demonstrates that the intensity of emotions in the information has a distinct impact on shaping the issues for the information receiver.

This article provides a theoretical framework for the ability of negative information to affect a voter's behavior. To conduct an empirical analysis to partially prove this framework, the author analyzed tweet texts from the Internet Research Agency (IRA) demonstrating false information in US society, and finds that negative emotions in tweet texts elicit more interaction than positively written tweet texts. These results will be corroborated with agenda-setting theory to indicate that information from those tweets may have distorted the voting behavior of Americans as well as their perspective on various domestic social issues.

Literature Review

The Theory of Agenda-Setting

The theory of agenda-setting originated from a US presidential election experiment conducted by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1969 (McCombs and Guo 2014, 251). Based on this experiment, the researchers found that there was a significant positive correlation between public issues as ordered by media descriptions and the perceptions of the participants regarding which issues were the most important for them (McCombs and Guo 2014, 252). The results suggest that issues covered by the media's agenda had a compelling influence on constructing individuals' agendas concerning those issues (McCombs and Guo 2014, 251).

The theory of agenda-setting broadly has two determinant factors, namely the formation of accessibility by a certain degree of exposure by the media and the need for orientation (NFO). The degree of issues' salience among individuals is decided by how relevant the issues are to them

and how accessible the information about those issues are to them from their memory storage. In this aspect, it is essential to acknowledge agenda-setting as an excellent tool to make information more accessible. The degree of media exposure is a critical factor for familiarizing individuals with these issues and eventually leading them to bear a desired attitude of the media toward the issues (Kim, Scheufele, and Shanahan 2002, 9).

The NFO implies that the degree of desire to understand specific issues varies between individuals. The significance of the NFO is that it provides a psychological explanation of the impact of agenda-setting on individuals (Matthes 2005, 423). The conditions of the NFO are systematically organized by focusing on the relevance of specific issues for individuals and their certainty about these issues being discussed in the media ((Matthes 2005, 424). If individuals are not interested in a specific issue and have a low level of uncertainty about it, they are regarded as having a low NFO (424). Conversely, if individuals realize that an issue is relevant to them but they are less certain of this issue, they will have a high NFO (Matthes 2005). Considering the relationship between the NFO and the agenda-setting effect, individuals who have a high NFO would have a similar agenda to the media, due to the tendency that more information is available from mass media (McCombs and Weaver 1973). To summarize, the relation between NFO and the issues works as follows:

- High need for orientation: relevance of issue is high, but certainty is low
- Low need for orientation: relevance of issue is low, but certainty is high

The theory of agenda-setting was further developed to understand how the portrayal of issues can make individuals focus on certain aspects of the issue rather than viewing it as a whole. Attribute agenda-setting theory suggests that various attributes of an issue, which are described and ranked according to their importance by the media, can lead individuals to focus on those attributes as well (McCombs and Guo 2014, 254). Attributes here are primarily defined and clarified in terms of political decisions. Attributes are classified into two groups, namely substantive and affective attributes (McCombs et al. 1997). The substantive attributes of a political candidate consist mostly of personal information about the candidate, such as their personality and educational background, whereas the affective attributes are the positive, neutral, or negative descriptions of the substantive attributes (McCombs et al. 1997, 706).

The distinction between the two types implies that the effect of agenda-setting can exploit the various attributes to deliver the salience of the objectives. The emphasized attributes resonate more significantly among individuals than other attributes disregarded by the media (McCombs 2005, 547). This hypothesis is also called a compelling argument which suggests that the salience of an issue is decided mainly by which attributes are accentuated by the mass media; individuals

would be isolated in a salient area of attributes when it comes to information processing (McCombs and Ghanem 2001, 76; McCombs and Guo 2014, 257).

Attribute agenda-setting has more impact on individuals when the information is negatively described than when it is positively depicted (Wu and Coleman 2009, 784). For example, frequent negative exposure of the government's economic performance by the media resulted in individuals having a lower assessment of the government (Sheafer 2007, 30-31). Another research similarly indicates that when individuals were asked to express their feelings regarding presidential candidates, more attention was given to candidates' negative attributes than their positive ones (Klein 1991, 412-18).

Although agenda-setting theory was chiefly developed by focusing on traditional media outlets, social media has also emerged in the area of agenda setting for its powerful ability to connect with individuals and diffuse information among people. People do not only share information on social media, but they are also exposed to numerous pieces of information from people with whom they have relationships. These relationships on social media can be built with people they know or with people with whom they share an interest in a specific topic. The diffusion of information derived from this connectivity has been a significant target for political campaign advertisements.

Social media can be a transmitter of political information from mass media, which results in shaping the salience of issues for its users (Feezell 2017, 2). As the communication distance between traditional media and the audience has become less, reverse information sharing between online social media and traditional media can also occur, due to the agility of sharing events on social media (Harder, Sevenans, and Aelst 2017, 13; Sayre et al. 2010, 5). It suggests that social media plays an intermediate role in agenda setting between social media and traditional media, meaning that the salient information about specific events can be shared from traditional media to social media, and vice versa.

This article follows the suggestion by Feezell (2017) that social media does not only play an intermediate role but, as a platform, has a direct agenda-setting effect for individuals. Camaj (2014, 695-96) identified that agenda-setting effect is great among individuals who have a high interest and low uncertainty on the issues – known as having an active involvement NFO – due to their tendency to actively receive the information. The source of information of the individuals who have an active involvement NFO is mostly politically biased media sources, inferring that the reason for consuming those media is that their political behavior and beliefs are already shaped (Camaj 2014, 695-96). Empirical research by Taber and Lodge (2006) clearly illustrates that individuals whose political values are firmly formed display the tendency to be more polarized in

their political point of view by seeking more agreeable information than incongruent political information. This biased way of searching information does not mean that those individuals constantly refrain from receiving incongruent political opinions. Rather, they are prone to consume information which solidifies their political preference and even engage in a mental process with noticeable efforts to negate disparate political opinions (Garrett 2009, 692).

In contrast, Feezell (2017, 4) has indicated that agenda-setting effects, through unexpected exposure to information shared on social media, are compelling to individuals who have less political inclination on specific issues but have a passive involvement NFO as being less interested and uncertain on the issues. The reason for this phenomenon is that incidental exposure to political information through social media undermines the deliberate avoidance of information on specific topics (Feezell 2017, 4). It also signifies the salience of information from mass media shared in social media, because this information sharing takes place in a trusted relationship on a social media platform. Hence, it is considered that:

- Active involvement NFO: the level of relevance and certainty is high on the issues
- Passive involvement NFO: the level of relevance and certainty is low on the issues

Agenda-setting through social media will have a varying impact among individuals depending on (a) how the shared information accentuates certain aspects of political issues since its connectivity provides an opportunity for individuals to encounter various political information from diverse sources for similar topics, and (b) the extent to which their political inclination is firmly formed. Thus, recognizing what type of NFO is necessary to correctly estimate how their angle on the issues will be similar compared to the agenda from information sources.

Bounded Rationality

Rationality is a central concept in social science which helps to understand the decision-making processes of individuals. The development of rational choice theory (RCT) and its application to decision-making processes on various social phenomena were initiated by the extensive application of rational interaction among individuals to economic behavior (Scott 2000, 126). According to RCT, decision-making is based on individual rationality. The theory suggests that individuals behave in a way that utilizes their cognitive abilities to maximize their self-interest (Smith 1991, 878). The basic assumption of rational decision-making is that individuals who are rational when making decisions have a concrete preference for a specific decision-making process, and will eventually choose the best alternatives using criteria based on that preference (Osborne and Rubinstein 1998, 834).

Another premise of RCT postulates that individuals will have complete information regarding their decision at their disposal (Green 2002, 10). This suggests that individuals, when

making a rational decision, are fully capable of cognitively calculating the outcomes of all alternatives using all relevant information. However, considering the limited conditions under which individuals have all the information when making decisions, individuals who have inadequate information would have an increased degree of uncertainty when deciding on a rational alternative. This does not necessarily mean that the alternative chosen under these conditions is always irrational and thus undesirable. Lipshitz and Strauss (1997, 153) have suggested that individuals can even use the tactics of utilizing the information which they have already accumulated using their cognitive capacity to predict a set of highly possible outcomes. In this process, the role of such information is that it reduces uncertainties with the help of constraints inherent in individuals, and therefore it allows individuals to acknowledge the risk of each alternative (Grunig 1966, 18).

