The Socio-Political Dimensions of Populism

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Abstract:

Populism is a complex social and political phenomenon that extends beyond a mere electoral strategy or temporary discourse, it emerges from crises of representation, institutional trust, and socio-political transformations in contemporary societies, this study examines the concept of populism, its theoretical approaches, social and political roots, populist discourse, mobilization mechanisms, and its impacts on democratic institutions and society, the research highlights that populism can simultaneously enhance political participation and expose marginalized groups while also deepening social and political polarization and challenging democratic stability, understanding populism is crucial for evaluating its effects on democracy and guiding strategies to balance popular engagement with institutional stability.

Keywords: *Populism, Political discourse, Social polarization, Representative democracy, Social media.*

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Introduction:

Populism is a major contemporary phenomenon that reflects deep crises in political representation, social and economic inequalities, and cultural transformations. Its recent global rise has prompted multidisciplinary study, analyzing its concepts, theoretical approaches, social roots, discourse, mobilization, and effects on the political system.

Populism matters politically for its impact on democracy and power dynamics, socially for its effects on identity and social divisions, and academically as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon requiring integrated analysis,

The study aims to define populism and its characteristics, review theoretical approaches, analyze social and political roots, and examine populist discourse, mobilization mechanisms, and its impact on democracy.

The main research problem can be summarized in the following question**: Is populism merely a temporary electoral strategy, or does it reflect a deeper crisis in political and social representation?**

This raises questions about populism's impact on democracy, its social and political origins, and the features of its discourse and mobilization.

Chapter One: The Conceptual and Theoretical Framework of Populism.

Populism is a major contemporary phenomenon that reshapes state–society relations and challenges democratic institutions through mass–elite conflict, simplified politics, and emotional mobilization, this chapter outlines its conceptual and theoretical framework by defining populism, examining it in modern political thought, and analyzing its key features from a political sociology perspective.

Section One: The Concept of Populism.

Populism is a complex phenomenon reflecting crises of representation, institutional trust, and social change, examined here through its definition and key features to prepare for further theoretical analysis.

First: Definition of Populism – Linguistically and Terminologically.

Populism refers linguistically to matters related to the people, and conceptually to a political discourse that divides society into the people and the elite while claiming to represent the popular will.

1- Linguistic Definition of Populism:

Linguistically, the term "populism" is derived from "the people" and refers to what pertains to or addresses the general public, aiming to attract their support, this derivation reflects that populism addresses the broad masses, claims to speak on their behalf, and defends their interests against political, economic, or cultural elites, the linguistic meaning highlights the mobilizing dimension of populism,

relying on simplification and emotional appeal to attract popular support (Mudde, 2004, p. 542).

2- Terminological Definition of Populism:

Terminologically, populism is one of the most debated concepts in social and political sciences due to the multiplicity of its definitions and the diversity of theoretical approaches, populism does not denote a comprehensive political ideology with a clear intellectual program but rather expresses a political logic or style in discourse and practice that can be adopted by various political currents, whether right-wing or left-wing (Mudde, 2004, p. 543).

Cas Mudde defines populism as a "thin-centered ideology" that views society as divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps: the pure people versus the corrupt elite, claiming that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004, p. 543), this definition highlights the binary structure of populist discourse, simplifying social and political reality into a moral struggle between good and evil.

Ernesto Laclau, on the other hand, considers populism not merely as political discourse but as logic for constructing political identity, aggregating disparate social demands into a unified discourse under the label "the people" against the "power" or the "established system" (Laclau, 2005, p 155), this perspective emphasizes the constitutive dimension of populism as a mechanism to reshape the political space.

Some studies also define populism as a political strategy relying on charismatic leadership, bypassing intermediary institutions, and seeking a direct relationship between the leader and the masses (Weyland, 2001, p 14), this definition underscores the organizational and mobilizing aspects of populism, particularly in fragile democratic systems.

