

Populism: Focusing on the People's Interests

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Abstract

Ever since the times of ancient philosophy, the focus of politics has been the well-being of the people, which has been ensured, throughout history, through various approaches. The search for a leader that is honest and also able to do justice can be seen as one of the constant wishes of the people. The way politicians build their public image struggles to achieve this sentiment of trust. Currently, Populism has risen in popularity since it claims to promote the interests of the masses, of the "pure" people, and not those of the corrupted political elite. Populism gives citizens the feeling that they are in control and free to make the right choice of leader to ensure their well-being. The present paper will rely on the fact that the increasing individualism across the world is being exploited here with respect to the citizens, who want to feel that they have the freedom of choice. The question is to what extent they truly have this freedom and to what extent they change one ideology with another. Is this alternative ideology, being tolerated next to the so-called mainstream one, an illusion or not? The paper will include the case study of a Post-Communist country, Romania.

Keywords: elites, masses, ideology, individualism, public image

Introduction

The present paper will deal with Populism, which is a topic of actuality in today's societies. Additionally, concern with politics, and the way political elites are expected to ensure the well-being of the masses is also a relevant topic, as it is and has been of universal concern across cultures.

The issue of trust in politics goes hand in hand with responsibility for the masses of people. We can see this from the way that people are many times disappointed by the political leaders they have voted for, starting from the fact that they have not kept

their promises or they have taken decisions which have negatively affected the lives of the people. We expect from politicians to create good living everyday life conditions, which can be seen from small details in everyday life, starting with the way the city looks like, with its streets, buildings, the way the traffic runs, ideally smoothly, and continuing with economic conditions based on salaries that keep up with the rising prices, and ending up with respect for professions such as teachers, who have, at least in Romania, been subject to plenty of protest movements.

The ideal image of the politician could, thus, be, for the masses, a trustworthy person that shows no signs of corruption, and who knows how to act efficiently to make everything work in the respective country, from institutions to laws and bureaucracy, and continuing with means of transport and infrastructure. It goes without saying that the ideal politician should act in the interest of the people. The ideal politician can be, however, just a public image which is, at some point, ruined by gossip and a negative image presented in mass media.

Why does Populism appeal to people? The idea that the ideal political leaders should act in the interest of the people, and not their own, is not new. Honesty and justice are features of the ideal leader ever since ancient times. We could claim that Populism shows people that some political leaders think just like them, and share the same values, regarding their wishes for trustworthiness, moral correctness, lack of corruption, and lack of self-interest for taking up a leading position. The people can, thus, come to believe that what they wish for from political leaders is not that far-away from being achievable in reality. Populism refers to a "rapport with 'the people,' a 'them-and-us' mentality," and, in some cases, it also includes "a period of crisis and mobilization" (Knight, 1998, p. 223). The close connection established with the people is not specific to Populism only and neither is the problematic period for which a commonly worked-out solution through collaboration between the masses and the political elites is needed.

A narrowing down of the definition of Populism can be worked out by examining definitions in the literature review section, where we can cover in detail what is specific to Populism as compared to other ideologies. The context when and where Populism emerged should also be taken into account.

Literature Review

We should consider, first of all, how Populism started and what other ideology it went against. It started out as "a form of government after the demise of Fascism," and it was, at the time, situated "between constitutional government and dictatorship" (Finchelstein

& Urbinati, 2018, p. 15). Nowadays, Populism is part of “democratizing and fully democratic societies” (Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018, p. 15). It has begun with mass democracies and societies, starting with the 19th century.

The term Populism in its English and German translation comes from the Hungarian “népi mozgalom” (Overholser, 2023). This movement in Hungary started in the 1930s, when it began as a means of wishing to bring equality to peasantry in allowing them to have land, material conditions, and access to school and education (Bartha, 2015, p. 215). We can see how social equality was an issue early on.

The definition of Populism as democratic illiberalism is put forth by Pappas (2014, p. 1). Thus, what we need to keep in mind is that Populism “may be democratic, but is not liberal” (Pappas, 2014, p. 2). Pappas (2014) mentions the understanding offered by Rawls (2005) regarding political liberalism, which is defined as a society where a variety of ideological doctrines that are not even compatible coexist. What is more, illiberal democracy can be defined as a system of governing where non-democratic practices are covered up by institutions and procedures which are, formally at least, democratic (Bonet & Zamorano, 2021, p. 559). Democratic illiberalism, as portrayed by Pappas (2014, p. 10) is dealing with a society which is split into the “good ‘people’” and the “evil ‘establishment,’” then with a polarizing types of politics instead of a politics seeking consensus, and finally with “the adherence to the majority principle.”

