REVISIÓN DE LOS FACTORES CAUSANTES DEL AUGE DE LOS POPULISMOS OCCIDENTALES CONTEMPORÁNEOS. LUGAR Y PAPEL DE SU VARIEDAD CÍVICA

A REVIEW OF FACTORS IN THE RISE OF CONTEMPORARY WESTERN POPULISMS. THE PLACE AND ROLE OF THEIR CIVIC VARIETY

© Bernard Boëne
International School of Governance, Geneva
chancellor@genevasg.com

Resumen

En un intento de explicar el auge de los populismos en Occidente, este artículo comienza con una declaración resumida de principios básicos y requisitos de una democracia liberal. Sugiere que los países occidentales se han desviado en algunos aspectos de sus principios centrales en las últimas décadas, privando a las mayorías de voz sobre el destino colectivo bajo la influencia de la globalización, el neoliberalismo y la suprema tendencia al individualismo de las relaciones sociales que ha marcado el último medio siglo. Tras abordar, brevemente, los problemas planteados por la naturaleza y sustancia del populismo en general, son caracterizadas las tres variedades que se identifican y se evalúa el desequilibrio de sus fuerzas respectivas. Se plantea la hipótesis de que la variedad cívica, la menos politizada de las tres, juega un papel clave en tanto que imán natural cuya influencia es alimentada en parte por las estrategias convergentes de las otras dos para expandir su base, pero sobre todo por las formas en que el actual estado de las cosas –inseguridad económica de las clases medias y bajas, desigualdades sociales y polarización, élites irresponsables, límites externos y judiciales excesivos de la voluntad popular, influencia normativa desproporcionada de pequeñas minorías, libertades restringidas, acoso de ciudadanos respetuosos con la ley, ausencia de una salida política del predicamento actual del sistema político– afecta a las vidas diarias de las mayorías al margen de sus inclinaciones políticas. Esto puede explicar la extensión asombrosa, revelada por las encuestas de opinión incluso más que por los resultados electorales, del descontento y malestar mostrado por la población occidental, cuya respuesta dominante es una mezcla de burla y escepticismo dando al Zeitgeist (espíritu de los tiempos, n.t.) su sabor peculiar. Incluso más, los contextos electorales marcados por resultados apretados convierten una proporción reducida, pero no insignificante, de populistas cívicos potenciales sin trincheras políticas en partidos bisagra o, al menos, los pone en situación de ayudar a líderes populistas a alcanzar

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predominio político como forma de protesta. El artículo sigue buscando la prueba que apoye sus disputas examinando a los varios conductores de populismo, identificados, así como la génesis histórica del individualismo más la alteración del delicado equilibrio entre los derechos individuales y las normas ciudadanas que supone una democracia liberal. Esto va seguido de una revisión crítica de remedios posibles contemplados para restablecer el equilibrio. Finalmente, el autor descansa en estudios recientes nacionales dirigidos en beneficio del proyecto More in Common para intentar localizar en entornos sociales, culturales y políticos de las naciones occidentales el centro populista cívico potencial cuya existencia constituye su coyuntura central. La conclusión del artículo resume sus puntos principales antes de realizar una evaluación crítica de la pragmática viabilidad y valor sociopolítico de aquello que anhelan los populistas cívicos (y que bien puede constituir el significado último de los populismos) –un regreso a la ciudadanía y al Estado-nación- en circunstancias que son sustancialmente diferente de aquellas que prevalecieron en su previo florecimiento.

