

POPULISM AND LEADERSHIP: IS THERE ANYTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN?

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Abstract

The literature on populism tends to consider dominant leaders as a characteristic feature of populist parties across time and space. However, we know very little about what the populist leadership is about. In this context, this article aims to contribute to a relatively unexplored arena of populist studies, which is what is special about the populist political leadership in an increasingly personalised politics. In the attempt to bridge the literature on populism and personalization of politics, the article argues that populist leadership mirrors the nucleus of the populist discourse. The centrality of the party leader translates in most cases into the emphasis on the unmediated, hence un-institutionalized, genuine democracy that populist parties tend to preach. Because of the veneration of the people, populist leadership is not primarily about communicational skill and (technical) competence but also – first and foremost – a continuously demonstrated trust. Hence the populist leadership is about the mutual pursuit of the people's interests. Populist leaders must demonstrate by both word and personal example that they are from the people, like the people.

Keywords: populism, parties, leadership, people, personalisation

Intimately linked to democracy, political parties are multifaceted objects of research. Since the late 1950s, the literature has conceived the transformation of Western European parties into electoral agencies in parallel to the strengthening of the party leader's organisational power.

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Implicit in Kirchheimer's 1966 interpretation¹, the professionalization of the party organisation was to be explicitly developed by Panebianco² in relation to the diffusion of the electoral-professional party with its increased appeal to the electorate and the pre-eminence of personalised leadership.³ Although the focus of cartel party theory was mainly linked to the relation between parties and state, Katz and Mair's⁴ concept also placed emphasis on an increasingly professional and technocratic party, "focused less on differences in policy and more (...) on the provision of spectacle, image and theatre".⁵ These transformations changed scholars' views on the relationship between citizens (voters) and political parties.⁶ Within a process of the individualisation of social life⁷, contemporary politics was to be encompassed as a personalised arena "in which the political weight of the individual actor in the political process increases over time, while the centrality of the political group (i.e., political party) declines"⁸.

Behind this process of the personalisation of politics, there is a major paradox.⁹ On the one hand, governmental agenda have progressively become more and more complex. On the other, leader-centred politics dismisses the comfort of the division of labour assured by a variety of co-

¹ Otto Kirchheimer, "The Transformation of Western European Party Systems", in Joseph LaPalombara and Myron Weiner (eds.), *Political Parties and Political Development*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1966, pp.177-200.

² Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 264.

³ Jonathan Hopkin and Caterina Paolucci, "The Business Firm Model of Party Organisation: Cases from Spain and Italy", in *European Journal of Political Research*, vol. 35, no 3, 1999, p. 308.

⁴ Richard Katz and Peter Mair, "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party", in *Party Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1995.

⁵ Richard Katz and Peter Mair, "The Cartel Party Thesis: A Restatement", in *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 7, no 4, p. 755.

⁶ Lauri Karvonen, *The Personalisation of Politics. A Study of Parliamentary Democracies*, Colchester: ECPR Press, 2010, p. 1.

⁷ Among others see Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.

⁸ Gideon Rahat and Tamir Shaefer, "The Personalization(s) of Politics: Israel, 1949–2003", in *Political Communication*, vol. 24, no 1, 2007, p. 65.

⁹ Albert Mabilleau, "La personnalisation du Pouvoir dans les gouvernements démocratiques", in *Revue française de science politique*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1960, pp. 39-65.

ordinated institutions.¹⁰ This undeniable paradox is counterbalanced by a major advantage in terms of accountability. The personalisation of politics is a direct consequence of the increased emphasis contemporary democracies lay on the “duty” of the citizenry (voters) to demand an account of the performance of elected offices. Hence, the personalization of politics enables voters to maintain or sanction their relationship with those in elected office in the light of this account in a simplified, clearer manner.

The literature on populist parties, a related field of research, tends to consider dominant leaders as a characteristic feature of populist parties across time and space.¹¹ Only a few texts question this prevailing interpretation.¹² From the point of view of the dimension at hand, most of the literature focuses on how populist leaders portray themselves and how they perform in public, while very limited research is conducted from the demand-side perspective.¹³ This is far from being an issue of detail. As McDonnell rightly stresses¹⁴, the “charismatic” leadership associated with populism does not fit within the Weberian definition, which holds that “what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or ‘disciples’”¹⁵. Moreover, there is limited research on the precise organisational leverages populist leaders have at their disposal in order to assess the strength of their leadership.¹⁶ This is consistent with the literature review provided by Heinisch and Mazzoleni in the introduction to their seminal volume on populist parties’ organization: “Western European populist parties have

¹⁰ Mabileau, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Paul Taggart, *Populism*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000; Yves Mény and Yves Surel (eds.), *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, New York: Palgrave, 2002; Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (eds.), *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

¹² Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Populism and Political Leadership”, in R. A. W. Rhodes and Paul ‘t Hart (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Leadership*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 376–388; Duncan McDonnell, “Populist Leaders and Coterie Charisma”, in *Political Studies*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2016, pp. 719-733.

¹³ McDonnell, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 719.

¹⁵ Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1978, p. 242 quoted by McDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 719.

¹⁶ Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (eds.), *Understand Populist Party Organization: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, New York: Palgrave, 2016.

been more or less implicitly framed as ‘charismatic parties’ with centralized leadership, a strong loyalty to the leader to ensure party cohesion, feeble organization, and a tiny bureaucratic apparatus”¹⁷. Despite the abundance of studies on populist parties’ general features, we know very little about their leadership and this is striking, considering that their leaders are among the most well-known faces of contemporary European politics. Kriesi summarizes the general features of the populist leaders¹⁸: “the monolithic conception of the populist leader (...) corresponds to the monolithic conception of the people”. But in most cases, Heinisch and Mazzoleni’s statement, quoted above, can be easily adapted to populist leadership, considering that (Western) European populist parties have been more or less implicitly framed as the political organization of their leader, with a hierarchical structure and centralized decision-making.