This distinction is old and can be considered problematic. For instance, Arendt refers to authoritarian-populism as a way of the elites claiming to represent the people, when in fact they exclude those members of the people who do not agree with nationalism and worshipping the populist leaders (Rensmann, 2023, p. 450).

Populism has been related by research to democracy (Canovan, 2002, pp. 25–44) and to nationalism (Brubaker, 2020, pp. 44–66). According to Canovan (2002, p. 25), Populism can begin in societies where there are problems related to social and economic areas, and where there is a common feature in “a political appeal to the people.” Additionally, the populist movements rely on “giving power to the people” (Canovan, 2002, p. 25). The appeal of the latter feature is that the people can finally feel in control of the decisions which are, otherwise, perceived as being taken at a higher level. Finally, the people can feel that their needs and opinions are taken into account, something that has been an issue with the previous political movements and with the previous political elites, before the populist representatives. Canovan (2002, p. 44) presents us with the following statements, quoted at the end of the research article:

“Our government has lost touch with the people (Ross Perot in Westlind 1996, 175)” and “The parties and governments in most countries in Europe are isolated from their people (Jörg Haider 1995, 88).” Both quotations show how the people’s needs have been ignored, while being put aside in favor of the needs of the representatives of the elites, under the form of parties and governments, which are forms of organizations of the political elites. While this is not normal, this has been a phenomenon which explains the need for a Populist movement in politics and the way this movement does, indeed, make sense and is, indeed useful, and not just a simple artifice of ideology.

The people could be understood as being part of the nation, function of their interests and their expectations. Once their mindset and values overlap with the nationalist ideology, they could be seen as part of the respective nation. The same, however, could be said about the elites. The image of the elites can vary function of the way the people perceive them, as supporting nationalism or as willing to establish international connections and to remain far from nationalist interests, if they do not overlap with their own values. The people may also feel disappointed with what is going on at national level and decide to move abroad on long or short term. Meanwhile, the people can still have an ideal image of their own country and feelings of patriotism and nationalism, which may or may not be supported by the corrupted elites and may be, instead, supported by Populist leaders.

Brubaker (2020, p. 2) mentions the following researchers who have dealt with the connection between nationalism and Populism: Bonikowski et al, 2018; De Cleen, 2016, 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017; and Stavrakakis et al, 2017. To clarify matters, Brubaker (2020, p. 2) mentions that there was an element of nationalism in Populism due to their same concern with the people: “Populism was characterized as a kind of nationalism, the distinguishing feature of populistic nationalism being its equation of ‘the nation’ and ‘the people’ (Stewart 1969, p. 183).” Brubaker (2020, p. 3) also mentions how the approaches of nationalism and Populism with respect to the people can differ. Thus, “Populism invokes the ‘people as underdog’ on an up-down axis,” while “nationalism the ‘people as nation’ on an in-out axis (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017).” Our immediate conclusion is that Populism sees how the people have been wronged by the corrupted political elites, which is in line with the people’s emotional mindset. Populism can appeal to them since they feel understood and they feel that their needs will be taken into account by political leaders of the populist movement. The people have acquired a rebellious attitude against elites of all kinds, both political and with respect to upper social classes. They finally find a political party which appears to have the same views and to align with the same attitude. The struggle towards achieving equality and

to move away from discrimination that is preached at world level or at least at supranational level can be seen as supporting the relevance of populist movements. Otherwise, nationalism may be or may not be compatible with the real needs of the people. The people may find that the political elites take actions without considering their opinion. Lack of trust in political leaders comes from various media claiming that the votes were not really taken into account in various elections, at least in Romania, and that the elections had actually been arranged. The people felt that they had been faced with the choice of leaders they and other members of the people had not chosen and did not even know who they were.