The opposition of RCT has criticized its limited application of various social circumstances because of its mathematically calculated methodologies. There is also suspicion regarding individuals' lack of the capability to process information, which often results in making undesirable decisions. In this regard, the theory of bounded rationality emerged from the need to produce an empirical prediction of human behavior while acknowledging that complete rationality is unrealistic and that emotion is crucial in cognitive decision-making (Selten 1999, 3). Jones (2003) has pointed out that perfection in calculating and comparing the pay-offs of each alternative is highly unrealistic, because individuals' cognitive capacity is often limited by their attention span for each alternative, suggesting that individuals tend to focus on alternatives sequentially (399). Such lack of calculation capacity is connected to their limited ability to process information, as suggested by the difference between the marginal utility calculated by a normative RCT model and models including frequent errors based on individuals' limited ability to process information (De Palma, Myers, and Papageorgiou 1994, 420).

The capability of individuals to process the information is not the only crucial attribute when making a decision, but the environment also becomes a primary factor in decision-making. The social networks to which individuals belong become places of distinctive analysis and searches for similar information (Forester 1984, 27). Searching for information on such networks can strengthen an individual's decision-making boundaries, due to the highly selective information found on such networks (Forester 1984, 28). Considerable research on political communication suggests that social media have an echo chamber effect which magnifies this penchant for searching political information. Algorithms in social media discreetly curate user's experiences in a platform and often dominate the selection of the information the user will encounter. Social media platforms apply various primary features to render its algorithm, such as the popularity of

the topics in specific regions, interaction history of users with other users, and highlighting recent information over old information (Bozdag 2013, 216). Those algorithms filter undesirable information and suggest the most suitable information for the users (211). Social media users do have some degree of authority on adjusting the preference of information exposure, but receiving personalized information through their adjustment is one of the reasons for having an echo chamber effect, as individuals are mostly exposed to their preferred information. Individuals circumscribed in this filter bubble will sacrifice the opportunities to encounter diverse opinions on specific political subjects and be eventually willing to withdraw from the discussion with other individuals with contrasting political points of view (Spohr 2017, 151; Cinelli et al. 2021, 5).

Bounded rationality states that individuals use heuristic decision-making. The use of heuristics suggests a reasonable explanation for reaching a decision based on a limited amount of information or by neglecting unnecessary information to reduce uncertainty and complexity (Kurz-Milcke and Gigerenzer 2007). In terms of political decision-making, heuristics are used as shortcuts by individuals who normally lack information and concerns about politics, allowing them to reach decisions with less cognitive efforts (Lau and Redlawsk 2001, 952). One of the notable examples of using heuristic skills for political decisions is endorsement. Endorsement is defined as an announcement of public support by other groups or individuals to the specific political candidate or activity on a specific matter. Individuals use endorsement as reliable information on complicated political decisions along with low-cost information when they do not have the motivation to obtain expensive political information (Lupia 1992, 393). However, it has been found that these individuals are vulnerable to having similar political expressions to those of the endorsers on a specific issue, when they acknowledge that the endorsers are related to that issue and they themselves do not have enough information on the political topics and have low motivation to process further political information from other sources (Chaiken and Ledgerwood 2012, 261; Forehand, Gastil, and Smith 2004, 2226).

Another example of using heuristic skills for processing political information is how individuals utilize the partisanship of candidates as a cue to make their political decision, such as voting. Voters use partisanship to determine the degree of affinity of their political values with specific candidates. Partisanship is regarded as low-cost information with a huge impact on their choice and prompts individuals to vote for their supporting party with a sense of belonging in a political group and bolstering the interest of this group through voting (Schaffner and Streb 2002, 560; Krishna and Sokolova 2017, 538). Individuals belonging to homogenous social networks will adhere to partisanship to access the political information due to the less occasion of encountering diverse information within this network (Krishna and Sokolova 2017, 541). Voters who place

heavy value on their political ideology for making a political decision depend less on partisanship cues because reliance on political ideology requires considerable effort into making political decisions (Krishna and Sokolova 2017, 542). It implies that the effectiveness of utilizing partisanship as a heuristic skill varies with individuals. Despite individuals having solid partisanship, one's political values nullify the significant effect of partisanship, leading to an increased likelihood of consuming discrepant political information from the contemporary environment where individuals became exposed to more political information from social media (Messing and Westwood 2012).

As there are numerous impeding factors to accomplishing rational decisions, bounded rationality provides an alternate route for acquiring optimized decision-making by using heuristic skills. Heuristic skills can be used as an efficient tool without expending more effort collecting additional information. Even so, it is related to an additional question together with the growing concern of the influence of social media on information processing, namely whether this skill can be used for appropriate political judgments inasmuch as the use of heuristic skills to process information is based on limited cognitive ability.

Impact of Emotion on Processing Political Information

The affective intelligence theory which emphasizes the role of emotion in decision-making discloses that emotional reaction precedes consciousness and so is leading decision-making process itself (Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen 2000, 44). It illustrates that emotion is another important aspect of heuristics to achieve an optimized decision. Affective heuristics suggest that individuals make decisions not only by focusing on reasoning, but also by considering how it feels to reach a decision (Slovic et al. 2007, 1343). It indicates that if individuals like an activity the risk of reaching a decision would be considered low and the benefits high; if they do not like the activity, the risk would be considered high and the benefits low (Slovic et al. 2007, 1343). For this reason, emotion has a significant influence on processing information, and emotions such as anger, fear, and enthusiasm have been studied exclusively (Mutz 2009, 83). This article focuses on two emotions, namely fear and anger, for the sake of developing a theoretical framework.

The influence of fear on an individual is mostly treated as interchangeable with the emotion of anxiety (Brader and Marcus, 2013). For the sake of simplicity, this article also uses both emotions interchangeably in terms of processing political information. Fear is provoked when individuals are confronted by a situation of uncertainty and threat which they are not used to resolving (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017, 446). This emotion causes the demeanor and cognitive processes of individuals to be altered, to focus on tackling the issue which induced the fear (Brader and Marcus 2013, 178). Anger, on the other hand, is caused by threats from the

external environment when individuals deem that their benefits are in danger and that they know the target that is responsible for this (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017, 446).

These two emotions in particular have distinct effects on individuals in terms of information processing. The more anxious individuals are, the more likely they are to search for more information, whereas positively driven emotions tend to make individuals participate more in politics (Marcus, Neuman, and Mackuen 2000, 61). When individuals are influenced by feelings of anxiety, they become less inclined to use heuristic information processing and are more susceptible to accepting perspectives that they could not consider before with the increased degree of compromise (MacKuen et al. 2010, 441, 452). Fear also influences them to reevaluate their choices in the current situation by putting less importance on their prior beliefs (Brader 2005, 391). Connecting with this finding, Parker and Isbell (2010, 2) found that fear stimulates individuals to rely on more detailed information for their judgment in voting and thus to reach a cautious decision (2). Avoidance is another emotional reaction to alleviate feelings of fear in the environment where individuals experience frightening situations (Lemerise and Arsenio 2000, 114). The use of avoidance depends on the level of anxiety individuals may have, meaning that intense fearful emotion is most likely to stimulate avoidance behavior in individuals (Lee 2019, 151).

Compared to anxiety, anger has a different impact on an individual's cognition and information processing. In relation to cognition, angered individuals have a decreased understanding of the situation, meaning that risk is recognized to a lesser degree, and they are prone to be less deliberate in their actions, resulting in a strong possibility of taking risky actions (Huddy, Feldman, and Cassese 2007, 206). The stimuli of anger provoke anger-related cognitive conditions, followed by information processing in this condition (Isbell, Ottani, and Burns 2006, 66). The unique point of this information processing is that this processing leads to manipulation of mentality, resulting in additional anger towards the target situation or person (Isbell, Ottani, and Burns 2006, 66). Furthermore, anger causes individuals to use more heuristic hints for processing information (Tiedens and Linton 2001, 977). These heuristic hints guide individuals to make judgments about targets based on their social stereotypes, because decision processing is accelerated when an individual experiences physical or mental harm (Bodenhausen, Sheppard, and Kramer 1994, 58-59).

Fear is most likely to lead individuals to make less biased decisions by stimulating them to search for more information and perform organized information processing as seeking further information regulates this process. Anger causes individuals, who have a biased belief about the anger-inducing situation, to easily accept a message framed by the content stimulating the anger

(DeSteno et al. 2000, 412). These findings on the effect of anger in information processing suggest that this emotion leads to a high possibility of distorting political judgments.

Development of Theoretical Framework

This article presents theoretical explanations of people's inability to make rational political decisions by presenting the negative aspects of heuristic skills in terms of bounded rationality. Negative emotions, such as fear and anger, have been found to exert various impacts on processing political information. Attribute agenda-setting signifies not only the salience of an issue created by the media, but an individual's behavior can also be notably swayed to be negative on issues when information on those issues is negatively presented by the media. Although social media has weakened traditional media for its dominant position on agenda-setting, the findings of the agenda-setting effect through traditional media can reasonably apply to social media.

Therefore, this article provides a theoretical framework that synthesizes the theories presented in the article namely that:

The political information shared on social media has a great possibility to shape the political behavior of social media users, who have a passive involvement NFO when this information is written in a negative tone.