3- General Characteristics of Populism :

From these definitions, several essential features of populism can be identified:

- **Bipolarity:** Dividing society into people versus elite.
- **Claim of representing the general will:** Speaking exclusively on behalf of the people.
- **Simplistic approach:** Reducing complex issues to direct moral interpretations.
- **Ideological flexibility:** Populism can be employed by different political currents.

Thus, populism can be understood as an analytical concept describing a particular pattern of political practice and discourse that reflects crises of representation and trust within contemporary societies, rather than a fully coherent ideological project.

Second: Populism in Contemporary Political Thought.

Populism has gained growing attention since the late 20th century, with the rise of movements in Europe, Latin America, and the U.S., prompting scholars to examine its nature and its effects on democracy and representative institutions.

Some liberal perspectives in contemporary political thought view populism as a direct threat to liberal democracy due to its simplistic discourse, creating a sharp polarization between “the people” and “the elite,” along with hostility toward intermediary institutions such as parties, parliaments, and independent media, Margaret Canovan emphasizes that populism tends to glorify popular will at the expense of rules and institutions, potentially undermining the separation of powers and the rule of law (Canovan, 1999, p. 10).

Similarly, Jan-Werner Müller argues that populism is inherently exclusionary, as populists claim exclusive representation of the “true” people and question the legitimacy of political opponents, which contradicts pluralism; the core of liberal democracy (Müller, 2016, p. 19), from this perspective, populism is seen as a deviation from sound democratic practice rather than a corrective mechanism.

Conversely, another trend in contemporary political thought considers populism as a product of the crisis of representative democracy rather than an external threat, according to this view, populism emerges when political elites and existing institutions fail to respond to growing social demands, especially in the context of globalization, widening social gaps, and declining trust in traditional parties, Cas Mudde notes that populism reflects widespread citizen’s feelings of political exclusion and expresses protest against the perceived elitism of the democratic system (Mudde, 2007, p. 82).

From a more critical sociological perspective, Ernesto Laclau contends that populism is not a disease affecting democracy but a political logic inherent to it during moments of crisis, populism, according to Laclau, is a mechanism to reconstruct the political space by uniting disparate social demands within a collective identity called “the people” in opposition to the existing system (Laclau, 2005, p. 154), this approach frames populism as an expression of structural transformations in the state-society relationship.

Hence, populism in contemporary political thought is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to mere political deviation or institutional threat but must be understood in its social and historical context, reflecting crises of representation and deep changes in political participation and citizen-state relations.

Third: Populism from the Perspective of Political Sociology.

Political sociology views populism as a complex phenomenon shaped by structural, cultural, and political factors, reflecting societal imbalances, economic changes, social integration shifts, and crises of representation and political trust.

Several political sociologists emphasize the relationship between populism and structural transformations brought by economic globalization, the decline of the welfare state, and widening inequality, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser argue that these transformations weaken traditional links between citizens and political institutions, creating increasing feelings of exclusion among large social groups and providing fertile ground for populist discourse (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 63).

Political sociology also analyzes populist discourse as a tool for reconstructing collective identity, in this context, populism is not merely a protest speech but a social mechanism for producing new political meaning, dividing the social field into “us” versus “them” and redefining belonging and enmity; Laclau asserts that populism is a socio-political logic through which disparate social demands are unified under a collective identity called “the people” against the elite or the established system (Laclau, 2005, p. 154).

Moreover, political sociology pays special attention to the mass mobilization mechanisms used by populism, and the role of symbols, emotions, and cultural identity in shaping political consciousness, populism in this sense derives its power from its ability to channel feelings of anger, fear, and social exclusion into organized political energy (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 25).

Populism is thus understood as an expression of a profound crisis of trust between society and political institutions, which are no longer able to represent social diversity or respond to citizens aspirations, Pierre Bourdieu observes that such crises open the door for alternative discourses claiming to represent the “true voice” of society in opposition to ruling elites (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 221).

