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# Rightwing Populism

## An Element of Neodemocracy


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# Contents

# Chapter 1
# Populism Typologies in the Age of Globalisation and Post-Democratisation


This contribution to the topical debate on right-wing populism seeks to analyse important aspects of the phenomenon with reasonable brevity:

- Populism is conceptualised through scientific analysis building on the history of political theories and ideologies.
- Definitions and stages of development are compared.
- The analysis focuses on the party system in Western and Eastern Europe, reasons for the rise and decline of right-wing populist groups, international associations and the participation of national governments.
- Right-wing populism is differentiated from right-wing extremism.
- In summary, a few generalisations can be made that support the hypothesis that right-wing populism can act as a barrier to right-wing extremism, and, in addition to some negative ones, also has several positive effects on the development of neo-democracy.

## 1.1 Terminology and Characteristics of Political Groups

Although Germany is currently doing surprisingly well, pessimistic doom-mongering is on the increase. Thomä (2017: 35f), a philosopher from St. Gallen, drives criticism to the extreme: "That's enough. The situation is dire. Those in charge are failing. Resistance is not futile. A reckoning with our broken present is possible". Just one little point: "Resistance is not futile" means there are opportunities to change things for the better. This optimism is, however, soon watered down: "Resistance is quite dispersed. …Political protest is currently directionless, haphazard, clueless." An alternative hypothesis preferred by the current author is: there is the possibility of an unorthodox populism which opens up opportunities to develop new methods in politics, interest groups and media and creates the direction, choices and recommendations which Thomä considered



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absent. Other authors, such as Nassehi (2017: 42), have also criticised Thomas's less empirical approach.

The political debate is currently being conducted in a kind of crisis fever. Crisis theories are being reinforced by the unexpected consequences of increasing globalisation. Expressions containing the word 'post' proliferate. *Post-democracy* cannot be understood without an awareness of the theory of *postmodernisation*, a term which Inglehart (1997: 338) introduced into the debate at an early stage. To him, postmodernisation was a survival strategy which sought to improve chances of survival by maximising economic growth, with basic survival and well-being being superseded by improvements in lifestyle.

A new term is making the rounds as a result of globalisation: 'post-democracy', coined by Crouch (2004, 2008). Populism seems to be a consequence of the developing post-democracy. It is identified by:

- the erosion of political parties;
- the medialisation of politics;
- the rise of experts at the expense of party elites.

'Post-democracy', however, has rapidly dropped behind postmodernisation, because this stage of development is characterised by a combination of economic maximisation and neoliberal ideology. This has generated increasing protests by new action groups, who think populism might be capable of overcoming the alleged rigidity of representative democracy. When discussing the search for a new *Leitkultur* (leading culture), Tibi (2000: 183) expressed hopes that a new concept of cultural pluralism would overcome uncertainty about the social value of *multiculturalism*. However, the eager search for a new German *Leitkultur* quickly became the "model for the Extreme Right" (Hentges 2002: 95ff).

The vague generalisations of actual social movements, such as populism, seem to be more promising than the search for an overall concept. The expression 'populism' has undergone a transformation in political debate, as previously occurred with 'corporatism' – the arch-enemy of populism – and is now happening with 'globalisation' and 'governance'. The populism label became convenient when Seehofer was accused of confusing 'popularity' with 'populism'. In politics the accusation of populism is frequently directed at unrealistic and uneconomic policies in opportunistic electoral campaigns. When postmodern democracy began to cut social spending, left-wing groups were hailed as defenders of the status quo and populists, a term previously applied to right-wing extremists. If national governments make excuses for policy failures by blaming the restrictions imposed by the European Union, the opponents of unsuccessful measures are criticised for their "populist irresponsibility". An illuminating feature of populism is that populists rebel against alleged constraints, but unlike revolutionaries they do so largely within the rules of the democratic system.

Populists – if they take any interest in theories – try to profit from the normative turn in postmodern political theory:

- *Negative connotations* include the term 'post-democracy' (Colin Crouch).
- *Positive connotations* are defined by terms such as "deliberative democracy" (Habermas) or "dialogic democracy" (Giddens).
- My proposal (v. Beyme 2013, 2018) to replace the term 'post-democracy' with a positive expression like 'neo-democracy' is supported by the populism debate. Whereas post-democracy suggests the demise of democracy, and right-wing populism only analyses the negative consequences of this decline, the term 'neo-democracy' implies that democracy has not been completely ruined by recent developments. Populism is developing new, unconventional and spontaneous forms of participation which prevent right-wing populism turning into right-wing extremism. In any case, Daniel-Pascal Zorn's theory (2017: 98) that populist thinking always leads to totalitarianism seems untenable.