This article regards passive involvement NFO as the main principle in this framework. Social media users who are at the beginning stage of shaping specific political beliefs and have this type of NFO would unconsciously not expend much effort in searching for information on political issues due to less interest in politics. Yet, they have frequent exposure to political information in social media with its uniquely arranged environment for users, which makes users to have selective exposure to political information.

The political information gained from social media does not assure that social media users become knowledgeable in issues through that information. Unintended encounters with political information through social media may induce individuals who are less interested in politics to obtain a feeling of knowing the political issues without verifying the authenticity of that information (Feezell and Ortiz 2019). The theoretical framework suggests the possibility of shaping the political behavior of social media users. Feezell (2016) found that repeated selective exposure to online political information having similar agendas may induce users to engage in more online political activity than users who encounter political information having different perspectives. This finding suggests that reinforcement of that feeling by increased selective exposure in social media can develop into a perceived political point of view.

Empirical Analysis

Hypotheses

In order to partially confirm the theoretical framework, the empirical analysis demonstrates that different emotions in politically related tweet texts indicate distinct degrees of interaction with Twitter users. Hence, this article proposes the following primary hypothesis and secondary hypothesis:

- Tweets that are written in negative contexts receive, on average, more likes than tweets that are written in positive contexts.
 - Tweets that contain the emotion of anger receive, on average, more likes than tweets that contain the emotion of fear.

In the above hypotheses, the average number of likes for tweet texts represents the degree of interaction with users. Although this interaction cannot imply the behavior of each user who clicks the “like” button for a tweet text, it could suggest that Twitter users interact more with negatively stated tweets than with positively stated ones – this behavior could be anticipated by the theoretical explanation of this article. The secondary hypothesis is based on the inference that fearful tweets elicit less interaction from individuals who are exposed to these tweets; individuals would try to find additional information, which could increase the possibility of encountering factual information or may avoid fearful tweets instead of further information searching. By contrast, angry tweets would mainly cause distortion rather than further information processing to examine the genuineness of the information and would result in a stronger tendency to “like” those tweets than fearful tweets.

Methodology

In this article, Twitter data from the IRA were used for the analysis. Since 2018, Twitter has allowed access to its data archive, which has been opened to the public to reveal interference in the societies of various nations by foreign nations utilizing massive Twitter accounts to manipulate Twitter users. Twitter has updated this archive since then and this article analyzed the first dataset released in October 2018. The IRA is an institution in St. Petersburg, Russia, which was established to propagate misinformation to various social classes in targeted nations by infiltrating social media services (The Guardian 2018). This agency implemented the various tactics not only to blindly support the Trump campaign in the presidential candidate race and the presidential election of 2016 but also to divide societies in the US by exploiting conflicts which are deeply inherent within those societies (Shane and Frenkel, 2018; Shane 2018).

The dataset for this research study included 3,613 accounts created by the IRA and the tweet texts for each account. The evidence of interaction with Twitter users is presented as quotes,

replies, likes, and retweet counts. For the analysis in this article, Twitter texts written in English were chosen. In its operation on Twitter, the IRA generated two types of accounts, main accounts and auxiliary accounts (Cleary 2019). Main accounts, which had more than 1,000 followers each, were the main factory creating tweets, and auxiliary accounts delivered those tweets through the function of retweeting (Cleary 2019). Therefore, the author decided to utilize the “like” count rather than the retweet count as evidence of interaction with real Twitter users. The selection of the tweets in the dataset was based on the combination of the following conditions: the Twitter accounts had to have more than 100 followers and the tweets had to have more than 100 likes. Thus, of the 344,475 tweets in English, which had 3,298,121 “like” counts in total, 3,536 tweets were selected for analysis, which had 2,954,285 “like” counts, equivalent to 89.6% of the “likes” for the total number of tweets in English.

Data Analysis

The author analyzed the text of 3,536 tweets to determine emotion and decided to categorize 1,239 tweets as “unidentified tweets,” as the author could not detect the emotion, due to uncertainty regarding the contexts of these tweets. In this dataset, there is a considerable number of tweets that include shortened YouTube links. Although most of the YouTube links were not available, the author identified the emotion of tweets with YouTube links by focusing on the texts, so it was not necessarily required to watch the YouTube video to detect the emotion. However, there were also numerous tweet texts in which emotion could not be detected without the context of the YouTube video and, as a result, they were categorized as unidentified tweets. Most of the tweets in the dataset were disseminated not only as text but as text with images. Twitter also provides the images in the dataset but the author decided to focus on the text for the analysis, due to the difficulty of determining the corresponding images for each tweet in the dataset. In this regard, the author categorized tweet texts which have an uncertain meaning in the text which is clearly expressed through the image of the tweet as unidentified tweets. In addition, the author classified 228 tweets as “tweets for description,” as those tweets mainly described a specific situation or person. Each tweet in this category has a clear context to understand what it means, but specific emotions are not indicated in the tweet.

Table 1: Number of Tweets and its likes for each category

Emotion	Tweet counts	Number of likes
Anger	936	915,664
Fear	137	73,268
Negativity other than anger and fear	465	361,553
positive	531	404,529

Source: Author.

Except for the tweets categorized as “unidentified tweets” and “tweets for the description,” 1,538 tweets were classified as tweets indicating negative emotion, and 531 tweets as indicating positive emotion. Tweets categorized as indicating negative emotion were further classified as indicating “anger,” “fear,” and “negativity expressed other than anger and fear.” To decide which emotion was mainly displayed in the tweet texts, the author contemplated not only specific words which can easily identify specific emotions, but also the contexts of the tweets, considering the various social situations in the US and other countries.

Table 2 provides examples of Twitter texts indicating the emotion of anger. The author identified the contexts of being unfair, illegitimate, or undeserved, which are essential characteristics of the emotion of anger (Brader and Marcus 2013, 180). As presented in Table 2, the IRA exploited the sensitive political issues in the US, such as the illegal immigrant issue, to derive anger by emphasizing the unfairness within the context of the text. Along with these characteristics, contexts designed to assign blame or responsibility for mostly fabricated situations and incidents were also classed as manifestations of anger, as this emotion can be aroused and escalated by the implication of being harmed or having one’s rights violated (Russell and Giner-Sorolla 2011). Indeed, during the analysis of tweet texts, the author observed numerous of them designed to provoke users to have the emotion of anger. Those tweet texts condemn various targets or situations with misinformation. The impact of anger on the political behavior of individuals increases their likelihood of political participation (Weber 2012, 10). This aspect of anger suggests that provoking messages in the text is another crucial indicator to decide which tweet texts indicate anger.

Table 2: Examples of Twitter text indicating emotion of Anger

Don't ever tell me kneeling for the flag is disrespectful to our troops when Trump calls a sitting Senator “Pocahontas” in front of Native American war heroes.
#MAGA hats should be placed right next to Nazi flags as symbols of fascism and white supremacy!
Hiring 10k refugees makes liberals feel warm BUT we have homeless vets that need those jobs. #BoycottStarbucks #ReasonsToProtest #MuslimBan
#FakeVotingFacts: Obama is now openly on live TV telling illegals that nobody will stop them from voting! I can't believe I heard that.
Liberals can identify 50 shades of gender but can't tell the difference between legal and illegal immigration. #MarchForScience
Another black girl is being asked to straighten her hair or face disciplinary action by a school by way of expulsion

Source: Author.

Table 3: Examples of Twitter text indicating emotion of fear

BREAKING NEWS: Protests run out of hand in central Paris. Pure madness.
FOX NEWS ALERT: Jihadis using religious visa to enter US, experts warn
A reminder that ISIS terrorists said they would infiltrate the "refugee" program and attack the West. #WorldRefugeeDay
Hungarian PM Viktor Orban: "European Union leaders and George Soros are seeking a new, mixed, Muslimized Europe"
Dr. Seb Gorka: 'Americans understand the danger of choosing Hillary'
BREAKING: Violence and chaos breaks out as Antifa attacks pro-Trump rally in #Berkeley. #TaxMarch

Source: Author.

In order to systematically detect the fear in the tweet texts, this article adopts the suggestion that a message which prompts fearful emotion has two elements: severity and susceptibility (de Hoog, Stroebe and de Wit 2007, 261). Severity is the outcome for individuals not taking measures for prevention, whereas susceptibility is the risk for negative circumstances (Tannenbaum et al. 2015, 1181). The IRA mainly used misinformation about illegal immigration to the US, the issue of refugees, terrorism, and social-democratic activity, spreading false information about violent demonstrations. As presented in Table 3, fearful tweet texts devised fabricated susceptibility in that misinformation to deliver the possibility of false peril to society. Together with this susceptibility, severity in tweet texts attempted to delude individuals by describing the negative consequences of this possibility. Individuals appear to have the strongest fear reaction when interpreting the subjects in the information as forthcoming threats to their welfare (Myrick and Nabi 2017, 6). The author identified that the IRA tried to use misinformation about immediate threats as a tactic to magnify the emotion of fear among users.