From this perspective, populism is not a superficial or temporary political phenomenon but an indicator of deep social imbalances and structural transformations in the relationship between the state and society and in patterns of political participation and integration.

Populism is a multidimensional phenomenon—political, social, and cultural—characterized by the people/elite divide, claim to represent the general will, issue simplification, and ideological flexibility, it is a political discourse and practice, not a full ideology, reflecting crises of representation and institutional trust while channeling the demands of marginalized groups.

Section Two: Theoretical Approaches Explaining Populism.

Populism is explained through diverse theoretical approaches, mainly liberal, Marxist, and cultural–identity perspectives, each offering different interpretations of its causes and dynamics.

First: The Liberal Approach.

The liberal approach focuses on populism as a threat to liberal democracy and its intermediary institutions, according to this perspective; populism simplifies

complex political and social issues into a moral binary of the “pure people” versus the “corrupt elite,” which undermines traditional democratic institutions, including political parties, parliaments, and independent judiciaries (Müller, 2016, p. 19), this analysis demonstrates how populist discourse can transform political pluralism and diversity into a rigid binary conflict, increasing polarization and weakening the foundations of democratic governance.

The liberal school also argues that populism relies on a direct relationship between the leader and the masses, bypassing traditional democratic channels such as unions, parties, and parliaments, this threatens political pluralism and endangers the peaceful transfer of power, Canovan explains that this type of populism reflects “two faces of democracy”: a direct popular face based on the immediate expression of the people’s will, and a representative institutional face that relies on institutions and legal mechanisms, populist movements often prioritize the popular face over formal institutions, increasing the fragility of the democratic system (Canovan, 1999, p. 10).

The liberal approach sees populism as a reaction against elites, driven by citizen alienation, enabling rapid mobilization of support, especially during economic or political crises or when trust in democratic institutions is low.

Second: The Marxist Approach.

The Marxist approach explains populism as a result of structural inequalities within the economic and social system and as a product of class conflict, according to this perspective, populism emerges particularly during economic crises or severe class disparities, where populist discourse is used to mobilize against the dominant economic and political elite, focusing on the demands of marginalized and underrepresented groups within the political system (Laclau, 2005, p. 154).

This approach emphasizes that populism is not merely a discourse or electoral tactic but a tool for reproducing class conflict symbolically, directing popular anger toward the political or economic elite instead of addressing the deep structural causes of crises, such as class exploitation or unequal resource distribution, in this sense, populism serves as an indicator of crises in the distribution of power and resources in society, reflecting growing social and economic exclusion experienced by ordinary citizens (Laclau, 2005, p. 160).

The Marxist approach views populism as exploiting structural political and economic imbalances, portraying itself as defending the “oppressed people” against elites, it is seen as a dynamic political–social tool used during crises to channel social conflict within the existing class structure.

Third: The Cultural and Identity-Based Approach.

The cultural and identity-based approach emphasizes the symbolic and cultural dimensions of populism, going beyond traditional economic and political explanations, according to this perspective, populism derives its strength from

mobilizing symbols, language, emotions, and ideologies linked to collective identity, whether national, religious, or ethnic (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018, p. 25), this analysis allows populism to be understood as a tool for reproducing social and political belonging, rather than merely a means of gaining power or achieving specific economic demands.

A key feature of this approach is that populism redefines the notions of "us" and "them," integrating social and political demands into identity-based discourse that strengthens the group's sense of belonging and identifies the "other" or "enemy" of the existing system, cultural analysis highlights that this discourse relies on symbolic and emotional mobilization of the masses, drawing on shared values, cultural heritage, and collective historical experiences to reinforce common identity (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 66).

This approach also posits that populism reflects crises of belonging and identity in contemporary societies, where individuals facing alienation or social exclusion find in populist discourse a means of redefining their identity and position within society, thus, populism can be seen as a tool for mobilizing collective identity and reorganizing the political sphere around cultural and symbolic affiliations, not merely as a result of economic disparities or political struggles (Laclau, 2005, p. 160).