We should mention that in the 1960s there was no clear definition of Populism, while nowadays we can distinguish their practitioners as follows: the Populists show "a strong focus [...] on the 'people,'" as well as "an implicit or explicit reference to an 'anti-group,' often the political elite, against which the 'people' is positioned" (Deiwiks, 2009, p. 1). The Populists, thus, present themselves on a par with the masses, erasing the high-power distance that is visible in authoritarian political regimes. Communist regimes are examples of regimes where the people have little to no power, and all they are expected to do is to follow the rules set out by the leader. For low-power distance societies, the relationship with authority in politics is more relaxed, to the point where the boundaries between the masses and the leaders are erased, and the political leaders simply take the role of efficient managers who seek to improve the situation in the country and with respect to the living conditions of the people. The dimensions of high vs low-power distance used to explain the situations are the ones developed by Hofstede (2011).

Most countries in the world nowadays believe that democracy is the ideal way of governing a state, since nowadays the world is moving on towards a rising individualism (Santos et al, 2017). The two influence one another, and it is believed that "democracy produces more individualism worldwide" (Ham, 2000, p. 127). While individualism, meaning focus on the interests of the individual (Hofstede, 2011) becomes prominent, we still need, as members of the masses, common ground on which to support each other. Populism provides these grounds, in that the populist leaders support the masses in their fight with a much too intervening state with respect to their personal freedom.

The democratic values are supported by supranational organizations such as the European Union, through their laws and principles, which are expressed in policies (Young, 2001), regarding equality in the way we are perceived in our country and our own non-discrimination, with respect to our lifestyle, ethnicity, nationality, and, ultimately, respect for diversity, the latter summing up all the previous values and is significant once

we have contact with many different cultures within Europe and from all over the world. The European Union promises to unite member countries in a common effort to raise the living conditions of the poorer countries.

There is a feeling of Euroscepticism for member countries, in that they feel that the European Union is being elitist and not taking into account nationalist interests and interests of the working class (ECPS, 2023). While not all Populist parties are Euro-sceptic (ECPS, 2023), we could take the dissatisfaction with the EU as a prompting point for the people to resort to Populist parties, since they would feel that their representatives understand them and share their concerns. Thus, not only the disappointment with the way local political leaders and the situation of the entire country is a starting point for the masses feeling the appeal of Populist parties and ideologies.

The case of Romania is significant from the point of view of a former Communist country and afterwards as having high hopes when having joined the European Union. Disappointment followed after the fall of Communism, and also after being accepted into the European Union.

Romania fits in with the context in which Populism developed in Central and Eastern Europe, and which is described by Stanley (2017, p. 140), as Populism can be understood as responding to the dissatisfaction of former Communist countries, and also if we are considering disappointment with the way society has been led politically after the fall of Communism.

Materials and Methods

Populism and its appeal to the people could be best studied using the domain of Psychology, in combination with Politics. The present paper will focus on the way Populism is being felt as relevant to Romanians, in order to see how they have reacted to it and understood it.

This case study of Romania is based on a specific example of a post-communist country and the way it relates to Populism. It is significant to look at examples of Populist parties in Romania since the term Populism has been associated to “vagueness and overuse” (Doiciar & Cretan, 2021, p. 244). The vague definition of Populism leads to it not having a clear definition, which allows to include Populism under various forms, starting from non-authoritarian forms, to authoritarian forms, and ranging from having a leader siding with the uneducated masses, until reaching a leader belonging to a category that has been

diminished in importance for society, such as those working in the education system, the researchers, and teachers. The general tendency of populist parties is that of siding with the people, and of going against the mainstream parties and trends, with leaders taking the position of the people, in the opinion of the author of the present paper. It can be considered strange to have an against the mainstream trend while being accepted as a party, yet, throughout history, we can see how such examples abound. Donald Trump, in the USA, has been portrayed as a man of the people, and he has gone against the mainstream values of political correctness, while Vladimir Putin has been considered a representative of fighting against Western influences, and he has, as a reaction against them, led his country towards a strong nationalism and closure from Western influence (Stockemer, 2019, p. 5). The diversity of the Populist leaders and their values show that they are strongly opposed against what has brought to the people a state of disillusionment and anger from the previous leaders.

Political Psychology has been applied to the understanding of Populism, in researches such as the one by Rovira Kaltwasser who (2021, p. 2) underlines how the people sharing their views with a certain political party may or may not reject altogether other parties' views. In the case of Populism, however, Kaltwasser (2021, p. 2) shows how rejection of other parties on the part of the people is radical. People can view mainstream political parties in a negative way, which is why they will be led "to endorse the populist set of ideas." Even more so, while being upset by the current political situation, the people can project the source of all the problems and the entire responsibility on the political parties that are mainstream, as can be concluded from Kaltwasser's (2021, p. 2) remark that "individuals holding populist attitudes might translate their anger against the existing state of affairs into negative partisanship towards mainstream political parties."