Summary

Attempting to account for the rise of populisms in the West, this paper starts with a summary statement of liberal democracy's basic principles and requirements. It suggests that Western countries have deviated in a number of ways from its central tenets over the last decades, depriving majorities of a say on collective destiny under the influence of globalization, neoliberalism and the major trend towards the individualization of social relations that has marked the last half-century. After briefly tackling the problems raised by the nature and substance of populism in general, it characterizes the three main varieties it identifies and assesses the imbalance of their respective forces. It then hypothesizes that the civic variety, the least politicized of the three, plays a key role as a natural attractor whose influence is fuelled in part by the other two's strategies of convergence to expand their support base, but more importantly by the ways in which the current state of affairs – economic insecurity of the lower and middle classes, social inequalities and polarization, unresponsive elites, excessive external and judicial constraints on the popular will, disproportionate normative influence of small minorities, restricted freedoms, harassment of law-abiding citizens, absence of a political way out of the system's current predicament – affects the everyday lives of majorities irrespective of political leanings. This may account for the astonishing extent, revealed by opinion polls even more than by voting results, of the discontent and malaise evinced by Western populations, whose predominant response is a mix of derision and cynicism giving the Zeitgeist its distinctive flavour. What's more, electoral contexts marked by tight results turn a reduced but not insignificant proportion of potential civic populists without entrenched political leanings into kingmakers, or at least put them in a position to help populist leaders achieve political prominence as a sign of protest. The article goes on to probe the evidence in support of its contentions by examining the various identified drivers of populisms as well as the historical genesis of individualization, plus the disruption of the delicate balance between individual rights and citizenship norms that liberal democracy implies.This is followed by a critical review of possible remedies envisaged to restore that balance. Finally, the author relies on recent country studies conducted on behalf of the *More in Common* Project to try and locate in Western nations' social, cultural and political landscapes the potential civic populist middle whose existence forms his central conjecture. The paper's conclusion summarizes its main points before turning to a critical evaluation of the pragmatic feasibility and sociopolitical worth of what civic populists yearn for (and may well constitute the ultimate meaning of populisms) – a return to citizenship and the nation-state – in circumstances that are substantially different from those which prevailed in their previous heyday.

Palabras clave: Democracias occidentales. Populismos. Variedad cívica. Globalización. Orden neoliberal: Efectos del individualismo. Multiculturalismo. Élites. Mayoría. Minorías. Ciudadanía. Límites en la vida diaria como un factor. Remedios.

Keywords: Western democracies ; populisms ; civic variety ; globalization ; neoliberal order ; effects of individualization ; multiculturalism ; elites ; majority ; minorities ; citizenship ; constraints on everyday life as a factor ; remedies.

1. Introduction

The populist wave that is currently affecting the world's democracies impresses by its pervasiveness, force and ubiquity. Very few countries in that group have so far entirely escaped it, and major democratic nations now have populist leaders in office, following seemingly erratic or divisive policies. Populism, defined by the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) as "*a political approach that strives to appeal to ordinary people who feel that their concerns are disregarded by established elite groups*", is of course nothing new under the sun where democratic (or at least republican) principles prevail. But while, rightly or wrongly, one does not wonder to see it flourish in places where democracy is fairly new, has shallow roots, or is difficult to apply amidst strong ethnic or religious strife, much more striking is the fact that it has taken a firm hold of late where it was least expected – in the West, where modern democracy originated and is most deeply-rooted. The Western model of liberal democracy is going through a crisis, leading some to fear that its long-term survival as we know it is now at stake – notably on account of populist impulses.

The phenomenon's simultaneous occurrence across continents suggests that it has to do with a reaction against the now apparent downsides of globalization and the neoliberal precepts of the 1989 Washington Consensus that have dominated the world scene over the last three decades. Yet, such a reaction could well have followed conventional democratic paths without generating the kind of vertical polarization and animus between a sizable part of the population and dominant elite groups that is at the heart of the problem today. Hence the hypothesis that widely shared internal factors are also at work in Western democracies. These are precisely the object of the developments that follow.

2.Liberal Democracy : Basic Principles and Requirements

Democracy, as Tocqueville taught us, is a term that applies to both a type of regime and a type of society. A democratic *regime* is one based on the principles of government by consent and equality before the law ; it further relies on the notion that the polity, i.e. the community formed by the totality of its membership, is a political subject, and the framework within which mastery of collective destiny is made possible. The polity recognizes no legitimate power superior to its own unless it has consented of its own accord to limit its sovereign right to persevere in its being and shape the present and future manifestations of its very existence. These are ultimately determined through votes by successive majorities of citizens – not because majorities are necessarily wiser, or guarantee effective governance, but because they are better approximations than minorities of the general will required by equality before the law. This in turn implies a degree of closure that defines who forms part of the citizenry and has a say, and who doesn't – under pain of rendering sovereignty meaningless.

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A *liberal* democracy adds a cardinal principle – that citizens be free to act as they please as long as their liberty does not impinge on the freedom of others, and their actions do not transgress the law. Preservation of the private sphere and civil society against invasion by the public sphere (or vice versa), and the protection of individual liberties against arbitrariness or collective bias require effective rule of law, best guaranteed by a degree of *constitutionalism*, i.e. a number of rules set above ordinary legislation, that the latter cannot contravene, and that can only be changed through special, restrictive procedures. Along with institutional checks and balances deriving their legitimacy from such constitutional principles, this guarantees the possibility of political pluralism and provides minorities with a modicum of protection against what Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill did not fear to term "majoritarian tyranny".