By doing so, the cultural and identity-based approach helps explain populism's ability to succeed in various contexts—economic, social, or cultural—through its capacity to present a compelling discourse that enhances the group's sense of belonging and leverages shared values and symbols.

Explaining populism requires a multidimensional perspective: liberal approaches highlight its threat to democracy, Marxist approaches emphasize economic inequality and class conflict, and cultural–identity approaches focus on collective identity and the "us versus them" dynamic in mass mobilization.

Populism is a multidimensional phenomenon rooted in crises of representation and citizen–elite relations, using the people/elite divide, issue simplification, and ideological flexibility to mobilize support. It reflects social and economic inequalities, class shifts, and declining trust in institutions, reshaping state–society relations.

Chapter Two: The Social and Political Roots of Populism.

Populism emerges from interconnected social and political factors such as economic inequality, class changes, institutional weakness, and crises of representative democracy, this chapter analyzes how these conditions create a favorable environment for populist discourse and mass mobilization.

Section One: Social Factors in the Emergence of Populism.

Populism arises from social contexts marked by inequality, marginalization, and class transformations, as these conditions shape citizens' relations with the

political system and encourage the adoption of populist discourse as a form of protest and social affirmation.

First: Social and Economic Inequality.

Social and economic inequality is a key structural factor that lays the groundwork for populism, growing disparities in income and wealth between different social groups create widespread perceptions of injustice and inequality, generating a sense of exclusion among less privileged classes, when economic and social policies lack effective mechanisms for resource redistribution and social justice, populist discourse becomes attractive because it offers a simplified explanation of complex crises and promises to represent the interests of the "real people" against the economic and political elite (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 45).

Economic inequality and social exclusion erode trust in institutions, making citizens more receptive to populist leaders who offer simple solutions, while populist discourse unites marginalized groups and channels collective frustration toward elites or perceived causes of crisis.

Populism thrives amid economic and social inequalities, where citizens feel unrepresented and deprived of basic rights, enabling rapid mobilization and strong popular support.

Second: Social Marginalization and Loss of Trust.

Social marginalization and loss of trust in political institutions are fundamental factors contributing to the spread of populism, marginalized groups—whether due to poverty, cultural background, or ethnic affiliation—often feel unrepresented within the political system and experience social and political exclusion, in this context, populist discourse is appealing because it presents itself as a platform representing the "real people", placing the traditional elite in opposition to these constituencies as obstacles or adversaries to their interests (Canovan, 1999, p. 10).

Political sociology shows that declining trust in institutions fosters citizen disconnection, creating fertile ground for populism, as leaders exploit public discontent with simple solutions to mobilize support.

Social marginalization highlights crises in political representation, and populism acts as a tool for collective protest, mobilizing marginalized groups shared identity against elites and giving the perception that their voices are heard beyond traditional institutions.

Third: Class Transformations.

Class transformations play a central role in explaining the spread of populism, especially in societies undergoing rapid changes in social class structures due to globalization, economic shifts, or industrial/technological restructuring,

these transformations rearrange social groups and alter their relationships with power and wealth, generating feelings of instability and anxiety among middle and lower classes (Laclau, 2005, p. 154).

Populism reinforces class and social identity, channels popular demands toward elites, and unites affected groups around the people/elite divide, giving a voice to those who feel marginalized by social and structural changes.

Populism is a social response to structural disruptions, expressing anger over lost economic and social security and redefining group positions. Social factors—inequality, marginalization, declining trust, and class transformations—drive citizens toward populist discourse claiming to represent the "real people."

In conclusion, populism, from this perspective, is not merely a political strategy but a reflection of complex social interactions indicating crises in the fair distribution of resources and institutional trust, these factors provide the foundation for understanding its political, economic, and cultural dimensions.

Section Two: Political and Institutional Factors.