Table 4: Examples of Twitter text indicating positive emotion

Happy 4th of July! May the United States stay united and independent forever! #IndependenceDay
RETWEET if you support our troops!
On this day in 1975, Arthur Ashe becomes the first and only Black man to win the men's singles title at Wimbledon.
Donald Trump is a candidate that speaks directly to the people! #TrumpInDetroit #Trump
"My husband will NEVER give up! You can ALWAYS count on him!" @FLOTUS introducing the president. #MAGA #TrumpScoutBadges
In Greek mythology, Memnon was an Ethiopian king and a warrior who was considered to be Achilles' equal in skill.

Source: Author.

Tweets categorized as indicating positive emotion mostly propagated information to support a specific person, situation, or political ideology. IRA notably created numerous tweets in a positive context by providing examples of various successes of mainly African-Americans. The purpose of those tweets is likely to disturb the inspection by Twitter and attract more users to their accounts, resulting in exposure of their negatively stated other tweets to the audience (Howard et al. 2018, 9).

Results

The primary and secondary hypotheses examined the relationship between the degree of the emotion of a tweet text and the degree of interaction with that tweet text by comparing the mean values calculated from the total number of “likes” for each category of emotion. As the number of tweets and the difference in the total number of “likes” varies greatly, the simple comparison of the mean value for each category without further statistical analysis is insufficient to prove each hypothesis. For this reason, the author performed Welch’s *t*-test using the programming language R because there were significant differences of variance detected between the category of positive and negative emotion and between the category of anger and fear. The use of this statistical method was to determine whether there was a statistical significance in the difference between the mean of the total number of “likes” in the category of negative emotion and that in the category of positive emotion, and between the mean of the total number of “likes” in the anger category and that in the fear category. During the analysis, the author noted that several tweet texts received huge amounts of “likes.” The author decided to winsorize those outliers rather than trimming for the following reason: the author assumes that those outliers were displayed on the social feed of an ample number of Twitter users because IRA Twitter accounts that created those outliers might have more social media influence than other accounts and effectively exploited the topics to grasp the attention of the other users.

Table 5: T-test results of relationship between the categories of Negative and Positive emotion

Emotion	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Negative	1538	721	1179	1785	4.89	0.000*
Positive	531	526	602			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Source: Author.

The results of the analysis conducted using Welch’s *t*-test to test the primary hypothesis are presented in Table 5. The test result reveals that the mean of the total number of “likes” in the category of negative emotion is higher than the mean in the category of positive emotion ($t_{(1785)} = 4.89, p < 0.05$). This outcome satisfies the condition of the primary hypothesis and demonstrates that negativity in information certainly has a significant impact on individuals, as indicated by the

greater interaction with the negatively stated information than with the positively stated information. From this impact, it could be inferred that the negative information has more appeal to the information receivers than the positive information.

The results of the analysis conducted using Welch's *t*-test to test the secondary hypothesis are presented in Table 6. The test result reveals that the mean of the total number of "likes" in the anger category is higher than the mean in the fear category ($t_{(648)} = 7.47, p < 0.05$). This significant difference in the average number of "likes" between fear and anger is because fear was more likely to induce detailed information seeking regarding the contents of the tweets, resulting in less interaction with the Twitter users. By comparison, the emotion of anger was more likely to distort this information-seeking pattern by provoking manipulation of further information processing and therefore increased the likelihood of responding to the tweets in the anger category.

Table 6: T-test results of relationship between the categories of Anger and Fear

Emotion	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Anger	936	653	884	648	7.47	0.000*
Fear	137	375	274			

*Significant at $p < 0.05$ level.

Source: Author.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article has attempted to explain the various obstacles to rational political information processing. It explores the bounded rationality that clearly states individuals are highly unable to make completely rational decisions, and how the influence of social media will narrow the range of information acquisition and will aggravate the information processing. The theoretical framework developed by the author suggests that the negativity of information is the vital aspect influencing information receivers. When processing political information, this negativity will predispose the receivers to be more susceptible to have distorted opinions on the political topics in that information. This article addressed that the severity of this susceptibility will be robust to the social media users who have a passive involvement NFO and have no particular interest in a specific political topic.

The findings from reports by the Computational Propaganda Research Project (CPRP) (Howard et al. 2018) and New Knowledge (DiResta et al. 2019) suggest that African Americans, conservatives, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) supporters, liberals, Mexican Americans, and Muslims in the US were mainly targeted on Facebook and Instagram. Through the analysis of Twitter data, the author found that, very similarly, these groups were targeted on Twitter as well. The IRA targeted various attributes of these groups by exploiting divisions in US society. The author assumes that these attributes, presented in a negative tone, had magnified the

manipulation of social media users to have distorted views on the topics discussed in the tweets and consequently to reduce the reliability of targeted persons or groups based on the theoretical framework in this article.

The author presumes that the sudden exposure of those tweets to other users could be another factor to magnify the influence of those tweets. It has been discussed that information sharing on Twitter could circumvent a user's avoidance of political issues. The degree of exposure of such tweets depends on how many routes of receiving information Twitter users have. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) have found that hashtags and URLs can be used effectively for displaying tweets to the various Twitter users. Likewise, enormous number of tweets analyzed for this article also included the hashtag function and URLs to disseminate content. The author assumes that this sudden exposure would have an emotional contagion effect on the users who received the emotional tweets in the dataset for the following reason: emotions in the shared information through social media enable users to experience similar emotions, and this emotional contagion effect does not depend on the level of relationship social media users form (Kramer, Guillory, and Hancock 2014, 8789). The theoretical framework of this article expects that this effect will be potent to the users who have passive involvement NFO, meaning that those users might sympathize with this content in the tweet text more than non-emotional tweet texts.

Empirical analysis of this article presents the notable difference of the mean value between tweets in the category of anger and fear. This result suggests that anger in tweets in this dataset attracted more attention from social media users, especially those who had similar opinions toward those tweets. One of the reasons for this attraction is that angry social media users exhibit the echo chamber effect because they consume more corroborating information to strengthen their political beliefs. In addition, they exhibit apparent hostility and tend toward arguing with other users whose political belief is different from them (Wollebaek et al. 2019, 8).

Individuals' relationships in social media also determine the agility of spreading information written in an angry context. The social media relationship formed in weak ties provides opportunities to receive new information in contrast to information sharing within strong ties represented as having relationships with close friends or family members (Gilbert and Karahalios 2009, 212). Together with the impact of negative information, emotional tweets will be more likely to be dispersed among users, and relationships based on weak ties cause the dissemination of information with an angry context to be faster than the information written in a positive context (Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan 2013; Fan, Xu, and Zhao 2020, 11). Therefore, whether it is an intended tactic or not, the author suggests that negatively stated information elicited more interaction from social media users, and emotionally phrased tweets, especially ones indicating

anger, were successfully delivered to the Twitter audience to magnify the impact of the manipulation.

The limitation of this article is that this analysis cannot prove to what extent those tweets manipulated the behavior of American individuals who were exposed to those tweets. However, the author cautiously presumes that those tweets could manipulate Twitter users, especially those who have passive involvement NFO, because the salience of specific issues of candidates or society could be unconsciously established and heightened by the negativity of the tweets.

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Populist Government and Constitutional Democracy: Radical Incompatibility or Possible Coexistence?

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Abstract

Until the first decade of the 21th century, scholars and reporters have identified contemporary populism as an element of anti-systemic revolt; furthermore, they have also recognized an incompatibility between populist phenomenon and government function. However, some recent cases of populist parties in power seem to be able to put into crisis more than one certainty regarding the nature and scope of the populist phenomenon. This observation raises the questions of this work: what harmful effects does populism in government produce on liberal institutions, pluralism, and representation in constitutional democracies? Do these effects merely erode the liberal component, or do they extend to produce a degeneration of democracy as a whole? And finally: what are the risks for democracy? The article corroborates the diarchic theories of democracy and aims to demonstrate the lack of compatibility between the principles of liberal democracy and populist principles, which have a negative impact not only on the liberal component, but also on the quality of democracy in its entirety.