Considering these caveats, it is important, however, that there is a widespread assessment that populist leaders are the driving forces of their parties. In this context, scholars like Zanatta¹⁹ have compared populism to a sort of “secular religion”, with its own prophet acting not in the name of God but of “the people”. In a similar vein, populist leaders have been compared to contemporary *tribuni plebis*, claiming the legitimate right to intervene in cases in which the community of the genuine people is unfairly menaced by rapacious élites.²⁰ The bottom line is that populist leaders are supposed to play a strategic role in the relationship with the electorate by signalling that they are not beholden to mainstream political interests: in other words, that they are not corruptible or unduly influenced by “the enemy” of the people. However, most literature on the topic is based on what Mudde critically assesses as “received wisdom”²¹. In other

¹⁷ Heinisch and Mazzoleni, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ Hans Kriesi, “The Populist Challenge”, in *West European Politics*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2014, pp. 361-378.

¹⁹ Loris Zanatta, “Il populismo, sul nucleo forte di un’ideologia debole”, in *Polis*, vol. XVI, 2001, pp. 263–292.

²⁰ Sorina Soare, “Hit by Populism: Democracy in Ruins”, in *Southeastern Europe*, vol. 38, no. 1, pp. 25 – 55.

²¹ Cas Mudde, “The Study of Populist Radical Right Parties: Towards a Fourth Wave”, in *CREX Working Papers*, 2017, available at [<https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/publications/c-rex-working-paper-series/Cas%20Mudde:%20The%20Study%20of%20Populist%20Radical%20Right%20Parties.pdf>], accessed July 2017.

words, there is relatively little systematic research on topics that go beyond the general features of populist parties, namely their discourses. Although this article does not make use of new data, it aims to contribute to a relatively unexplored arena of populist studies, which is what is special about the populist political leadership in an increasingly personalised politics²².

If we take into account the literature on the personalisation of politics, there might be a couple of interesting points to add to the current knowledge. It is the intention of this paper to bridge the two literatures. The starting point is that, while the personalisation of politics has been described as the destination point of complex evolutions in contemporary democracies, the relevance of leadership in the populist politics can be considered an *ab origine* element. I hence argue that personalised politics is, above all, a birth sign in the case of populism. Rather than the result of external stimuli or of an adaptation to a progressive personalization of its main competitors, as in the case of the general phenomenon identified by the literature, in my understanding, populist leadership ought to be seen as the transposition of the “populist verb” (the thin-ideology) into a “populist actor” (the party public figure). My assumption is that populist leadership mirrors the nucleus of the populist discourse, which is the veneration of the people as “the source of sovereignty, above all representation”²³. I fully acknowledge that the same authority (the people) is praised by democracy too and, as such, by all the mainstream parties. Still, as Pasquino notes, the definition of democracy goes beyond a simple etymological reference to the “power of the people” as in the case of the populist discourse; democracy refers to “the people” as citizens with rights and duties or, in other words, to the power of sovereignty exercised within the constitutionally codified limits and forms.²⁴ Populist parties claim to restore the genuine authority of the people by diminishing or cancelling the distortions generated by

²² Nicole Bolleyer, *New Parties in Old Party Systems: Persistence and Decline in Seventeen Democracies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*; McDonnell, *op. cit.*; Heinisch and Mazzoleni, *op. cit.*

²³ Zanatta, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

²⁴ Gianfranco Pasquino, “Populism and Democracy,” in Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell (eds), *Twenty-First Century Populism. The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 15-16.

institutional and procedural mechanisms.²⁵ The centrality of the party leader translates in most cases into the emphasis on the unmediated, hence un-institutionalized, genuine democracy populist parties tend to preach. This means that leaderless populism is not impossible; on the contrary, it is part of the documented empirical evidence of the most recent literature.²⁶ However, in an increasingly personalised politics, personalised populist leadership seems to be the norm. Still, this does not mean that populist leadership is just one among many others. It has its peculiarity, which is the content of its public discourses. Because of the veneration of the people, populist leadership is not primarily about communicational skill and (technical) competence but also – first and foremost – a continuously demonstrated trust. Hence the populist leadership is about the mutual pursuit of the people's interests. Populist leaders must demonstrate by both word and personal example that they are from the people, like the people.

In order to grasp the peculiar position of populist leaders in the populist politics, we shall first provide a general overview of the features of contemporary leadership in order to be able to compare the general assumptions of the literature with the specific cases of populist leadership in the literature, a topic covered in the second section. In the following section, I shall provide a synthetic, empirical analysis of populist leaders. I shall conclude this analysis with several general remarks.

The importance of leadership in contemporary politics

The role and the features of (political) leadership have been an established topic of research for centuries. This is hardly surprising considering that leadership is as old as humankind.²⁷ However, the conceptual frontiers of leadership remain porous and rather vague. Leadership refers to the most varied areas, ranging from sport teams to school classes, from professional to political arenas.²⁸ In order to grasp the complexity of the concept, a brief overview of its etymology is particularly

²⁵ Yves Mény, "La costitutiva ambiguità del populismo", in *Filosofia politica*, vol. XVIII, no. 3, p. 361.

²⁶ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*

²⁷ Jean Blondel, *Political Leadership. Towards a General Analysis*, London: Sage Publications, 1987, p. 1.