Finally, as modern democratic polities are far larger in terms of territorial and demographic size than were their historical forerunners (ancient Greek, medieval or Renaissance Italian city-States, etc.), the latter's agora model is obviously impractical. Its functional substitute is a system of representation whereby an elected few (and those they appoint to office) govern the many in the latter's name for a few years at a time. This creates the possibility of large sections of the governed feeling divorced from, or even betrayed by, their governors because the policies they enact fail to take sufficient account of their interests, disregard their strongly-held views, or otherwise deny their legitimate rights. Inevitable differences in social backgrounds, material interests and ideological worldviews between ruling élites and the citizenry at large are apt to generate biases, unwitting or not, that may selectively filter or even distort the expression of what passes as the general will. Such a possibility is all the more present as from the early days of liberal (proto) democracy, at a time when the citizenry was still largely uneducated, American Federalists as well as French revolutionaries conceived of representation as the selection by the people of men endowed with the talent, discernment and vision it takes to define the general interest, i.e. individuals with education, which in those days mostly implied private wealth. This meant that representatives were granted freedom of judgement in the running of public affairs, and ruled out any imperative mandate. While historically the discontent, malaise or erosion of trust resulting from a possible divorce between rulers and grassroots only occasionally overflowed in the past, it tends to overspill in such circumstances today, as citizens – now much better educated on average and possessed of effective digital means of making themselves heard – clamour for more active participation in policy formulation in between election times, or for the recall of elected government officials deemed unfaithful to the voters' expectations.

A democratic *society*, for its part, is required by its very logic to shun extremes of inequality in (and concentrations in the same elite groups of) wealth, status and power – for fear of creating oligarchies, or recreating aristocracies, thus in practice making formal equality before the law ineffective or meaningless. As Montesquieu averred, it also requires its elites to be virtuous and ideally imbued with the citizenship spirit as well as a sense of social justice. Moreover, it helps if extremes of consensus (inimical to individual freedoms) or dissensus (because of risks of violence) are avoided. While multiple memberships in secondary groups make for vibrant pluralist civil societies, cohesion requires that cleavages between them be as far as possible cross-cutting rather than mutually reinforcing. In other words, a democracy requires its citizens to have enough in common culturally and socially to form a viable society, but it also needs enough differentiation to allow individuals, groups and minorities some breathing space. Inasmuch as modern societies had until recently assumed the form of culturally homogeneous nations, Touraine's formula – "*cultural consensus, political compromise, social conflict*" – applied to them. Insofar as contemporary democratic societies have granted pride of

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place to aggressive cultural expressiveness and differentiation over the last three decades, they have turned into juxtapositions of groups each with its preferred norms, shunning the discipline citizens had until then consented to by keeping their cultural identities in the private sphere, and battling each other for symbolic gain or primacy. The "culture wars" and "identity politics" that have raged in the United States since the 1980s are a perfect case in point (and a harbinger of things to come in the rest of the West – if indeed they are not with us already). The formula that best captures the Zeitgeist then becomes: "*cultural polarization, hardened political conflict, less relevant social issues*".

3. Characterizing Contemporary Western Populisms

Populist movements are apt to arise *from below* (they then either direct their anger at ruling elites, and tend to be led by political outsiders, or force mainstream parties to change course on a number of issues under pressure from their support base) or *from above* (as when political leaders in office seek to secure their grip on power and to that end rely on popular animus to target social or economic elites opposing their policies at home, or much-maligned external power centres placing constraints on their rule). The questions asked in both cases remain the same : what is the phenomenon's intimate nature, what accounts for its current salience, and is it a threat to democracy or only a symptom of the system's present anomie, pointing to possible democratic solutions to heal it ?