Keywords

Populism; Government; Democracy; Liberalism; Representation

Introduction

The relationship between populism and democracy is problematic. Although the two concepts have different elements in common, starting from the roots — *Demos* and *Populus* that refer to the same object (although, as we shall see, they do not express the same thing) — the two phenomena seem to be mutually exclusive: when democracy is healthy, populism shrinks; conversely, when the democratic system seems unable to provide adequate responses to the crises of the legitimacy of the actors that compose it, the populist push becomes impetuous. Populism, therefore, grasps the ontological gap that exists between ideal democracy and real democracy and inserts itself in the incessant struggle to make the abstract people and the concrete people coincide. Several scholars (among others see: Tännsjö 1992; Kazin 1995; Canovan 1999; Ardit 2004; Laclau 2005; Urbinati 2019) have underlined the ambivalent nature of the relationship between the two factors. The explicit connection between populism and democracy is the motor of what Nadia Urbinati has defined as “maximal theory of populism” (Urbinati 2019, 116-17), which offers not only a conception of it based on the characteristics consubstantial with the phenomenon (rhetorical style; Manichean division, ideological core) but extends to the analysis of the relations it promotes within the democratic system and the effects that populist government produces on liberal constitutional democracy.

Examining the existing literature on the subject, there is no convergence line: some authors have described populism as an opportunity to relaunch the delegitimized democratic institutions (Taylor 2016), otherwise, the rest have spoken of populism as the purest form of democracy (Tännsjö 1992) or as a counter-democratic demonstration that pushes the main actors of democracy to improve policies (Rosanvallon 2017a). Despite this, it is possible to find a majority tendency: that of the authors (Diamond 1999; Zakaria 1997; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012) who identify populism as a problem for constitutional democracy. My concern is the relationship between populism in government and democracy, i.e., examining whether the populists, from the government, negatively affect pluralism and liberal institutions (or, as Blokker 2018 argues, democratic constitutions) and how populists in power transform constitutional democracy. If these risks exist, which institutions, rules, practices, and actors do they address?

This paper, using a methodology focused on conceptual analysis developed by comparing the various approaches and answers provided by various authors, aims to draw some theoretical coordinates on the relationship between populism in power and democracy. The purpose of the article is, therefore, to take into account the existing theories and provide some new conceptualizations useful to evaluate the relationship between populist principles and principles of modern liberal democracy, i.e. that system which guarantees individual freedoms, pluralism of

representation, free elections, respect for third party powers, and guarantee of minority (Sartori 1987). In the first section, I retrace the main scholarly contributions focused on the theme of populists in government; the second section concentrates on the two main interpretations of the relationship between democracy and liberalism: the diarchic and the dualistic one. Furthermore, I examine the transformation of one of the pillars of modern liberal democracy that is the principle of representation and dwell on the essential characteristics of populist democracy as a disfigurement of the principles and norms of the democratic system. Finally, I underline the risks of this transformation. There are several limits to an analysis of this kind: some generalizations could be contradicted by empirical observations and the absence of non-Western perspectives could negatively affect the completeness of the conclusions. Despite these weaknesses, a comprehensive theoretical framework could guide future empirical studies and will be specifically useful for scholars approaching the topic of populism in power with greater awareness of the salient issues that are at the center of the debate.

Theories of the Populists in Power

Until recently, contemporary populism has been interpreted as an “element of anti-systemic revolt” (Falter and Schuhmann 1993; Schedler 1996; Tismaneanu 2000; Engler, et al. 2019), that is, it has been postulated that between the populist phenomenon and the function of government there is a high degree of incompatibility and that populism is a charismatic phenomenon and therefore difficult to institutionalize. This trade-off would entail the inability of populists to reach power or, even when they succeed in doing so, to manage the institutions of democratic politics. However, some recent cases of new populist parties, such as the *Five Star Movement*, *Podemos*, *Syriza*, or of parties whose leadership has been renewed in a populist sense (such as the Trump-led conservative party, the Renzi-led PD, and Salvini's League) who came to the government, seem to be able to undermine more than one conviction concerning the nature and scope of the populist phenomenon, outlining an unprecedented “institutional populism”. As challengers, populist parties have shown, in various countries, that they can carry out a real rise to power, an element that, starting from 2008, required greater attention to the behavior of populist actors once came to power, as well as towards the potential effects that these actors could produce on democratic and liberal institutions with government action. The populist parties in power no longer seem to be confined to some countries of the world with an underdeveloped economy but have become a impetuous phenomenon that challenges even the advanced democracies of the developed world from within.

Despite reaching prominent positions in different countries, populist parties for several reasons face challenges on their journey to the government. Firstly, their programs are designed

to attract the widest possible part of the heterogeneous audience of discontent, by channeling disparate claims within them. Secondly, to acquire increasing shares of trust from the opposition and undermine the political system, populist parties often propose overpromising programs (Mény and Surel 2000; Aslanidis 2017) that amplify the direct and indirect costs of their potential implementation. Another central problem can be found in the strong deiodination (Tormey 2018) towards other political actors (channeled above all towards the mainstream parties), and in the codes of political relations based on one's moral superiority, elements that make the formation of governments of a post-electoral coalition. Finally, the most difficult element to reconcile is the anti-elitist rhetoric and political identity defined by contrast and opposition (Laclau 2005), which loses its position with the passage from the opposition to the government.

Against this backdrop, Morlino and Raniolo (2018, 140) pointed out the dilemmas of populist parties in the transition from opposition to government: a) the strategic one that refers to the choice between short-term and long-term responsiveness (or, to use a distinction proposed by Sartori (1967), between personal responsibility, influenced by the political/electoral cycle, and functional responsibility, based instead on the realization of long-term interests taking into account systemic constraints); b) that of identity, which refers to the preference between economic and political responsiveness; c) the divergence between the aims declared in the electoral campaign and the concrete possibility of realizing the operational aims, that is the tension between the radicalism of the discourse (political propaganda) and the moderation of government practice (political action); d) the organizational one that derives from the constraints deriving from the transition light, post-bureaucratic and network-based on organizational models to institutionalization; e) the difference between anti-establishment propaganda that has a unifying effect when they are in opposition and the need to make specific decisions that have exclusive effects when they are in government; f) the absence of a professional political class, and the consequent need to rely on the old bureaucratic staff often in close relationship and continuity with the previous leaders (Morlino and Raniolo 2018, 181-82); g) having to deal with the spontaneous centralistic tendency of the national government that collides with their peripheral representation.

According to some studies, the populist parties in power would follow the same dynamics as the other radical parties, reaching a growing political maturity following their entry into the institutions which would produce a normalizing effect on them. Peter Mair (2016) argued that in the transition from opposition to the government, populists try — at least strategically — to moderate their excesses to build an image of *salonfähig*, that is of “respectable ones” (Morlino and Raniolo 2018, 52). Berman (2008) traced this dynamic back to the phase of approaching government, that is, to attempts to build political links with other actors to form potential

government coalitions. Similarly, according to Krause and Wagner (2019), a responsible and pragmatic approach takes over when these parties are called upon to demonstrate the ability to manage and resolve problems concerning public affairs, thus gaining credibility through acting. The transition from protest to institutional representation (with the consequent increase in institutional relevance) and, even more so, from opposition to the government (which involves a prior search for offices) could therefore lead to the reduction of the anti-establishment position and favor an adaptation behavioral to parliamentary procedures and customs (Akkerman et al. 2016), or remodeling of the character and intensity of their rhetoric. Ivaldi (2016) spoke in this regard of the external packaging of the message. Other authors, instead, have argued that, by the commitment of these parties to appear reliable in the eyes of public opinion and other parties, the transformation could even extend beyond the communication style and behavior to transform even ideology and the content of programs and positions (Heinisch 2003).

An opposite line of thinking is that which sees populism as the potential for the creation of a new post-democratic or alter-democratic regime, and a specific type of government in the populists in power. A contrary line of thought (Müller 2017; Pappas 2019; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019) is the one that sees in populism the potential for the creation of a new post-democratic or alter-democratic regime, and in populists in power a specific type of government. Takis Pappas (2019) identified the following elements to isolate some characteristics of “populism in office”: a) the strengthening of an extraordinary leadership compared to an ordinary / legal-bureaucratic one in the Weberian sense (charismatic leadership); b) the relentless strategic search for political polarization. In this case, however, it is a question of competitive polarization without ideological polarization (political polarization); c) the adoption of a political program based on the hoarding of the main State institutions, on the strengthening of the executive and the consequent weakening of liberal check and balances and the imposition of illiberal constitutions (institutional onslaught); d) the strategic use of patronage tools, aimed at rewarding their supporters at the expense of the opposition and their supporters (patronage politics), is also useful as a rooting strategy.

According to Müller (2017), through the argument that they are the only morally legitimized representatives of the people, populists justify three main ways of managing power: a sort of colonization of the state; mass cronyism, also called “discriminatory legalism” and the systemic repression of civil society. Blokker (2013) argues that, in some cases, populism to reify the principle of majority in majority power (see the distinction between majority principle and majority rule that we owe to Sartori, 2007) could cross the distinction between ordinary legislative activity and constitutional, giving rise to a series of constitutional reforms indicated under the name of populist constitutionalism. According to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2019), whose work focuses

particularly on the experience of the Trump government, the modern populist government would be characterized by the production of a slow democratic decalage organized in two phases: initially, a legal (and nonviolent) subversion of conventional rules of behavior and political habits, and subsequently the implementation of structural changes to liberal institutions and even to the Constitutional Charters aimed at creating a new system of authority.