²⁸ Blondel, *op. cit.*

useful. Drawing upon the etymological reconstruction of Regalia²⁹, the word leadership derives from the English verb “to lead” with meanings such as to control, to be in charge of or in command of, to go with one by holding them physically in order to show the direction, etc. As rightly illustrated by Regalia³⁰, the verb “to lead” implies both a physical and an emotional dimension of motion towards a physical direction or an idea, a goal. The same complexity is echoed by the ancient Greek verb ἄγω (ago) and the noun ἀγῶγός (agonos) whose meaning is particularly important for the most recent declinations of the concept. I refer once again to Regalia’s interpretation: ἀγῶγός is not only the person that guides but also the person able to seduce, an appealing person as one might say today, a person that stimulates and requires obedience.³¹

It is since Weber’s famous writings on the concept of charismatic leadership at the beginning of the 20th century that the concept receives a renewed attention. On this ground, the literature agreed the leadership is an issue of power, although not any kind of power: a legitimate power³², a hierarchical³³ and, last but not least, a relational one³⁴. Without neglecting the complexity of the issue and the different nuances in Weber’s writings³⁵, the literature agrees that, for Weber the concept of the charismatic leader is linked foremost to a strong personal appeal and extraordinary qualities, particularly relevant in time of crisis. According to the German sociologist, charismatic leadership is strongly dependent on the followership; if the leadership fails to benefit his or her followers, it is most likely that his charisma will disappear.³⁶ This relational aspect continues to be central to the literature. Leadership is described not only in terms of skills, competences and qualities used to mobilise followers but also in connection with a mutual exchange of trust and loyalty. This line of interpretation can be traced back to Burns’ seminal book on leadership. Burns defines

²⁹ Marta Regalia, “La leadership: concetto, concezioni e rappresentazioni”, in *Rivista italiana di scienza politica*, vol. XLII, no. 3, 2012, pp. 385-398.

³⁰ Regalia, *op. cit.*, p. 385-386.

³¹ Regalia, *op. cit.*

³² Luciano Cavalli, *Il capo carismatico*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 1981, p. 24.

³³ Blondel, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Weber, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Cavalli, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Weber, *op. cit.*

leadership as being “inseparable from followers’ needs and goals”³⁷. Hence leadership is not only about the personal attributes of the leader but about a so-called mutual pursuit of interest that connects the perceptions and expectations of both leaders and followers.³⁸ I conclude with Gardner’s observation: leaders are “persons who, by word and/or personal example, markedly influence the behaviours, thoughts, and/or feelings of a significant number of their fellow human beings”³⁹.

In addition to these general considerations, according to students of contemporary democracies there is an ongoing process of personalisation of politics in our societies. The search for “charismatic leaders” has become a routine operation in contemporary politics. This process is commonly referred to as “candidate-centred politics”, “personalization”, “leaderisation” or even “presidentialisation” of politics.⁴⁰ Although not fully overlapping, these processes have been explained as direct consequences of intertwined factors: the internationalization/Europeanisation of domestic politics, the changing dynamics of mass communications and recent technological innovations, the erosion of traditional cleavage-based politics and organisational changes within parties, the increased individualization of social life. The gist of the story is that (charismatic) political leaders have become increasingly visible and, instead than a story of party politics, contemporary politics has become the arena of leader-based politics within what Manin called an audience democracy⁴¹. This process has impacted upon both the supply-side (the institutional arena) and the demand-side (voters and supporters). In relation to the supply side, Poguntke and

³⁷ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, New York: Harper & Row, 1976, p. 19.

³⁸ Edwin P. Hollander, “Relating Leadership to Active Followership”, in Richard A. Couto (ed.), *Reflections on Leadership*, Lanham: University Press of America, 2007, pp. 57-66.

³⁹ H. Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership*, New York: Basic Books, 1995, p. 8 quoted by Hollander, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴⁰ See among others: Martin Wattenberg, *The Rise of Candidate-Centered Politics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987; David Swanson and Paolo Mancini, *Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: An International Study of Innovations in Electoral Campaigning and Their Consequences*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996; Thomas Poguntke and Paul Webb (eds.), *The Presidentialization of Politics in Democratic Societies*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; Karvonen, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ Bernard Manin, *Principles of Representative Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Webb⁴² have associated the increasing power resources of leadership with major autonomy within the party (coupled with an increased role for the political executive) and an increasingly leadership-centred electoral process. Their interpretation has been included in a progressive trend towards 'presidentialised' executive politics, although numerous conceptual and empirical criticisms and cautious interpretations have been developed since then.⁴³ On the demand-side, the visibility of the leaders has influenced the way in which voters, members and/or supporters perceive and evaluate their leaders. The literature has documented a relatively important shift in voters' interests from issues to specific candidates. Moreover, voters and supporters tend to apply cognitive frameworks usually employed in everyday life to the evaluation of political leaders to the extent that the "symbolic closeness to the masses has become a necessary condition for emergence and electoral success of a political leadership"⁴⁴. As with the relational dimension of the charismatic leadership, contemporary politics is less about what the leader is and more about what people perceive the leader to be. Leaders, then, tend to speak, dress and behave like common voters: their language is less sophisticated, their dress code is more relaxed and they let themselves be seen in the most mundane aspects of their lives (i.e. they go to supermarket queuing to buy fruit and vegetables, go to pub, ride bicycles instead of official cars, exhibit their attendance of football matches and music concerts, they publicly sing popular songs or play music instruments, etc.).

The literature agrees that the personal characteristics of leaders, or more specifically their perception among their followers, is important in explaining voting behaviour.⁴⁵ Intuitively, voters' preferences for candidates are guided by their perception of the candidates as competent, honest and trustworthy persons. However, electoral dynamics across Europe and the United States seem to show a different picture. The

⁴² Poguntke and Webb, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁴³ Keith Dowding, "The Prime Ministerialisation of the British Prime Minister", in *Parliamentary Affairs*, vol. n. 3, 2013, pp. 617-635.

⁴⁴ Diego Grazia, "The personalization of politics in Western democracies: Causes and consequences on leader-follower relationships", in *The Leadership Quarterly*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2011, pp. 697-709.