Political and institutional crises, such as unrepresentation and declining trust, play a key role in the rise of populism. Political sociology highlights how populism exploits institutional weaknesses and amplifies political polarization.

First: Crisis of Political Representation.

The crisis of political representation is one of the most prominent factors explaining the emergence of populism in modern societies, it arises when citizens feel that the political system does not reflect their real interests, or that traditional state institutions do not allow them meaningful participation in decision-making, this perception leads to political alienation, as individuals feel their voices are unheard and their interests overlooked, increasing their tendency to engage with populist movements or parties that present themselves as the voice of the "real people", bypassing traditional channels of democratic institutions (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 33).

In this context, populism redefines the relationship between leaders and the masses by establishing a direct connection that circumvents traditional institutions such as parties and parliaments, this direct link enhances popular legitimacy and increases the movement's or leader's ability to mobilize rapidly, especially during political or economic crises.

Furthermore, the crisis of representation is seen as an indicator of the weaknesses of representative democracy in meeting citizens aspirations, making populism a means of reshaping the relationship between citizens and the state, it does so by offering a popular discourse capable of unifying the masses around a shared identity and collective interests, redistributing political legitimacy away from traditional institutions (Kaltwasser et al., 2017, p. 105).

Second: Weakness of Parties and Institutions.

The weakness of political parties and institutions is another fundamental factor contributing to the growth of populism. Ineffective institutions or parties that fail to meet citizens' demands foster frustration and political alienation, when traditional parties fail to provide tangible solutions to economic and social crises, the public turns to populist movements and figures who offer simple discourse and a promise of direct representation of their interests (Kaltwasser et al, 2017, p. 110).

In addition, weak judicial and oversight institutions undermine confidence in the system's ability to protect public rights and interests, making the public more receptive to populist discourse, which promises to confront the elite and defend the "people" against corruption or institutional neglect, in this context, populism becomes a mechanism to exploit weaknesses in the political system by offering rapid solutions and mobilizing citizens who feel unheard within traditional institutions.

Third: Crisis of Representative Democracy.

The emergence of populism is also linked to a crisis of representative democracy, where traditional democratic institutions are perceived as incapable of representing the true will of the people or responding promptly and effectively to their demands, this lack of representation increases the discursive legitimacy of populist movements, which present themselves as an alternative capable of directly expressing the general will, bypassing conventional procedures and institutions (Norris & Inglehart, 2019, p. 18).

Studies indicate that the crisis of representative democracy manifests in weak political participation, unresponsiveness to citizens demands, and rising partisan polarization, all of which enhance populism's capacity to capitalize on feelings of exclusion and political alienation, redefining the relationship between citizens and the political system, consequently, populism serves as a tool for redirecting political and social demands away from traditional institutions, while presenting a popular discourse that aims to unify the masses around a shared identity and collective interests.

Political and institutional factors drive the spread of populism. Crises of political representation, weak parties, and slow, polarized institutions increase public frustration, making populist movements and their direct, alternative discourse more appealing.

Populism is a product of complex social and political interactions, fueled by inequality, marginalization, class changes, and weak institutions, it reshapes the citizen–state relationship and strengthens direct popular legitimacy, understanding these roots is essential for analyzing its emergence, impact on democracy, and mechanisms of discourse and mobilization.

Chapter Three: Populist Discourse and Its Impact on the Political System.

Populist discourse is central to populism, as it mobilizes the masses, reshapes collective identity, and redefines relations between the people and elites, this chapter examines its key features—people/elite division, issue simplification, and media influence—showing that populism is both a political strategy and a broader social and cultural phenomenon.

Section One: Characteristics of Populist Discourse and Mobilization Mechanisms.

Analyzing populist discourse and mobilization mechanisms helps explain how mass awareness is shaped, support is mobilized, and social and political divisions are reinforced. This analysis is structured around three main sub-sections.

First: The People/Elite Dichotomy.