Undemocratic or Illiberal? The Dilemma of the Populists in Government

Within the theories that describe populism in terms of risk to democracy, it is possible to distinguish two approaches. The first is the one that theorizes the possibility of a theoretical disjunction between democracy and liberalism and sees in populism a phenomenon that negatively impacts liberal values: norms, procedures, inter-institutional accountability, and therefore respect for the balance of powers and principles of constitutionalism. To understand the theoretical basis of the distinction between the two traditions, we can take up the words of a staunch supporter of left populism, Chantal Mouffe (2000, 2-3), who maintained: “On one hand we have the liberal tradition constituted by the reign of law, from the defense of human rights and respect for individual freedom; on the other hand, the democratic tradition, whose main ideas are those of equality, of the identity between rulers and the governed and of popular sovereignty. There is no necessary articulation between these two different traditions, but only a contingent historical articulation”. According to this binary distinction, populism in power would give life, not to a new political regime, but the transformation of the form of state: from liberal democracy one would pass to illiberal/populist democracy, characterized by the ontological and irreducible opposition between the neat people represented by its leader and the corrupt elite; by the dominance of direct popular expression - filtered by the conviction of the leader or the party – on the law and by the replacement of party representation with a type of direct bond between leader and electorate (Urbinati 2019).

Already Robert Dahl, in 1956, proposed a distinction between the Madisonian form and the populist form of democracy. While in the first version, the emphasis is placed on the limitations of the power of government and of democratic power itself, populist democracy accentuates the antagonism with the liberal principle of limitation to theorize the potential limitlessness of the power of the people. Yasha Mounk (2018) took up this distinction - redefining the terms, respectively, the Madisonian form and the Rousseauian form of democracy - to advance a comparison between two excluding models: democracy without rights (which would coincide with populist democracy) and rights without democracy (what the author calls undemocratic liberalism which characterizes, for example, the new European governance with the growing importance of non-majoritarian institutions). The various theorists of democratic dualism (Zakaria 1997;

Diamond 1999; Mudde 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012) therefore distinguished between democracy and liberal-democracy, defining the latter not as the only possible form of democracy, but only as one of the possible combinations. Fared Zakaria (1997) was the first to use the expression “illiberal democracy” to indicate regimes in which there is a combination of free elections and authoritarianism, in which the rulers “are democratically elected (only to ignore) the limits imposed on their power from the constitution (and depriving) citizens of fundamental rights” (Zakaria 1997, 111). It could be said, in summary, that populist leaders accept electoral democracy but not liberal constraints (Sartori 1987) on the exercise of political power: “If liberalism is a culture of delimitation and control of political power, the populist leaders who have emerged in recent years are knowingly anti-liberal or illiberal. They use their electoral legitimacy to question the liberal constraints of the rule of law” (Fabbrini, preface to Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018, X).

The second approach offers a different reading of modern democracies and consequently a different diagnosis of the effects that government populism has on the democratic system. One of the first authors to question the classic contrast between populist democracy and liberal democracy was Margaret Canovan (1999), who rejected the theories of total separation between the two terms and defined the liberal component as the mechanism that preserves the democratic system from prevarication by the tyranny of the majority (Baldini 2014). Liberalism, therefore, would not be one of the many sets of values that can accompany democracy, but the one that makes it possible in its complete form. Modern democracies, according to Canovan, are characterized by a “double face”, by a constant tension between the redemptive face and the pragmatic face. As Baldini summarizes (2014, 12) “The two faces should not be seen as superimposable on the alternative liberalism/populism: in every country, politics alternates these phases, and populist waves present themselves as one of the clearest symptoms of the prevalence of redemptive face”. Therefore, according to Baldini (2014), there is no crystallized gap between the two moments, the popular one and the constitutional one, but there is a continuous tension in which an interpenetration alternates followed by an imbalance, and vice versa an imbalance followed by a rebalancing. More clearly, Müller (2017) underlined the subversive and undemocratic potential that lies within the conceptual core of populism, the distinctive elements of which would produce a democratic disfigurement and the affirmation of an undemocratic principle of democracy. The interpretation offered by Müller (2017) is the following: the rights of freedom of speech and assembly, pluralism and freedom of expression of the mass media, the protection of minorities, are not only values that fall within the sphere of competence of liberalism, but have to do with democracy itself. The rule of law and democracy are intertwined, and you can't have one

without the other. The populist refusal of the delimitation of power, argues the author, is not reduced only to a formal element but ends up by affecting the democratic substance itself, because the same imbalance between the rule of the majority and the rule of law in favor of the former produces a loss of importance of minority rights and the guarantee of a balance of powers, undermining the very democratic substance itself.

Recently, Nadia Urbinati (2019) examined in depth the relationship between populism and democracy and the potential outcomes that populism can produce when it governs. Urbinati (2019) found a tendency to distort the procedures (and, hence, the substance) of democracy in radical majoritarianism and in the effort to tolerate divisions of powers, an independent judiciary, and the statute of fundamental rights. In controversy with the theorists of democratic dualism, she argued that democracy cannot be reduced to the recurrence of electoral practices. The liberal components, such as the limitation of power, the existence of checks and balances, free information, guaranteed civil liberties, and legitimate multi-partism must be also considered integral characteristics of democracy, both in its procedures and its substance. Moreover, it is precisely the institutional brakes and counterweights that are classified by the populists as obstacles that prevent the unfolding of the pure will of the people — one synthesized by a leader who embodies it. If we define democracy as that system that guarantees “the protection of fundamental civil and political rights by limiting the power of the governing majority” through pluralism, the separation of powers, and the independence of the judicial system (Urbinati 2019, 16), populism according to the author, seems to transform this three pillars of modern constitutional democracy through three factors: the direct relationship between the leader and the part — considered just — of the people, the supreme authority of the audience and public opinion (Manin 2014), and the intolerance shown towards opponents and democratic impediments.

Populism and Representation: the “Inner Periphery” of Democracy

A point that partially unites these analyses, and that differentiates them from others that identify the populist government with a post-democratic government or as a prodromal step towards the establishment of an authoritarian system (we have seen Pappas 2019; see also Kellner 2016), is that both do not identify the populists in power with a leak from democracy, but as an extreme limit or as an “internal periphery” (Arditi 2004) of democracy. The populist challenge, therefore, is not aimed at replacing representative democracy with direct democracy, but aims at establishing a direct representation of the people by the leader, translating the popular mandate into a plebiscitary sense. As for the theme of the transformation of representation, populism would distance itself from the principle of acting for (Pitkin 1967) to address itself not towards direct democracy, but towards a “democracy of incarnation” (Zanatta 2004) in which the direct link is

that between people and party/leader. As in private law, direct representation promoted by populists differs from indirect representation based on the action of the representative which takes place not only “on behalf” but also “in the name” of the person represented. Acting “in the name” as well as “on behalf” is one of the many stratagems used by populists to facilitate identification between them and the evoked people and suspend the latter's judgment of their activity. Taking up the expression of Decker (2003, quoted in Giraudi 2017, 124-25): “Populism postulates that the classic intermediary institution should be eliminated and replaced by a direct link between the government and the electorate”.

According to these theories, populism in government disfigures democracy through incremental “process innovations” (Schumpeter 1943) which unbalance institutional mechanisms and introduce new limit-tensions that alter institutional functioning and produce a subversion of the indices of the quality of democracy. According to Morlino and Raniolo (2018) the populist challenge intertwines with other critical factors both external (economic crises, international crises, migratory flows) and internal (corruption, decline of traditional channels of representation, lack of alternation, and dissatisfaction with the activities of governments) and hence puts democratic regimes under pressure. In fact, “The impact of the populist challenge [...] extends to all the main dimensions of democratic quality, even if not all the relevant dimensions and their secondary dimensions they are involved in the same way and with the same intensity. The result of the populist challenge can be a subversion of democratic quality, rather than the improvement or deepening of democracy” (Morlino and Raniolo 2018, 178). Populist democracy is identified with a precise form of democracy that is based on a specific type of representation, which however is characterized by some limit-tensions which, contrary to the expressed intent to achieve democracy at its best, obtain democracy at its worst. As stated by Weyland (2013), the populists in the government direct formulas that promote political disintermediation and simultaneously require a plebiscitary approval, making democracy no longer radically democratic but less democratic.