⁴⁵ Mauro Barisione, *L'immagine del leader. Quanto conta per gli elettori?*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2006.

perception of skilfulness and trustworthiness is filtered by the increased demand of identification between leaders and followers (voters and/or supporters) to the point that the ideal candidate looks more and more like a person whom the voter can understand and speak with. In an outstanding attempt to explain this deviation from the intuitive rationale behind electoral behaviour, Garzia⁴⁶ emphasises the so-called lowering effect of television and new media, which has brought leaders to the level of their audience. One caveat ought to be mentioned. Contemporary politics is influenced by the role played by professionals in marketing candidates and programmes. Candidates' images and content are "packaged" according to the preferences of the voters.⁴⁷ This means, concretely, that the frontier between popular and populist sometimes becomes blurred. The extensive use of political marketing to shape voters' perceptions and their personal abilities to act as empathic public communicator have led some to consider that popular politicians like Tony Blair, Nicolas Sarkozy or Matteo Renzi are part of the populist pantheon. However, as rightly observed by Mudde and Kaltwasser⁴⁸, all these leaders occasionally behaved opportunistically, but their support for political pluralism as well as membership of the establishment prevented full exploitation of a Manichean vision of the society and radical critique of the establishment. By referring to the Ancient philosophy, it is possible to consider these politicians not as populists, but good rhetoricians, able to understand "what is possibly persuasive" not only in terms of good arguments and solid proofs but also in emotional terms⁴⁹.

Although perceptions of honesty and trustfulness remain central in guiding voters' choices, additional personal skills of leaders are also taken into account. Almost compulsorily, leaders and successful candidates are supposed to be in possession of communicative and expressive capacities. These elements have been part of the rhetorician's toolbox since the Ancient Greeks and, most notably, cannot be understood as attempts to

⁴⁶ Garzia, *op. cit.*

⁴⁷ Donatella Campus, *L'antipolitica al governo. De Gaulle, Reagan, Berlusconi*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007.

⁴⁸ Kaltwasser and Mudde, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

⁴⁹ Salvatore Di Piazza, "Fiducia ed argomentazione. Una prospettiva aristotelica", in *Rivista italiana di filosofia del linguaggio*, vol. 6, no.3, 2012, pp. 41-52.

outwit the audience or to manipulate it. In direct connection with this short digression, the similarity-attraction paradigm, analysed among others by Caprara and Zimbardo⁵⁰, provides an updated explanatory framework for clarifying how voters are attracted to candidates who are similar, rather than dissimilar. To illustrate this paradigm, one can cite Silvio Berlusconi's strategic investment in building a similarity based on proximity with Italian voters. In 2001, he mailed his personal biography to every single family in Italy in the form of 128-page book describes him as the personification of the 'Italian dream'. Despite different corruption scandals, his excellent skills as a public communicator, as well as his control over the media, made him a politician whom a high percentage of electorate felt they could trust. The history of Berlusconi's political career is less about what the leader is in terms of objective criteria's (for example, the number of legal cases and judgements), but about what his voters perceive Berlusconi to be. Caprara and Zimbardo⁵¹ synthesize what appears to be an apparently illogical behaviour: "we want to trust competent leaders, but we also want to like them personally, and this is easier when they are perceived as essentially similar to us". Note that in this context the traditional role of parties in connecting the state and the citizenry progressively almost vanished into thin air. The once party-based democracy evolved towards an increasingly "partyless democracy"⁵² compensated for by a person-based capacity to bring people together (in parties or in elections) in order to achieve control of the government and shape policies.

While modern political democracy is usually understood as party-based democracy, contemporary democracy is increasingly becoming a person-based democracy. In this context, the personalization of politics should also be seen as the process by which the political weight of party leaders and candidates increases over time not only within the political process as a whole but also within the parties they represent. In respect of

⁵⁰ Gian Vittorio Caprara and Philip G. Zimbardo, "Personalizing Politics", in *The American Psychologist*, vol. 59, 2004, pp. 581–594 quoted by Garzia, *op. cit.*, 706.

⁵¹ Caprara and Zimbardo, *op. cit.*, p. 590 quoted by Garzia, *op. cit.*, p. 706.

⁵² Peter Mair, "Partyless Democracy. Solving the Paradox of New Labour?", *New Left Review*, no. 2, 2000, available at [<https://newleftreview.org/II/2/peter-mair-partyless-democracy>], accessed June 2017.

party politics, the process of personalisation has been associated with a favourable opportunity structure for party leaders to accumulate power.⁵³ The role played by contemporary party leaders has progressively expanded, as illustrated by the increased control of the party leader on the party in public office. Within the party, a strong leadership has also been associated with the broadening of the leadership selectorate⁵⁴. Outside the party, a strong leadership goes hand in hand with targeted media coverage and an increased role in influencing electoral dynamics in terms of voters' preferences.

The importance of leadership in populist politics

Despite persistent doubts regarding its conceptual solidity, scholars, experts, politicians, and journalists tend to rely regularly on the term "populism" to describe a wide plethora of political phenomena, which have built their political platforms on a rather vaguely defined moral and ethical struggle between "the people" and a wide range of internal and external menaces. Not surprisingly, when dealing with populism, the main challenge refers to the difficulty in assessing what populism is. Most frequently, scholars identify different chronological periods of populism(s), with significant variations both in the form and in the intensity of their manifestation. In order to define populism, different conceptual approaches have been debated and fine-tuned, among which are populism as an ideology, a discourse or a strategy.⁵⁵ Accordingly, these scholars point to different features of populism, in which various kinds of extremisms, criticisms and anti-isms in general cohabitate.

One line of analysis frames populism as a "thin-centred ideology" considering that "it expresses a distinct and internally coherent map of the political, but thin in its focus on broad normative principles and ontological

⁵³ Poguntke and Webb, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Jean-Benoit Pilet and William Cross (eds.), *The Selection of Political Party Leaders in Contemporary Parliamentary Democracies. A Comparative Study*, London: Routledge, 2014.