Populism is built on a bipolar logic that divides society into two opposing groups: the "pure" or "real" people versus the corrupt or detached elite, this dichotomy forms the core of populist discourse, providing a simplified framework for understanding political and social conflicts, it allows the populist leader or movement to portray themselves as the protector of the people's interests against what is perceived as exploitation or neglect by the elite (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 53).

This dichotomy has several key characteristics:

1- Legitimizing the leader: Populism portrays the leader as the people's direct voice.
2- Enhancing belonging: Populism fosters a shared identity as part of the "real people."
3- Polarization: Populism deepens the people/elite divide, fueling tensions and mass mobilization.
4- Guiding debate: Populism simplifies issues into a moral struggle, making politics accessible but limiting critical analysis.

From a political sociology perspective, this dichotomy serves as a symbolic mechanism for reproducing social and political identity; it enables populism to exploit feelings of exclusion and alienation and facilitates mass mobilization by creating a strong psychological and emotional link between individuals and the political leader or slogan (Laclau, 2005, p. 22).

Second: Simplification of Political Issues.

Populist discourse is characterized by an excessive simplification of complex political and social issues; structural problems are reduced to moral conflicts, such as good versus evil, people versus elite, or justice versus corruption, this simplification makes populist discourse more appealing to the masses, as it offers direct and easy solutions to complex problems, providing the public with a sense of understanding and control without delving into institutional or economic details (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 45).

This simplification serves several main functions:

1- Mobilization efficiency: Clear, direct messages enable rapid public support without specialized knowledge.
2- Symbolic legitimacy: The leader is shown as the direct executor of the people's will, bypassing traditional institutions.
3- Reshaping debate: Populism turns political dialogue into a moral struggle, favoring slogans and quick promises over policy analysis.
4- Strengthening identity: Populism unites the masses around common enemies, reinforcing belonging and emotional engagement.

From a political sociology standpoint, this approach is a mechanism for reproducing social and political divisions and exploiting the public's sense of exclusion and alienation, facilitating direct leader–audience communication outside traditional mediating institutions (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp. 56).

Third: The Role of Media and Social Media.

Traditional media and social media have become central tools in modern populist mobilization; these platforms enable rapid dissemination of simplified messages and access to a wide audience without passing through traditional intermediaries such as political parties or mainstream media, populist leaders use these platforms to deliver personal, direct discourse that targets emotions, strengthens identity and collective belonging, and enhances the public's sense of being part of the "real people" (Engesser, Ernst, Esser, & Büchel, 2017, p. 102).

Modern media plays several key roles in populist mobilization:

1- Direct connection: Populist leaders communicate directly with citizens, boosting influence and symbolic legitimacy.
2- Amplifying divisions: Media highlights the people/elite conflict, fostering polarization and popular support.
3- Reshaping identity: Digital platforms strengthen collective belonging and loyalty to the "real people."
4- Rapid mobilization: Social media enables real-time mass mobilization during crises and political events.

From a political sociology perspective, media and social media are strategic mechanisms for reproducing populist discourse and expanding its influence, engaging audiences emotionally and in terms of identity, thus strengthening the movement or populist leader (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 60).

Populist discourse mobilizes the masses through the people/elite divide, simplification of complex issues, and strategic use of media and social media, enabling direct influence on the public and reinforcing social and political divisions.

The conclusion emphasizes that populist discourse is not merely a political tool; it is an instrument for reshaping collective identity, enhancing popular belonging,

deepening polarization, and influencing traditional democratic structures, making it a central element for understanding the social and political dynamics of populism.

Section Two: Social and Political Impacts of Populism.

Populism represents a complex phenomenon that extends beyond a political style; it has wide-ranging effects on the social and political structures of society, these impacts can be analyzed through three main sub-sections:

First: Populism and Democracy.

Populism directly affects modern democracy, on one hand, it can enhance political participation and motivate citizens to engage in the political process, especially in contexts where people feel excluded or underrepresented, in this sense, populism serves as a tool for revitalizing democracy, revealing crises of political representation, and providing marginalized groups with avenues to express their demands outside traditional channels (Mounk, 2018, p. 112).