Modern democracy is based on the irreducible and necessary gap between the immediate will of the various popular sectors and the - mediated - political translation of the demands from below. This void, in a constitutional democracy, can be partially filled thanks to two mechanisms. Firstly, the *fictio juris* of the majority as unanimity, which presents itself as the guarantor of the interests of all, also in light of the acceptance of the result by the opposition. Secondly, the constant work of representation and mediation carried out by the parties reduces the distance between the institutions and the portions of the people they represent, between inside and outside. In this way, representative democracy, which unlike direct democracy does not collapse the moment of will and judgment in the very act of elections (or of the decision through deliberation arising from a

direct consultation), keeps the political process open. Populism, for its part, proposes a new mixed regime characterized by the oxymoronic formula of direct representation (Urbinati 2019). In other words, there is a substitution of representation through parties with the incarnation of the part of the people deemed worthy by the leader. The direct component of populist parties, therefore, does not refer so much to the modalities of decision-making but the disintermediated relationship between the leader and his people. The aim is to obtain a “full” that resolves the original defect affecting representation, consisting of the distance between the political principle and sociological reality (Rosanvallon 2006).

The consequence of this interpretation of political authority which he believes he has based on popular legitimacy is that “with him, the evocative power of the incarnation prevails over the rationalized principle of representation” (Diamanti and Lazar 2018, 28). While according to classical democratic theory (Kelsen 1981; Dahl 1956; Sartori 1967) this distance makes it possible to maintain the political space as a field that is always open to the reformulation of preferences, the populists demand - through instruments that reinforce the idea of a perfect coincidence between the univocal popular will and populist representation — to seal it definitively. Here lies the forcing of constitutional democracy to its extreme limit: populism does not inaugurate a new type of political regime but transforms the democratic system it uses to assert itself by presenting itself as an actor provided with a higher moral legitimacy than that of its competitors (united, in a single frame of discredit, under the discrediting label of elite or establishment), guilty of disfiguring the moral and political integrity of the one-people (Tronconi 2018). Therefore, it does not escape from representative democracy but transmutes its essence, verticalizing it; that is, replacing representation through parties with the incarnation of the part of the people deemed “deserving” by the leader.

The interpretation of populism as a new type of representative government starts from the diarchic conception of democracy (Canovan 1999), Which is based on the idea of democracy as a mixed government of decision (i.e., political will and from which the decision-making process originates) and opinion (the sphere of extra-institutional political judgments). The aversion towards the culture of delimitation and control of political power, the change in the tenor of the institutional discourse, the continuous inter-institutional tensions, and the modification of behavioral, regulatory codes and consolidated traditional practices do not only produce a disfiguring impact on liberal institutions and do not damage only the liberal system, but also deeply affect the democratic system itself in its broad conception, producing a democracy of low quality (or, as Ardeni (2020, 67) defined it, a “form degraded of democracy”). But paradoxically, by limiting themselves to contesting the traditional actors and forms of representation, by not

extending the critique of the legitimacy of the regime itself, and by not proposing to radically change the system of government, the populists manage to present themselves as the only interpreters of the popular will and therefore as the only authentic democrats who oppose the factions and the privileged castes who hold, officially or secretly, the power, and intend to win power legally.

Also in this case, however, there is an element of friction to underline. Populists tend to conceive the electoral process as revealing a truth that already exists (Revelli 2018) and to consider themselves not a majority among the many possible, but the only just majority. By doing so, they drift away from sociological reality as a source of legitimacy (descriptive representation) to arrive at a type of symbolic representation, aimed at overcoming the interests' part out to identify elements that transcend divisions and place the accent on concepts capable of uniting the social body. The populist challenge, therefore, fits into the ontological gap left empty by representation and takes advantage of the distance that separates representatives from represented. In that sense too, populism emphasizes the ideological and principled distance from the liberal tradition. Hans Kelsen (1981) argued in fact that the correspondence between the parliamentary majority and the popular will was impossible, a metapolitical illusion just like the identification of a precise popular will. People can never be grasped in its entirety; the identification of a single popular will is an act of pure fantasy (Achen and Bartels 2017). Furthermore, while liberal democracy, particularly in the light of recent war conflicts, aimed to fragment power and distribute it among non-elected institutions (constitutional courts, tribunals, etc.), placed above electoral responsibility, to prevent recurrence of the risk of tyranny of the majority, populism interrupts this tradition and tries to re-aggregate the lost power. This interpretation of political competition and government activity can therefore lead populism to clash with constitutional democracy, even if its fundamental principles are incorporated into the democratic universe. In summary, when the principles that populism presents are translated into acts of government — and even more so when the interpretation of them exasperates them — they can collide with the principles of constitutional democracy.

From Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde: A Variant of Democracy

From what has been said so far, populism in power seems to establish a specific form of democracy, which differs from classical constitutional democracy to bring some transformations to democratic practices and substance while not escaping the system. Like the figure of Mr. Hyde in Stevenson's novel, populist democracy appears to be the alter-ego of liberal democracy. Populism, therefore, has a democratic derivation that acts as a genetic relationship: if it were to escape from the democratic order, it would renounce most of its founding principles (primarily horizontality and free consultation) and would turn into authoritarianism. For this reason,

populism is described in terms of a particular interpretation of democracy, mainly centered on one of the elements that characterize modern democracy (the principle of popular sovereignty), which becomes overwhelming for the other principles and traditional institutional forms. According to Mastropaolo (2005), the problematic aspect concerns the relations with democracy in speeches and the practice of government in the light of the contempt for minorities, for the opposition, for the diversity of ideas, disregard for human rights, and intolerance towards the pluralism that populism manifests from the government. It is a “democratic fundamentalism” on which populism relies, which gives democracy a plebiscitary twist and empties it (Mastropaolo 2005, 76): when the populist parties win the elections and consider it a pronouncement of the people in their unity, and on these assumptions, they question the caution and uncertainty of the democratic regime, erode some fundamental principles at the basis of constitutional democracy.

The myth of immediate democracy, in which the space - which allows the “distance” essential for elaboration and judgment - between the people and the leader is cancelled, substantially alters real democracy. The loss of distance in the name of identity and co-presence between leaders and voters has the aim of suspending judgment on the quality of the representation, the decisions taken and the policies promoted in defense of specific interests. Since according to the populists all power emanates from the people and condenses in the figure of the leader who exercises it in their name, the discretionary space of it extends beyond measure, overwhelming the powers that do not depend directly on the judgment or the will of the people and the leader. The delegation is therefore rejected by the populists both in its principles (since any mediation would distort the integral and already formed will of the people) as in its effects (when it, favoring the creation of a political elite, represents the origin of every evil of contemporary democracy, the failures to which are all attributed to the degeneration of political elites). In the very construction of the people, then, the populist version of democracy challenges proceduralism and produces a distortion of the principle of democratic representation. The same people to which populism is addressed is not the result of the political/theoretical construction promoted by social actors based on a specific vision of the conflicts that cross society, but is a pre-existing monolithic entity, which is built outside - and against - a political practice traditionally understood and recognizes itself as a unitary subject. With Blokker (as cited in Anselmi et al. 2018, 54) we could argue that with populism “the people are made identical to a populist, self-built majority”. However, the identification of the people “once and for all”, as well as the theorization of oneself as the only authentic and deserving representatives of it, is profoundly incompatible with the principle that informs the democratic space, which, to use the expression of Pierre Rosanvallon (2006, 83-84): “it always allows us to reopen and even put the question of the people

in completely new terms (...) in this sense, it could also be said that democracy suffers from a permanent crisis of representation”.

The populists, on the other hand, tend to propose an overlap between their enemies and enemies of the whole people, as well as the indisputable equivalence between the reforms they propose and the popular will. To question an action by the populist government is to question the will of the people. This is the main method that populists in power use to justify their decisions and it is precisely the logic that distinguishes the populists from other parties critical of the liberal system: the other party is decreed to be non-part of popular sovereignty, an illegitimate part and morally unworthy to govern. The coincidence between popular will and government activity distinguishes the populist governmental form from that of representative democracy: in the second, in fact, “the people” can appear only in an institutionalized way, that is, as a majority in Parliament, while for populism the majority coincides with the integral people, therefore it is possible to speak in their name. Representative democracy not only considers the fallibility of the decisions taken by the rulers but is willing to question the conformity of the will of the representatives concerning the political translation expressed in the form of a decision by the rulers, for which it accepts its contestability. For the populists, on the other hand, the general will they appeal to is an abstract will, not empirically verifiable; a sort of Jacobin claim for the protection of a natural right independent of the actual will of the people. What populists consider the popular will is predetermined: its direction is not formed through the mediation between opposing heterogeneous wills nor does it derive from the inter-party political dialectic that occurs within the institutions of representation. The law loses its sovereignty in the presence of the general will that immediately manifests itself and unfolds all its hubris, refusing to control or limit.