⁵⁵ See Noam Gidron and Bart Bonikowski, "Varieties of Populism: Literature Review and Research Agenda", in *Weatherhead Working Paper Series*, No. 13-0004, 2013, available at [<https://scholar.harvard.edu/gidron/publications/varieties-populism-literature-review-and-research-agenda>], accessed July 2017.

matters rather than the detail of the policy”⁵⁶. Consequently, scholars like Tarchi⁵⁷, Albertazzi and McDonnell⁵⁸, and Mudde⁵⁹ agree that populism’s mental framework depicts society as separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” and “the corrupt elite”. Accordingly, populism pervades traditional ideological frontiers and blends with both left and right-wing features, the direction and its intensity depending upon the socio-political context within which the populist parties mobilize.⁶⁰ On this basis, references to the pure people, the corrupt elite and the general will are considered the necessary and sufficient conditions for classifying a phenomenon as populist.⁶¹ Seen as a specific mental framework, scholars focus for the most part on partisan texts, with relatively limited focus on the organizational dimension. However, as illustrated by Mudde⁶², this is less an issue of lack of interest and more a consequence of the literature’s focus over the last decades on reinforcing the conceptual solidity of populism.

As illustrated by Gidron and Bonikowski’s⁶³ extremely useful reconstruction of the varieties of populism, there is also a group of scholars that tend to focus on the discursive dimension. The Manichean depiction of a moral and ethical clash between the people and élites provides the frame of reference of a specific interpretation of the political world.⁶⁴ This part of the literature uses the binary division as a very feature of the political dimension in which there are important variations in time (and in degrees) and between political actors. Those who define populism as a discursive approach include in their interpretational frame the role of a strong and flamboyant leader whose hold on the electorate is built upon seductive

⁵⁶ Ben Stanley, “The Thin Ideology of Populism”, in *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 13, no. 1, 2008, p. 102.

⁵⁷ Marco Tarchi, *Italia populista. Dal qualunquismo a Beppe Grillo*, Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015.

⁵⁸ Albertazzi and McDonnell, *op. cit.*

⁵⁹ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist”, in *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 39, no. 4, 2004, pp. 542-563.

⁶⁰ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*

⁶¹ Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “The Responses of Populism to Dahl’s Democratic Dilemmas”, in *Political Studies*, vol. 62, no. 3, 2014, p. 479.

⁶² Mudde 2017, *op. cit.*

⁶³ Gidron and Bonikowski, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ Kirk Hawkins, *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

narrative about the exploitation of the common people by the establishment. On this point, as Mudde and Kaltwasser point out⁶⁵, those who defend a discursive approach consider that, at least under specific historical circumstances, populist discourse is not a narration promoted by the political leader, but instead the leader becomes the very vehicle for a demand of populism manifest within the society.

Following Gidron and Bonikowski⁶⁶, populism is also encompassed as a strategic opportunity for mass mobilization. Weyland provides the most authoritative definition of populism as a political strategy with a focus on the organizational dimension. Accordingly, populism is defined as a “political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, un-institutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers”⁶⁷. The relevance of the content of the *forma mentis* is downgraded in favor of the flamboyant leadership. Weyland’s definition echoes the context of reference, which is Latin America, and the recurrent electoral exploits of political entrepreneurs who are able to mobilize different social groups around the denunciation of the corrupt establishment.⁶⁸ Without neglecting the argumentative dimension, a related interpretation can be found in Taggart⁶⁹, according to which populist parties are intimately connected with a centralized organization and a strong leadership. Mény and Surel⁷⁰ describe charismatic leadership as being both a source of unity for the party and the basis of the success achieved by populist mobilizations.

Historically speaking, the first documented forms of populism, the Russian Narodnik movement and the American Farmers, are characterized by the absence of a strong leadership.⁷¹ However, during the same period, a French form of populism developed in strong synergy with the personal

⁶⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*, p. 379.

⁶⁶ Gidron and Bonikowski, *op. cit.*

⁶⁷ Kurt Weyland, “Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics”, in *Comparative Politics*, 2011, vol. 34, no. 1, p. 14.

⁶⁸ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*, p. 378.

⁶⁹ Taggart, *op. cit.*

⁷⁰ Mény and Surel, *op. cit.*

⁷¹ Guy Hermet, *Les populismes dans le monde. Une histoire sociologique. XIXe-XXe siècle*, Paris: Fayard, 2001.

ascent of a leader, General Georges Boulanger.⁷² With the new century, it was not only the content of the different forms of populism that proliferated in Latin America and Europe progressively that mutated but the features too. Most 20th century forms of populisms have been described as being strongly dependent on the figure of the leader. This is the case with the populist tribunes of Juan Domingo Perón or Getulio Vargas in Brazil.⁷³ Similarly, the dominant leadership of Guglielmo Giannini in the case of Everyman's Front in Italy or Pierre Poujade's Union for the Defence of Tradesmen and Artisans have been quoted as prototypes of a personalized populism. The magnetism of the leaders has been used as a recurrent explanation for the rapid success of different forms of populism in other continents, as detailed by Mudde and Kaltwasser.⁷⁴ In most of the cases documented by the literature until the 1990s, the presence of strong leadership was associated with feeble organizations and underdeveloped bureaucratic apparatus. The symbiosis between dominant leaders and feebly institutionalized populist parties was further associated with the limited possibility these parties had of surviving without their leaders. Leaders' transitions were considered to be lethal moments in the life of populist parties. However, with the new century the empirical evidence has rapidly fine-tuned. The symbiosis between Jörg Haider and Austrian Freedom party (FPÖ) and the founding of the Alliance for the Future of Austria in 2005 as a splinter of the FPÖ, led by Haider himself, did not compromise the electoral viability of the FPÖ. Despite continuity in terms of strong leadership, Heinz-Christian Strache's chairmanship differs from the model of Haider.⁷⁵ Continuous changes at in the direction of the party have been documented in the case of the Slovak National Party.⁷⁶ The replacement of Umberto Bossi as leader of the Northern League, first with a triumvirate and then with the younger Matteo Salvini, has not been very

⁷² *Ibidem.*

⁷³ *Ibidem*

⁷⁴ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*, p. 381.