The Populist affiliation therefore places the people in conflict with a political elite, which is likely the mainstream one, on which everything that is negative is projected, and all that goes wrong is attributed to them as a responsibility, which is understood as a way of showing how they failed, as political leaders, to do their duty towards the people. Generally, we can encounter this psychological mechanism in revolted members of the people, who may have issues with authority that may date even all the way back to their childhood, when they did not perceive parents and teachers, or other adults in their lives, as protecting and instructing them, but as restricting their personal freedom, and as a negative influence in all ways. We can see how people expect political leaders to provide for them and ensure their well-being, as well as to create a utopic environment for them and for their families in all ways. It may be true that certain laws can affect negatively

the way people live their lives, yet, to some extent, the responsibility for success or for failure does not belong to external sources and even more so to political leaders. When someone has a bad day with bureaucracy, for example, they may claim and we may hear them in the street, saying how bad everything in the respective country is going on. Populism seems to have become aware of this psychological mechanism and is working its way to provide comfort for the people from their negative experiences with mainstream politics and with political elites that do not take into account the interest and needs of the people. Populist parties, thus, provide an alternative solution to the already existing parties that have, over the years, failed the expectations of the people.

Politics is a domain where the people are being offered hope and then they may become disappointed. Since society has grown more and more individualistic, it is difficult for parties and for political leaders to identify common interests. Besides, at least in Romania, different groups, such as those formed by different professions, have different needs, and they feel that nobody from the political world, being able to take decisions, cares about them. As an example, we can mention the frequent protests which have been taking place in the education system in Romania ever since after the fall of Communism. The issue of revolt was a combination of the place school used to have in the lives of the citizens during Communism and after Communism, together with the status of the teachers and of the way students reacted to the topic of school and education, and behaved during their school years, and with the way in which the political leaders decided to let their salaries go much too low. The salaries were seen both at a practical level, being related to the way teachers could not lead a basic needs related lifestyle in Romania, and at a symbolic level, believing that the state did not support the field of education as they did not find it valuable and in line with the current mindset and lifestyle of the new generations. This change in attitude towards school led to further debates, such as the fact not everyone was suited to and inclined to study, and that they could be good in completely different domains.

Once again there was an issue with authority, as teachers were perceived as much too authoritarian by some students. Additionally, after 1989, in Romania, the world changed, and there was a strong wish to move further, towards individualism, personal freedom of choice, and equality at all levels, following the model set forth by the American culture. The idea that we could become anything we wanted as individuals and to start from scratch, without needing school and even money resources, as we could make them through individual effort, influenced by the American ideal of the self-made man may have influenced and affected negatively the image of school and of the education system in Romania.

This was one part of the changing mindset, together with the resort to Populism in politics. Further on, we can consider a resort to what Stob (2020) called intellectual populism, as another group that has been disfavored wants to have their rights represented. Claudiu Crăciun, a lecturer at the National University of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest has created DEMOS party, which can be considered, according to the author of the present paper, as a representative of intellectual populism. He has managed to gather enough signature to enter with his party for the local council of sector 1 in Bucharest, for the elections in June, 2024, and his programme includes access to cultural events, as well as issues of concern regarding the disparity of financial situation among inhabitants in this district, as some are very poor, while some are very rich, and he intends to set up opportunities for equality of chances, as well as the usual promises for green spaces, not too much crowded billboard adds, and so on. His programme promises a decent life for everyone, starting from equality.

Education is important for him as well, an issue that has been put aside by AUR party, led by George Simion. The two representatives of Populism in Romania, DEMOS and AUR party look opposite and yet they belong to the same ideology, which proves how lack of homogeneity characterizes Populism, to the point where the only common element is a reaction against the mainstream and against other opinions of parties and politicians in power. This shows the way that society is divided into subgroups of various interests, and how they need to feel included by the political leaders.