3.1 Unity and Adversarial Diversity among Populists

Two features stand out when first trying to make sense of the dramatic rise over the last two decades of contemporary populist parties or movements. One is that they share a number of detestations[1] (and a disruptive way of expressing them : more on style below) – unresponsive elites, globalization and free trade, multilateralism in international relations, the European Union, big business, multinational firms, "systemic" banks and the financialisation of the economy, public and third-sector international organizations, the media, and constitutional constraints – in other words, anything that is apt to curb or distort the expression of sovereignty and the general will. The other central feature is that over and beyond such shared stances, populists are strongly divided on all other issues. The reason, as some authors correctly assume,[2] is that their insistence on the people's will and resentment of elites can only form a "thin ideology", i.e. one that is insufficiently robust to stand on its own and thus needs to borrow from other "thick" ideologies. Put differently, populism is compatible with strongly contrasted options – whether of the far-right, far-left, or "centre". Much depends in that regard on the definition of "the people" populists have in mind. Three conceptions are on offer : *ethnos, plebs, demos*.[3]

The ethnic variety, the oldest but one that had long remained on the margins, is distinguished by its cult of the nation's historic roots and particularisms. It is a nativism exposed in the eyes of its enemies to the "sad passion" that is the rejection of the Other in the name of native people's right to remain masters at home ; it experienced a resurgence from the moment when (from the 1980s onwards, through the cumulative volume of its successive waves) immigration started to produce social and political effects. It also reacts against too many moves away from traditional social mores. The second variety, on the Left, has two facets : one (apparent notably in Greece, Spain, and partly in Italy and France after the global financial crisis of 2008) favours the socio-economically disadvantaged, reasons in class terms, and retains old Marxist accents ; the other's emphasis is on those who consider themselves discriminated against, or in some way symbolically dominated. The last variant exalts citizenship, and sees the people as the sum total of those who, on the basis of a cherished heritage (history, geography,

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culture) and a political design premised on universalism, claim a shared destiny and are ready to consent to the disciplines that this implies. While, for want of a viable alternative in sight, it shares with the ethnic variant the reference to the nation-state, it is far less exclusionary than the latter as long as individuals loyally play the citizenship game. Where the other two restrictively equate the people with an identifiable part of the citizenry, it embraces it as a whole, and is as a result the least politicized of the three. So that the "centre" it occupies is not a middle-of-the-road partisan position but a more abstract, pluralist, *supra-* or *meta*-partisan locus, from which it critically assesses ongoing trends affecting democracy as both regime and society. The bearers of this civic conception had for a long time remained fairly quiet and reluctant to abandon themselves to populism ; but, reacting to a course of events that is far too contrary to their values, they too now seem ready to yield to its appeal.

Other than in terms of ideology, populisms of whatever hue are often pictured (not least by their critics) as little more than political opportunism. There no denying that a large number of political leaders have acceded to power or achieved prominence by appealing to the populist vote. Yet very few, if any, have actually "invented" a populist movement as a tailor-made vehicle for their needs on their way to power. More frequent in fact are existing parties' opportunistic bids to enlist some of the politically indeterminate populist vote by adopting a populist language[4] and targeting this or that particular elite group. In either case, the argument implies the pre-existence of manifest or latent populist sentiment which those leaders or parties can tap, surf on, and encourage. So that while it may say something about the rise of populisms, opportunism says little about their intimate nature.

Style, as already intimated, is in that regard a more serious candidate, especially as it is common to all types of populism. The populist style is a rhetoric and posture whose anti-establishment tone is easily recognizable. Its trademark, verbal bluntness, borrows from both a right-wing polemic tradition and caustic working-class banter, and is easily distinguished by its rejection of intellectualism, decorum, propriety, or even politeness.[5] To this must be added the liberties it takes with established truths – its notorious recourse to "alternative facts" –, its sometimes *ad hominem* verbal attacks, and the confidence with which it is apt to affirm or do today the opposite of the day before. The histrionics of its leaders seem to be inherent in it, as is the delectation its often "politically incorrect" language provides.

An interesting point is that populist leaders do not shelve this more or less markedly demagogic style once in high State office, but maintain it as a communication strategy – a means for them to safeguard the unity of their electoral support base despite the ambiguity, or the zigzags, of the policies they conduct – and to continue distinguishing themselves from the hated elites who preceded them in power. Another proven way is, through the transgression of forms, to cultivate the charisma that befits those who want to embody the popular will, and which induces in them, when in power, a "Platonic" manner of exercising it : as long as they are assured of the support (measured by polls) of their electorate, populist statespersons can free themselves from legal forms or norms, even brave judicial risks, and leave scrupulous respect of legality to leaders of lesser status.