⁷⁵ Reinhard Heinisch, "The Austrian Freedom Party: Organizational Development and Leadership Change", in Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (eds.), *Understand Populist Party Organization: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, New York: Palgrave, 2016, pp. 19-48.

⁷⁶ Sorina Soare, "Io sono (come) voi! Alla ricerca della mobilitazione elettorale: leader e partiti populistici nell'Europa postcomunista", in *Società Mutamento Politica. Rivista italiana di sociologia*, vol. 8, no. 15, 2017, pp. 353-378.

traumatic either.⁷⁷ Marine Le Pen succeeded her father in leading Front National and, despite a rearrangement of the public discourse, maintained familial model of autocratic leadership within a highly centralized hierarchical party organization.⁷⁸ There are numerous other cases that document the fact that, despite the existence of a dominant leader, even a founding leader, most populist parties outlive their leaders.⁷⁹

In the end, populist parties regularly have a surname. It is Le Pen's Front National, Strache's FPÖ, Savini's Northern League, etc. Yet not all leaders are particularly dominant. The origins of the parties are particularly useful in understanding how and why some of these parties outlive their leaders. Bolleyer⁸⁰ provides us with a brilliant argument on this point. Not all populist political entrepreneurs are equally able to consolidate an electoral base in the longer term; in a brilliant demonstration, Bolleyer lays emphasis on the long-term implications of the party origins, with direct consequences on the orientations of founding leaders and the formation of a lasting party infrastructure (2013). Moreover, as Heinisch and Mazzoleni remind us⁸¹, not all those who were perceived to be party leaders - Philip Dewinter for the Flemish Interest Party - were effectively leader of the party. The same applies in the case of Dan Diaconescu in the case of the People's Party Dan Diaconescu.⁸²

Drawing on the literature, it is possible to identify the different degrees of relevance of the party leadership to populist parties. This ranges from the top importance in the case of the political strategy approach through to a relevant although not compulsory role in the schemes of analysis endorsed by the discourse-based and thin-ideology approaches.

⁷⁷ Duncan McDonnell and Davide Vampa, "The Italian Lega Nord", in Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (eds.), *Understand Populist Party Organization: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, New York: Palgrave, 2016, pp. 105-130.

⁷⁸ Gilles Ivaldi and Maria Elisabetta Lanzone, "The French Front National: Organizational Change and Adaptation from Jean-Marie to Marine Le Pen", in Reinhard Heinisch and Oscar Mazzoleni (eds.), *Understand Populist Party Organization: The Radical Right in Western Europe*, New York: Palgrave, 2016, pp. 131-158.

⁷⁹ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*, p.382. Bolleyer, *op. cit.*

⁸⁰ Bolleyer, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Heinisch and Mazzoleni, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

⁸² Sergiu Gherghina and Sorina Soare, "From TV to Parliament: The Successful Birth and Progressive Death of a Personal Party. The Case of the People's Party Dan Diaconescu", in *Politologický časopis/Czech Journal of Political Science*, vol. 2, 2017, pp. 201-220.

Beyond the hierarchical dimension (leadership comes first vs. populism comes first), there is another subtle difference. For the discourse-based and thin-ideology approaches, strong (charismatic) leadership is a current but not a defining attribute of populist parties. In other words, leaderless populist parties are as possible as are populist parties with less dominant leaderships, as the case of Pia Kjærsgaard, co-founder of the Danish People's Party.⁸³

Populism in real life: leaders above parties?

If we put together the two literatures, the one on the personalization of politics and the other on populism, it is possible to draw some interesting observations. Let me start from the general trends documented by the literature on personalization, in particular in relation to voters' perception of the leaders. As briefly described above, empirical research since the 1960s has demonstrated that ideal leaders are perceived as trustworthy, honest and competent. However, due to the increasingly minimized distances between politicians and voters in a mediatized politics, preferences are more and more shaped by a so-called perception of ordinariness. Personalized politics is hence about politicians that are of the people and like the people.⁸⁴ In this context, communication skills have become very important. As briefly mentioned above, this is not only about eloquence and public-speaking, but also about expressive, empathic and relational capacities.⁸⁵ Contemporary leaders are required to be good rhetoricians, and this is not an issue strictly of communication skills but is more about the application of the traditional understanding of the means of persuasion: the perception of the speaker as credible, the emotions of the audience and, last but not least, the argument *per se*.⁸⁶

Where do the populist leaders fit in this general portrayal? A short descriptive part is necessary. Based on the existing literature, it is possible to observe that populist leaders are men for the most part, aged over 40 and

⁸³ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*; Tarchi, *op. cit.*

⁸⁴ Stanley Renshon, *The Clinton Presidency: Campaigning, Governing and the Psychology of Leadership*, Boulder: Westview, 1995, p. 2001 quoted by Garzia, *op. cit.*, p. 701.

⁸⁵ Frank Esser and Jesper Strömbäck (eds.), *Mediatization of Politics. Understanding the Transformation of Western Democracies*, London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

⁸⁶ Di Piazza, *op. cit.*

with relatively long political experience.⁸⁷ From this point of view, populist leaders look strikingly like mainstream leaders.⁸⁸ At this level, the peculiarity of the populist leaders comes from their selection in elections with a limited degree of competitiveness and low levels of participation.⁸⁹

If we refer to how populist leaders depict themselves, the literature on the personalization of politics becomes particularly useful. As already stated, the very position of the populist leaders in the public arena is filtered by the “appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society”⁹⁰. Since populist leaders constantly refer to the natural unity and virtuousness of their people, their claimed ordinariness is a logical consequence. In line with the assumptions of the literature on the personalization of politics, populist leaders portray themselves as being part of the people and like the people. The populist leaders are first and foremost representatives of the people they worship in public speeches.