*Post-democratisation* has been portrayed as a new phase by numerous theoreticians, from Jacques Rancière, the radical-democratic disciple of Althusser, to Crouch (2008) and Wolin (2008), who, influenced by Tocqueville, calls it "democratic despotism". Behind the façade of formal democracy and in the name of neoliberal theory, the self-government of the people is increasingly being replaced by controlling elites. In post-democracy the elites are increasingly receiving less deference and respect. The secrets of the "political class" are no longer tactfully respected by the media, although virtually all the formal components of representative democracy seem to have survived. Through an appreciation of the most important post-democracy theorists, Ritzi (2014: 2ff, 271f, 274) tried to argue against the widespread scepticism surrounding the term 'post-democracy'. The elements of post-democracy theory are quite well-known. However, the current author (v. Beyme 2018, 274f) has tried to explain the term 'neo-democracy' by drawing parallels with the history of art. In art every 'post' term has been revived as a 'neo' term after a while, from Neo-Impressionism to Neo-Surrealism. I maintain doubts about the usefulness of the negatively orientated term 'post-democracy' while suspecting that the more positive expression 'neo-democracy' will perhaps also not last long. More important than the originality of terms is the emphasis on clear contents which enrich ideas about the social development they describe. The pioneer of populism research Müller (2016: 18, 16), who thoroughly understood why newer democracies are motivated to embrace populism, ultimately came to the conclusion that populism always has a tendency to be anti-democratic, although it often seems to be radically democratic. If that is correct, we must be careful about using the label "right-wing populism". At least we should not automatically denounce 'Thatcherism' as neo-fascism because it breaks down the differences between the people and the government (see Weiss 2017: 242).

The rise of Western European right-wing populism has been popularly assumed to have begun around the end of the 1980s, although by the late 1960s Ionescu/Gellner (1969) had already published on the 'phantom' of populism, which pluralises and individualises values and leads to the decline of traditions. Traditional group loyalties towards the family, the local community and the nation were increasingly questioned. Populism found its way into not only an ideological but

also an "aesthetic-cultural space for representation", since the leaders of the people's parties cultivated the lifestyle of urban middle-classes (Manow 2017). Whereas in the USA the weakness of left-wing liberalism, which is still liberal but no longer left, explains the rise of right-wing populism, in Germany it is social democracy, which has allegedly forgotten its traditional working-class supporters, which seems to be responsible for the wave of right-wing populism (Kaube 2017: 22). Populism has profited from the decline in the reputation of governments, political parties and professional politicians. Right-wing populist politics is above all identity politics. The agendas of populist groups are not usually based on coherent ideological strategies, but on constructions of cultural differences (Geden 2006: 209ff, 219). According to right-wing populist definitions, "*the people*" are predominantly virtuous and possess common sense, in contrast to the elites, who are mostly denounced as the "political class". However, this evaluation causes problems for right-wing populists when they enter coalition governments (Hartleb 2004: 74ff, 122, 131; 2014: 222).

Even then right-wing populists are not always consistent: criticism of the State in contrast to the glorification of the community does not prevent the State being strongly influenced by the community, as in the fight against crime and the prevention of illegal immigration. This does not prevent some occasionally invoking "Fortress Europe" to protect the continent against foreign immigration flows. Liberalist antipathy to too much State intervention does not prevent the occasional demand for State support in the economic development of one's own country.

Populism only became a significant topical theme in the new millennium and has increasingly become a battle cry in the political arena. Particularly since the rise of the AfD (Alternative for Germany), right-wing extremism has been discussed more frequently in Germany, the country that, according to the expert Mudde (2007: 303), has produced the most studies on right-wing extremism – see, for example, the comprehensive bibliography of Virchow et al. (2016/2017: 22–41). The two terms 'populism' and "right-wing extremism" have often either been conflated or treated completely separately. The wealth of applied terms listed by Mudde (2007: 11f), from "Extreme Right" to "reactionary tribalism", have mostly included only individual aspects of right-wing populism. The chaotic terminology was attributed less to disagreements between authors than to lack of clear definitions. Historical change explains some of the differences. The terms have evolved with changes in the political system. In recent times, especially after the end of the bipolar system of the Cold War, systemic change in the democratic world has fostered many new groups that are not just political sects. New concepts had to be integrated into the landscape of the larger factions in party systems, but the majority of populism researchers accept right-wing populism as a notion that can be differentiated from both conservatism and right-wing extremism (Stöss 2013: 564ff).

Right-wing extremism has become an established term since the German Constitutional Protection Service adopted it in 1974/75. A balance of left-wing and right-wing extremism was assumed to exist in many older symmetrical perceptions of party systems. It is only in recent times that the majority of researchers no longer believe in the equal role of left and right in the field of extremism. Bobbio (1994)