However, many scholars view populism as a phenomenon that can threaten the stability of traditional democratic institutions, its reliance on simplifying complex issues and providing rapid solutions without adhering to institutional rules creates a dual impact: while it may stimulate participation, it can simultaneously weaken political pluralism and concentrate power excessively in the hands of the populist leader or movement (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 75).

Populism reshapes citizen–state relations by bypassing intermediary institutions, risking the peaceful transfer of power, it both reflects representation crises and declining trust, and can deepen divisions, making democracy fragile without strong institutions and oversight.

Studies indicate that the polarization resulting from populism is not limited to the short term or electoral campaigns; it can become a permanent structure in political life, reshaping citizens' political identities, altering patterns of social interaction, and increasing the likelihood of ongoing political or social crises (Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008, p. 60).

Consequently, populism is more than a temporary electoral tool—it is a sustained phenomenon that reshapes relationships between citizens and the state, as well as among different social groups, making social and political polarization one of its most significant long-term effects.

Second: Future of Populism in Contemporary Societies.

Research suggests that populism will remain a persistent and evolving phenomenon in modern societies, driven by a range of structural, social, and political factors, among the most prominent of these are ongoing economic crises, unequal distribution of power and wealth, and rapid social transformations such as globalization, labor market changes, and demographic shifts (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, p. 85).

With the development of digital media and social networks, direct mobilization mechanisms have become more effective and widespread, populist leaders can reach audiences without traditional intermediaries such as political parties or mainstream media, enabling them to exert direct emotional influence and reshape collective identity (Engesser et al., 2017, p. 1120).

Populism is expected to evolve into new forms, including:

1- Cross-border alliances: Populist movements in different countries influence each other globally.
2- Specialized digital discourse targeting different audience segments: utilizing big data and political behavior analysis to enhance the effectiveness of mobilization campaigns.
3- Broader mobilization strategies based on cultural, religious, or national identity: deepening collective belonging and increasing cohesion around populist narratives (Kaltwasser et al., 2017, p. 130).

Understanding the future of populism requires an integrated analysis of its interactions with economic, social, and political structures, as well as modern digital media, to distinguish between legitimate expressions of public demands and discourse that may undermine democratic stability and institutional integrity.

Populism has a dual impact: it can increase political participation and highlight representation crises, but it also threatens democratic stability through issue simplification, bypassing institutions, and excessive leader legitimization.

Populism is a multidimensional and enduring phenomenon that deepens social and political polarization through the people/elite divide, cultural identity, issue simplification, and use of modern media, while it can expose representation crises and amplify marginalized voices, it also threatens democratic stability, challenges institutions, and risks undermining political pluralism, understanding its discourse and mobilization mechanisms is essential to assess its impact on democracy and society.

Conclusion:

This study provided a comprehensive examination of populism as a contemporary social and political phenomenon, addressing its conceptual and theoretical framework, social and political roots, discourse, mobilization mechanisms, and effects on the political system, the research aimed to analyze populism from a multidimensional perspective, combining political theory and political sociology to understand the reasons for its emergence, its characteristics, and its methods of influence on institutions and society.

The study produced the following findings:

- Populism is a political discourse marked by a people-versus-elite divide, simplified issues, and ideological flexibility."

- Populism is viewed as a threat to democracy (liberal), a result of class and economic inequalities (Marxist), and driven by identity and belonging (cultural–identity).
- Populism stems from inequality, marginalization, institutional distrust, weak parties, and crises of democratic representation.
- Populist discourse uses the people/elite divide, simplified issues, and media to directly mobilize audiences.
- Populism may boost participation but also increases polarization, social tensions, and weakens democratic institutions."

Populism is a multidimensional phenomenon affecting democracy, social cohesion, and institutions; understanding its roots and mechanisms is key to safeguarding democratic stability.

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