But is it really a distinctive feature in a personalized politics that has demonstrated that ordinary men, politicians that succeed in identifying with their public, tend to dominate contemporary politics?

The answer is “Yes, they are!”, although with some nuances. The difference is related to the fact that the ordinariness of the populist leaders is fundamentally shaped by the populist thin-ideology. Populist leaders exhibit a double ordinariness: a positive one, the result of their belonging to the common people and a negative one, the consequence of their publicly-preached opposition to the mainstream élites. Moreover, while in the literature on the personalization of politics this ordinariness is essentially due to a process of adaptation to an exogenous stimulus, which is the lowering effect of the media and new social media, in the populist case it is first and foremost a synchronization with the declared goal of giving power back to the ordinary people. At the same level, not only do populist leaders claim to be listening, understanding and voicing the will of the people, but, because of their similarity with the people, they also dress, speak, eat and

⁸⁷ Soare, 2017, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸ Cross and Pilet, *op. cit.*

⁸⁹ Cross and Pilet, *op. cit.*; Heinisch and Mazzoleni, *op. cit.*

⁹⁰ Margaret Canovan, “Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy”, in *Political Studies*, vol. 47, no 1, 1999, p. 3.

behave like the people. Note that this does not cancel distinguishing elements like the Wilders platinum blond hair or Siderov's casual leather jackets.

The ordinariness of populist leadership is functional to another fundamental element: his trustfulness. Populist leaders apply a basic principle of transitivity:

Populist leaders are part of the common people
(= *Populist leaders are like the common people*)
Common people can be trusted.

Populist leaders are trustful.

The same mechanisms of transitivity make them likeable and understandable. However, as documented by the literature on the voting behavior, political leaders are also evaluated based on their competence. This is where the populist leaders' extraordinariness comes from. This is how populist leaders succeed in keeping the balance between the ordinariness of the constituents and their exhibited extraordinariness.⁹¹ The populist leader's competence is less an issue of technicalities and more the capacity to say what people are thinking, to see through the machinations of the elites and to be able to formulate understandable solutions to the problems that the élites in power tend to depict as complex and intractable.⁹² The extraordinariness of the populist leaders is connected with the prevalent metaphor of them being "saviors" of the people, endowed with extraordinary qualities, purifiers of a perverted democracy controlled by corrupt elite, providers of immediate solutions for bringing the scepter of the *volonté générale* back into place.

The peculiarity of the populist leader is hence the ability to balance ordinariness and extraordinariness: "there is no doubt that a leader must show uncommon qualities in the eyes of his followers in order to secure their trust but, at the same time, a populist leader must never make the mistake of showing himself made of different ingredients compared to the common man; instead, his foremost ability should be precisely that of

⁹¹ Taggart, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁹² Albertazzi and McDonnell, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

suggesting to his followers that, in the end, he is like them, and still to know how to make a more appropriate use of the gifts that each member of the people potentially has"⁹³. This extraordinariness is also the source of the control over the organization of the party. "Thus the loyalty to the leader equals loyalty to the people. As a result, those within the party who disagree with the leader tend to be swiftly branded as traitors and added to the list of the 'enemies of the people'"⁹⁴. McDonnell's⁹⁵ analysis has fine-tuned the compliance with an authoritarian *Führerprinzip* in the management of these parties. The differences identified in three leaderships, termed "charismatic" by different scholars, Silvio Berlusconi of the People of Freedom, Christoph Blocher of the Swiss People's Party and Umberto Bossi of the Northern League, are particularly useful on this point. Not only is "charisma" not a compulsory feature of the relationship between populist leaders and their parties' representatives and members, but also there is significant variance across cases. McDonnell (2016) clearly demonstrates that Bossi tended to be considered to possess unique and extraordinary powers, the very basis of an unconditional acceptance of his personal authority and emotional commitment. In the case of Berlusconi, McDonnell⁹⁶ finds less evidence in favor of an emotional commitment, coupled with an emphasis on Berlusconi's unique qualities. However, Berlusconi's authority is encompassed as being a continuation of a personal party⁹⁷. Finally, Blocher is considered to be the weakest case of coterie charisma, his unique qualities are stated by his followers, however his authority is not unconditionally accepted⁹⁸.

The description of the ideal populist leader cannot avoid the issue of integrity, a major proof of genuineness, of non-contamination from the corrupted politics. Integrity can be understood as a direct consequence of them being outsiders, challenging politics "as usual"⁹⁹. In 2016, Geert Wilders was found guilty of hate speech, committed two years earlier in

⁹³ Tarchi, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁵ McDonnell, *op. cit.*

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ Duncan McDonnell, "Silvio Berlusconi's Personal Parties: From Forza Italia to the Popolo Della Libertà", in *Political Studies*, vol. 61, no. 1, pp. 217–233.

⁹⁸ McDonnell 2016, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ Canovan, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

the guise of a specific question asked to a rally: “Do you more or fewer Moroccans in the Netherlands”¹⁰⁰. His comments after the guilty verdict are particularly relevant for the position of Wilders in relation to the mainstream politics. He openly accused “the judges of convicting ‘half of the Netherlands’ - a reference to research commissioned by the PVV which found 43% of the Dutch public believe the country has a problem with Moroccans”¹⁰¹. It is thus important for populist leader to exhibit their non-belonging to the mainstream politics. They can do it by simply emphasizing the fact that they come from outside politics. They can do it by stressing that their way of doing politics is different because they are essentially entrepreneurs like Silvio Berlusconi and Dan Diaconescu, journalists like Volen Siderov, or academics like Pablo Iglesias and Pim Fortuyn. However, some of them are not without political experience. This is the case with Geert Wilders, whose experience in the People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy was used as proof of his resistance to the system. In opposition to the VVD on the Turkish accession to the EU, Wilders had left the VVD and founded a new party. All in all, because they are outsiders, populist leaders claim to be able to say loudly what the (common) people think about essential questions (i.e. immigration, EU, globalization, etc) while the cosmopolitan elite hide behind technical discourses and political correctness. Their non-belonging to the “political system” is also used as a proof of non-corruption. However, various judicial scandals have stained major populist leaders. In July 2017, Umberto Bossi was sentenced to two years and six months in jail following a trial for defrauding the State of 56 million euros¹⁰². Ján Slota, former chairman of the Slovak national party, was found guilty of attempting to bribe a second party into not calling the police after a car accident in 2016¹⁰³. In 2017, Marine Le Pen was

¹⁰⁰ “Netherlands Trial: Geert Wilders Guilty of Incitement”, 9 December 2016, available at [<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38260377>], accessed July 2017.