Beyond its postures, slogans and simplisms, the discourse that underpins the populist style is deliberately vague, for a reason Ernesto Laclau insightfully identified[6] : far from selectively assembling easily recognizable interest groups or social backgrounds, populist audiences present a "catch-all" character that transcends traditional alignments, obliging their leaders to adopt tortuous policy lines or platforms that combine in practice (or without warning

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alternate between) seemingly contradictory options with regard to the traditional left/ right divide. Renouncing their "empty" or "floating" signifiers – Freedom, Equality, Sovereignty, Purchasing Power – and specifying coherent policy programmes based on those values or goals would make them look like conventional government party leaders (precisely those vehemently opposed by populist movements), and lose part of their target audience. Such empty discourse aims at producing a "logic of equivalence" between heterogeneous demands that are structurally unsatisfied by the "system", thus blurring potential contradictions, and presenting the establishment and its elites with a united, "hegemonic" front against it. In sum, the rhetoric may be vague, but perhaps the outrage is the subliminal message. This draws attention to the driver behind the rise of populisms, namely a growing mood of rage on the part of grassroots citizens against their loss of control over collective destiny and the seeming irrelevance of politics.

3.2 The (Im)Balance of Populist Forces of Right and Left

Despite their convergence on a number of issues ("shared detestations"), left-wing and right-wing populisms oppose one another. While they have jointly attracted a larger share of the popular vote throughout the West in the last two decades,[7] they have not done so in equal proportions. In the few countries where they have acceded to office or tilted the balance in their favour, only one (Greece) has seen left-wing populists carry the day ; in the others (Central Europe and, most noticeably, the US), victory has gone to right-wingers. In Europe as a whole, if the populist vote has almost quadrupled (from 7 to 27%) over the 1998-2018 period, its right-wing sort has constantly dominated its opposite number to the tune of a 2:1 ratio. This is what the following figure suggests :
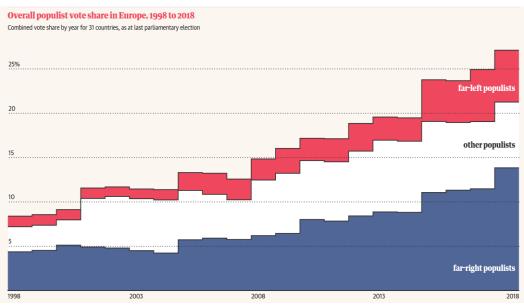

Overall populist vote share in Europe, 1998 to 2018
Combined vote share by year for 31 countries, as at last parliamentary election

Figure 1. Source : "Revealed : one in four Europeans vote populist", *The Guardian*, November 20, 2018.

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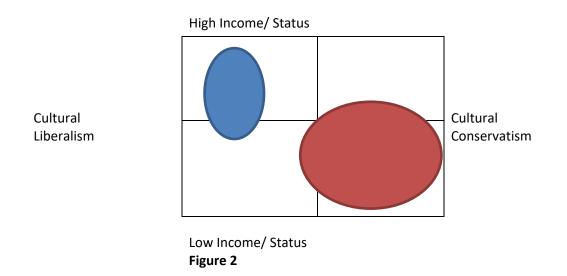### 3.3 Resonance between Populist Themes and Public Opinion Moods

Interestingly, what is true of populist sections is also true of Western domestic opinions in general. Observers have been puzzled by this domination of the scene by the Right in a context – the 2008 financial crisis, economic hardships born of the austerity measures that followed, the rise of inequalities at home and the impact on the work force of heightened international trade competition associated with globalization – that should have favoured the Left. Evidence has been mounting in recent years of rich and poor voting *against* their respective material interests. Key to resolving that paradox is the observation that, mainly due to the new salience of concerns about immigration and fast changing mores, the cultural axis (societal norms) has tended to predominate over the old left-right axis (socio-economic issues) as the main political divide in most of the West.

One among a number of convergent interpretations is that the Left, which had hitherto been the protector and promoter of wage-earners' socio-economic interests, proved powerless to stem the tide of inequalities generated by globalization, and embraced instead the demands of cultural minorities (feminists, gays, immigrants, etc.) for expressive rights and symbolic equality, to which the lower strata are by and large indifferent. A vicious circle ensued : as their traditional working-class support base started dwindling, left-wing parties deepened their commitment to cultural change, leading workers to switch allegiance to culturally conservative rightist parties.