These acts and attitudes of the governing populists have become evident in several more or less mature democracies of Europe and even in the archetype of Democracy: the USA. In the “Imperfect democracies” (see Democracy Index) of Eastern Europe these attacks have gone to the extreme, reaching a compromise with the weak resistance of non-majoritarian institutions. In Hungary, for instance, President Viktor Orbán has fostered ongoing institutional tensions by denouncing the judiciary and other independent agencies, creating a “constitutional blitzkrieg” that weakens the separation of powers. Kaczyński in Poland has made consistent attacks on the Constitutional Tribunal and purged the Supreme Court by compelling rules on the designation of judges. Former Prime Minister Fico and his Smer managed to fill the Slovak Constitutional Court with loyal judges, *de facto* immunizing the Smer’s policies from judicial control. Likewise in the Czech Republic, Prime Minister Babiš has envisioned a series of measures that decrease checks on the executive and weaken the separation of powers; he has also attempted to weaken Parliament

(by abolishing the upper house and reducing the number of MPs in the lower house) to encourage greater centralization of power, with the support of President Miloš Zeman. In Western mature democracies, however, these attempts have often been controlled by guarantee institutions and have been reduced to a “war of words” (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019). In the Italian example, for instance, the threats of filing magistrates guilty of rejecting the orders of the Minister of the Interior addressed by Salvini to the courts and magistrates who opposed his decisions on landings and migrant control are paradigmatic. Even in the USA, Donald Trump has launched a heavy institutional game by pushing his presidential prerogatives to the limit and violating established practices through the appointment of two judges of the US Supreme Court (SCOTUS) (Hawkins et al. 2019).

In light of these assessments, we could affirm that modern populist parties distort the institutional rules of the State and rewrite the geometry of the powers within the state. In other words, they offer a peculiar interpretation of democracy interpreting the tension between the two poles as an antinomy between two incompatible principles: the liberal one which intends to weaken popular power and its discretion, and the democratic one which they interpret as a boundless increase in the power of the sovereign people. By merging democracy and representation, it establishes a form of democracy that is based on a direct relationship between the leader and the people and on the celebration of a subset of the people that fundamentally disfigures, without formally denying them, democratic principles. It is in this sense that Nadia Urbinati (2014) speaks of “disfigured democracy”: a conception of politics that introduces a fierce but internal tension and contestation to democracy stretches some principles, and unravels some rules of the democratic regime while continuing to formally operate in it. It is therefore an internal transformation of democracy that, however, facilitates the risk of authoritarian drift. In populism, the primacy of the interests of the majority overshadows the liberal guarantee of the rights of minorities and the balance of powers. Hence the rejection of the legitimacy of those inherited rules and therefore not directly approved by the people: only popular ratification puts the seal on a decision. Such an interpretation of the subject holding the decision-making legitimacy produces a distortion of the role of Parliament and lays the foundations for a general rethinking of the delegation: it shows a preference for direct democracy instruments or for monitoring instruments of popular will. Citizens’ preferences are translated into political measures which, precisely because they are in line with the wishes of the people, Parliament must limit itself to ratifying. For instance, the 5 Star Movement promoted a series of institutional reforms from the government that, in addition to lowering the quorum for the validation of popular bills, erected the propositional referendum to a primary legislative source, binding the parliament to decide based on the

indications provided by the outcome of the consultation. This risked an extra-parliamentarisation of decision-making and a transformation of the formal architecture of powers that the Constitution designs.

Modern representative democracy assumes and cultivates the constant tension between the functional principle and the plebiscitary principle (Bendix 1964), and tries to propose a decision-making synthesis that safeguards the division of constitutional powers (legislative, executive, and judicial power). In this dialectic, the formal abstraction of some principles subtracted from the discretion of the expression of the will of the majority is realized, which therefore limit it and act as a barrier to the potential drifts of arbitrary power, and the substantial dependence of the decision on the source of the will of the majority verified through the electoral mechanism. But this dualism is never transparent, for the fact that the immediate will of the people must always be contaminated with the democratic principles of the protection of minorities, pluralism, and the fundamental freedoms of the individual. We are within the concept of democracy as an empty and unbridgeable space, if not partially and using substitutes, proposed by Lefort (1986). The indeterminacy of democracy depends on the impossibility of identifying once and for all the main agent of sovereign legitimacy: the people. Populism tries to escape the necessary distance between pure will and representation, solidifying and absolutizing the concept of people which, instead, in the liberal-democratic conception remains mediated, open to re-identification, and never definitive. The means that populism uses, however, derive from the conception of popular involvement as individual involvement, without a previous work of the parties that organizes it in a stable and continuous form. The use of these means by a populist party, responds to the intention to unite inside and outside and overlap the moment of decision and that of opinion and risks to violate the need for the democratic game to always remain open, also through the self-limitation of government forces. This attempt can have the effect of compromising the indirect and representative form of democratic government in which distance and difference are regulated by representation and elections.

Conclusions: Sand in the Gears

Although it is possible to find empirical confirmation of the theories according to which populism in power does not establish a regime on its own and therefore does not change the democratic regime, its style of government changes the tenor of public discourse and the nature of relations between citizens and institutions. It is characterized by unscrupulous management of power that risks changing both the style and the content of public discourse, even when the Constitution does not change. Government populism when it does not deny the modern constitutional order tout court (favoring alternative constitutional projects supported by “legal

skepticism” or “legal resentment” (Blokker 2003), establishes an opportunistic relationship with constitutionalism and instrumental, often by reforming or ab-using existing constitutional structures. In power, populists establish a problematic relationship with constitutionalism as an expression of the legal-liberal doctrine. Blokker (cited in Anselmi et al. 2018, 50) argues, re-reading Corrias (2016), that populist constitutionalism can be linked to the distortion of the tradition of radical constitutionalism, in which the constituent power of the people is understood in an absolute sense, and by affirming the superiority of politics over the law it insists on refounding the political system negating the liberal limitations that have the function of “taming politics” (Corrias 2016, 15). By arguing that the rule of law and constitutionalism cannot be superior to the will of the people, constitutionalism for the populists in power “becomes [...] a tool for the populist project to rebuild the state and redefine the relationship between politics and law” (Blokker 2003, 51). But at the same time, this construction denies the emancipatory promise of constitutionalism addressed to all the forces that make up the political/constitutional body of the state, excluding those social and political realities that are not considered by populists as being included in their delimitation of the concept of people.

Although we can trace this line of orientation common to the various populist governments, it must be recognized that not all the actors defined as “populists” behave in the same way when they govern. The differences, even those minimal, could produce significant effects if we take into account the fact that some measures - institutional changes, ordinary laws, distributions of resources, regulations, and press campaigns - that seem legal and reasonable, for how they are sewn together they can give life to real “institutional monsters” (Raniolo 2019, 54). For this reason, the typological conception of populism, which distinguishes the different types of populism — in the plural (Canovan 1999; Sorice 2018) — rather than using a unitary concept of populism in the singular more account of the specific differences between different cases. A hypothesis that would require an important study of empirical confirmation, for example, could highlight that the risk of extra-democratic drift of the populist government is more accentuated in contexts in which the government is a single party led by a leader with monocratic powers, which hybridizes a populist approach with ideological elements marked by conservatism with a radical orientation (Jenne 2018). Another element to take into account would be the effect that these measures could have on the different democratic systems. In incomplete democracies, where legitimization of guarantee institutions is feeble and the culture of rights is not deeply rooted in public opinion, democratic backsliding should be more accentuated than in countries with mature democracies, where institutional respect and respect for fundamental rights have long since become part of the social culture.

In any case, the changes that populism introduces deeply affect the various indicators that constitute the indispensable elements for a “quality democracy” (Morlino 2003, 21). Populist democracy comes to be identified with a precise form of democracy that is characterized by certain limiting tensions that could produce a slide, through a gradual introduction of “sand in the gears” (Beck 2005, 375) that guarantee the proper functioning of the system, towards authoritarian forms of political management. In this case, those “sliding backward realized through the progressive marginalization of democratic processes and institution” (Raniolo 2019, 1) would therefore be favored, producing a democracy of low quality which over time may tend to transform itself into “other than itself”, favoring an authoritarian twist. The liberal components such as the limitation of power, the existence of checks and balances, free information, the guarantee of civil liberties, and the presence of other parties considered legitimate are inseparable both from form and from democratic substance. The imbalance towards some of the elements produced by the populists in government, the tension between the powers, and the extremization of some principles to the detriment of others represent a serious risk of slipping into a form of government in which the will of the people becomes refractory to institutional temperaments and can easily result in tyranny.

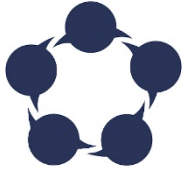
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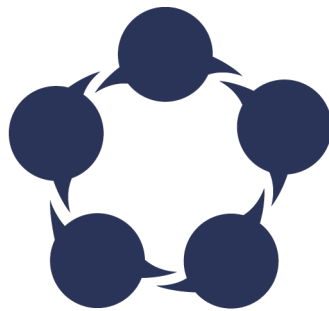
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