We could view Populism as a means of answering the current needs of the people in a changing world. The mainstream trend in all areas was, gradually, being left aside and confronted, as it was no longer believed to answer everyone's needs. People started adhering to alternative lifestyles and beliefs. This allowed them an element of choice in their lives, which is specific to highly individualist societies, where people no longer want to do as they are told. One single authority for everyone is no longer a possible reality, in any area, political, music-related, film-related, book-related, and lifestyle-related. Before the fall of Communism, in Romania, we had, if we want to say so, one single truth, the mainstream, which allowed us one single choice. Nowadays, we have joined in the trends started by the Western world and which is present at international level. The wish for personal freedom, as well as for having the possibility of choice of lifestyle is being exploited by Populist leaders, who, through their ideology and rhetoric appeal to the people in Romania, based on the needs that have appeared as a consequence of historical and living conditions under Communism, then under Post-Communism, and due to the wish to live at international level, individualist standards.

We can see the appeal of Populism in Romania through the way parties have adapted to fill in the needs of the people. Among the successful Populist parties, we can find the "Save Romania Union" (USR), which was chosen for the 2016 parliamentary elections, and which took over the strategy of "reviving old populist themes but in a more radical manner," and afterwards continued "to emphasize an anti-elitist orientation combined with a strong anti-corruption campaign" (Dragoman, 2021, p. 303). The party was distinguished by its "flamboyant political style based on permanent confrontation, verbal attacks, and extensive accusations" (Dragoman, 2021, p. 303). We could claim that such a type of rhetoric could easily resonate with the people's being upset at the political situation and at the influence of political decisions on their lives. Usual discussions can include what is mentioned in the rhetorical style of the USR party, which is why some segments of the people can easily find that they fulfill their emotional needs.

Another example of populist Romanian party is the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD), "which, despite being a mainstream center-left party, has shifted from a latent to a crystalized populist rhetoric" (Chiruta, 2023, p. 76).

According to Doiciar & Cretan (2021, p. 243), the rise in popularity of the AUR (the Alliance for the Union of Romanians) in Romania during the pandemic, at the Parliamentary elections from December 2020, is an example of the nationalist parties gaining popularity among a younger segment of the population in Romania, consisting of men under 35 years old, and not only among the older population. Doiciar & Cretan (2021, p. 243) use the term "nationalist parties" for populist parties. Romania is, according to them, a different case, at least in 2010, "after the decay of other nationalist parties," compared to the general tendencies of Central and Eastern European countries, which "elected nationalist parties after the collapse of communism: a phenomenon often attributed to a combination of socioeconomic crisis and political instability." What may have contributed to the rise in popularity of the AUR party? Doiciar & Cretan (2021, p. 243) believe that it was all due to the fact that AUR could "offer a potent mix of old nationalism, religious faith, traditional family values and new ideological elements, such as environmentalism, anti-globalization, and anti-government critique to create a self-consciously 'alternative' political rhetoric."

By looking at the traits of AUR listed previously, we can easily see how it has adapted to the needs of the people, both from their past, as we have all noticed how, in Romania, some people have, at some point and in regards to certain aspects, the nostalgia of life in Communist times, the nostalgia of respect for faith and family, but also the needs to move on, to be modern, and to adapt to the current values and principles in the world

we live in, such as environmental care, the need to protect ourselves from globalization, the need to look critically at the work and attitude of the government. AUR takes into account the diversity and the breaking free from the mainstream trends. It focuses on alternative lifestyles and ideologies or, on what is believed to be alternative, since some of these have become part of the mainstream trends, such as anti-globalization and environmental care.

An examination of the previous situation in Romania, namely right after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, is also necessary in order to make a comparison with the situation in the past and in the present, as well as during the times relatively close to the present. According to Mungiu-Pippidi (2001, p. 230), Romania was, back in 1989, an “electoral democracy,” and the elections from 1990 and 1992 led to the institutions’ operating “in principle within the framework of procedural democracy, but in practice often broke the rules and norms accepted in the West as characteristic of liberal democracy.” Weakness, division, as well as indifference from public opinion led to leaving matters like this. Later on, poor citizens grew even poorer, the economy was not well managed, and afterwards corruption emerged, all of these leading “to the demise of the post-communist regime in 1996, which in turn led to the hope that with electoral democracy established, the development of democratic institutions and government accountability would follow.”

The situation of Romania immediately after the fall of Communism described above could be regarded as bringing up the causes of crisis, which are specific to the start of the activity of Populist parties, in this case poor economy and rising corruption which emerged in post-communist times.

The political situation after Communism grew unstable in Romania, due to lots of conflicts and contradictory political movements, ideas, and hopes on the part of the people. The people were no longer kept united under one single ideology as in Communism, which was, after all, mainly a form of control, yet it serves to maintain a certain order.