¹⁰¹ “Netherlands Trial: Geert Wilders Guilty of Incitement...”.

¹⁰² “Bossi, Belsito convicted in fraud case. Former leader gets two years, six months”, 24 July 2017, available at [http://www.ansa.it/english/news/politics/2017/07/24/bossi-belsito-convicted-in-fraud-case_92eb3fc3-87ed-4124-a20f-9e423bee2cb1.html], accessed June 2017.

¹⁰³ “Ex-SNS chair Slota sentenced for bribery but still has right of appeal. He attempted to bribe a second party into not calling the police after a car accident in 2016”, 4 May 2017, available at [<https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20524948/ex-sns-chair-slota-sentenced-for-bribery-but-still-has-right-of-appeal.html>], accessed June 2017.

charged with misusing EU funds to pay her party's parliamentary assistants¹⁰⁴.

Conclusions: is anything really new under the sun?

While the success of populist leaders cannot be isolated from the general trend towards strong party leaders and direct communication between the party leadership and supporters, in the case of populism, personalized leadership cannot be considered a defining attribute.¹⁰⁵ Although it might seem to lack coherence, I fully agree with the observation that populism is “particularly liable to the politics of personality”¹⁰⁶. This means that the “degree” of populism and the different interpretations of the compulsory features of the thin-ideology of populism (the references to the pure people, the corrupt elite and the general will) are interpreted and re-shaped by the personality of the leaders. The leadership explains the chameleon-like nature of populism. It can hence be demonstrated easily that the populism is not only context-dependent, but also leader-bound. A very eloquent example that speaks to this point is provided by the detailed analysis of the FPÖ provided by Heinisch.¹⁰⁷ In line with the assumption introduced in the first pages of this article, there is a logical sequence that has to be taken into account when analyzing populism. First comes the ideational framework and then the relationship of the political actor (the leader) with the party and more in general the constituents. This is important because, beyond differences of personality, of political cultural and context-peculiarities, leaders that are labeled as populist have to fit first within the *forma mentis* that considers society to be separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups. Their political entrepreneurship is fully dependent on the credibility of this Manichean discourse. This is the territory on which it is possible to identify the frontier between popular leaders and populist ones.

¹⁰⁴ “Marine Le Pen Charged with Alleged EU Funds Misuse”, 30 June 2017, available at [<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/06/30/marine-le-pen-charged-alleged-eu-funds-misuse>], accessed June 2017.

¹⁰⁵ Mudde and Kaltwasser, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ Taggart, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹⁰⁷ Heinisch, *op. cit.*

Finally yet importantly, in this unfinished attempt to draw an ideal portrayal of populist leadership, there is an important congruence with general trends in contemporary party politics. There is, indeed, general agreement in the comparative literature that populism is context-dependent. An increasingly personalized (hence mediatized) politics has most probably had an impact upon populist leadership. Marine Le Pen's highly professionalized electoral campaigns are an element in favor of this synchronization. Similarly, the communicational skills that used to be the trademark of the populist leaders have become a basic requirement of any relevant politician. In my understanding, the difference lays in the narrative and the relationship with the followers/voters. Populist leadership is dependent on the populist content of their discourses. Before being a party chairman (with the extraordinary characteristics required), the populist leader is the spokesperson of the *vox populi* and as such has to constantly demonstrate - with gestures, official positions and narratives - the sameness with the people. It is hence fundamental to make the voters see in them their own reflection, what common voters like in themselves and the others. As already mentioned, there is however an *ex negativo* element: populist leaders constantly show what they are by emphasizing what they are not. They regularly narrate the differences with the corrupt, cosmopolitan, indifferent elites and they do it via both linguistic and non-linguistic signs. Populist leaders have a performative political identity because they use much more instruments than conventional political (spoken) language (i.e. party programmes, policy positions, etc.). The exhibition of their difference requires not only language (i.e. simple and simplistic) but also bodily aspects of language (i.e. gestures, voice). Moreover, the populist leadership credibility is strongly dependent on their personal features and the way these personal features are presented to the others. The ethos, the character of the speaker (and this is true for any speaker), is more powerful than his/her arguments: this is why he/she is trustworthy and his/her arguments are perceived as good arguments. It does not work the other way around.¹⁰⁸ This point is, however, not new. Already noted by Aristotle in the 4th century BC: "We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and

¹⁰⁸ Di Piazza, *op. cit.*

opinions are divided [...]. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses"¹⁰⁹. Yet these features are not just descriptions, passive characteristics, they became part of a political action. That means that the moment the populist leaders say *I'm (like) you!* that means they become in a credible and trustful way the personification of the people, the genuine source of democratic legitimacy. This is the populist *forma mentis* direct effect on leadership: all the narratives, gestures and signs work in this way. The populist discourse *ex ante* determines what populist leaders are and their political performance succeeds only if they act convincingly as part of the people. In other words, less than a credibility based on rational arguments and demonstrated proofs, populist leaders are trusted because of their (narrated and perceived) characteristics. Hence the more voters and followers see the leaders as being similar to themselves, the more credible he/she becomes and, in direct consequence, the more credible his/her arguments become.

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