Results

It is difficult even to bring under one coherent movement even the Populist movements in one single country, such as Romania. We can view Populism as an adaptable tool in the hands of the political parties’ leaders, who are trying to respond to the needs of the people at the time when the election campaigns are organized. What matters is, after all, the present time, and the voters react strongly from an emotional point of view to what has disappointed and angered them looking back at the time from when they chose certain political leaders who, at some point, may no longer have responded to their emotional needs.

The definition of Populism remains vague, and it juxtaposes over the specific needs of the masses at a certain time. In order to give a definition of it, we need, first of all to establish the context and analyze the values, principles and mindset the political parties belonging to the Populist movement set forth.

The main element is a high distrust in the corrupted political elites, against which the Populist leaders offer to fight on a par with the masses, supporting them emotionally. Through their rhetoric, Populist leaders show that they are aware of and they also feel the need, just like the masses, to express themselves freely, and make themselves heard. Freedom of speech is, after all, a right in any individualist and democratic society. Populist leaders offer the opportunity to allow open dialogue between themselves and the masses.

In the case of Romania, we could say that Populism offers a comforting, relaxing experience, away from the authoritarian state and regime which has remained, for Romanians, a reference point regarding what type of state they do not want, as far as relationship between themselves as individuals and the leaders in a position of authority. At the same time, the fall of Communism has brought about a crisis of values and collapse of a system having a certain kind of stability of belief systems.

Discussion

Populism is based on a communication between political elites and masses by using common values and common ideal images of how leaders should be, which are relevant during any historical age and in any political context. This makes it so adaptable to various countries' political situations. It especially has an appeal for countries that have, in the past, been under the rule of authoritarian regimes, which interfered to a large extent in the personal lives of the individuals. The living conditions in authoritarian regimes are perceived as offering limited personal freedom to the individual, in contrast with the ideal image of life today in highly individualist societies, an ideal image which has been, for Romania, based on the image Romanians have of American society after the fall of Communism.

One reason for the appeal of Populism to the masses is that the political representatives show how they are aware of the same problems that the masses are preoccupied with. However, more than this, the Populists present themselves as part of the masses, and as being upset by the same issues regarding the corrupted political elite that is and has been in power. This is why it is easy for Populist parties to persuade the masses to vote for them.

All these impressions of the masses can, however, prove to be illusions finally, since all political actions rely on ideology. The ideology brings to the fore certain values, mindsets, and principles which can resonate with voters, who will react emotionally and support the candidates they feel are worth it. In the end, the image of an honest, well-intended, responsible and skillful political leader may prove to remain utopic.

We always compare the past with the present regarding the political situation in a country. We tend to sometimes idealize the past, or to see it in a very negative light. Sometimes we want to go back to the way life was in the past, while other times we completely want to break away with it. Populism relies on the negative image of the Communist regime in Romania, with a focus on political elites that are corrupt and that do not take the individual needs of the population into account, which has as a consequence a hard life for the people and restricted freedom.

Once Romania is part of a globalized society, it shows how it should be considered with respect to the mentality of its people in line with what is going on at world level. Especially with the fall of Communism, Romania was eager to join the Western, globalized trends, of freedom associated with democracy, which made Romania become divided into subgroups of interests, based on values associated with subgroups. We could divide these subgroups according to the two trends we noticed, with AUR and DEMOS, namely those segments of the population breaking free from considering education a landmark value in their lives, and DEMOS, relying on the value of intellectualism, and promotion of culture accessible to all. With globalization, various segments of the population rely on their own sense of values, and a general, stable sense of values can no longer be at work. Values, just as truth, are interpretable, and function of the interests of certain subgroups, or communities. Society becomes divided according to these interests, and Populism seeks to answer their needs, based on the subgroups the leaders themselves belong to.

Conclusion

Populist political figures open up a friendly communication with the masses, in that they show that they are just like them, and follow the same interests, unlike the corrupted political elites. We could speak about a high vs. low power distance dimension in the relationship with Populist political personalities and with the other political elites. The low power distance means that the masses can be on an equal level with the political leaders, and that they feel free to negotiate with them, and to communicate to them what is bothering them at a certain moment regarding their living conditions and the status of the way everything works or not in their country.

The focus on the people's interest is being brought to the fore by Populist political leaders by showing them how they resonate with all their issues themselves. They take the position of a very understanding friend that is a good listener and who encourages them to move on, and who also offers them not just emotional support, but also takes concrete actions to help them.

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