Another has it that from the 1960s onwards "post-materialist" values giving pride of place to individual autonomy, permissiveness, self-expression and quality of life have gradually taken centre stage in advanced developed democracies, in sharp contrast with what had been the case in previous generations, more concerned about physical and economic security. Generated by historically unprecedented living and educational standards, the *Silent Revolution* described and analysed by Ronald Inglehart in 1977 was seen as an irresistible long-term master-trend and even, among those who went along with it, as an embodiment of progress. Yet it has produced of late a *cultural backlash* against the now dominant liberal-libertarian attitudes it has spawned, notably when it comes to the relaxation of societal norms and immigration. This has undermined the class-based political cleavage of post-war decades by reducing the internal cohesion of upper- and lower-income groups. But the new configuration is not the product of a random or balanced redistribution of votes or political sympathies along new lines : something more has taken place.

Since liberal attitudes are strongly correlated with education and education with later income, after a while a polarization ensued, which pitted richer, more educated and cosmopolitan progressives against poorer, less educated and patriotic (or nationalist) conservatives. As time went by, such polarization was hardened by economic shocks, stronger immigration and trade pressures, technological innovation as a source of wider skill (and pay) level gaps, as well as by social media allowing members to interact selectively on line with like-minded individuals.[8]

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Election results, public opinion data, and party platforms or manifestoes amply attest to this primacy of cultural over socio-economic issues in the last decades. However, the latter have not entirely deserted the scene : they still play a part, if only because globalization has increased inequalities. They in fact combine to generate a sociopolitical landscape structured in depth by two orthogonal splits, as in Figure 2 :

Figure 2

When, due to the perceived salience of specific problems in a given context, citizens define the situation in cultural terms and switch identities, they tone down their demands for or against economic redistribution. In other words, the social question is no longer as central as in the past. As major strikes and demonstrations occasioned by reform plans on retirement pensions in France have recently shown, the trend can certainly be reversed if a social issue appears crucial. But such a turnaround is likely to be momentary because the polarization alluded to above seems to be structural. And as Figure 2 suggests, it is unbalanced. In his *Road to Somewhere : The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics*, David Goodhart estimates the relative size of the elite cosmopolitan group in Britain at around 25% and that of the culturally conservative lower class group at some 50%. There are reasons to believe that by and large such a structure holds for most other Western countries.

3.4 A Third Variety

Figure 1 further reveals that between far-right and far-left populist voters comes a third populist vote, outclassing the leftist variety over the period, in favour of parties that adopt the style of populism but are more nuanced and selective in their hatreds or fears (Euro-scepticism, immigration – as distinct from sheer Europhobia or xenophobia), a vote that can only come from moderate voters disenchanted by the practice of government parties.[9] These voters presumably constitute the reservoir from which parties or movements that approximate or revolve around the civic "centre" of the populist spectrum can draw their supporters.

While it comes second to the far-right populists, this civic variety occupies a strategic centre-of-gravity position. That is because if far-right and far-left populist varieties are to expand their support base, they can only do so by attracting voters and sympathisers from that part of the political chessboard. The way to do this is to soften their doctrinal stance and stress popular

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sovereignty ("win back control") at the expense of their more extreme ethnic or proletarian leanings. In other words, the civic centre can be seen as a natural attractor towards which the tails of the spectrum spontaneously tend to converge. And indeed, there are signs that this is so.[10]

If such is the case, another explanation for the resonance observed between populist battle cries and the mood of public opinions at large suggests itself : some of the contributing factors to the situation that prevails in most countries of the West actually vex societies – except elite groups and those who identify with them – in more or less blanket fashion. The acid test on that score may well reside in the salience (or lack thereof) in dominant attitudes of issues negatively affecting the lives of the general population irrespective of social backgrounds and partisan leanings, i.e. issues not usually seen as part and parcel of the natural domain of politics but which now arouse strong feelings and resentment about the way elites exert their power and influence in government and society. Should this conjecture prove correct, the attitudes of central groups among the least politicized in terms of partisanship but with enough civic consciousness to regularly cast pragmatic votes in most elections become a critical variable : they are presumably the reservoir from which "civic" populists are drawn. And, depending on their volume, the proportion among them prepared to turn against the "system" and cast a populist vote in the next election has the potential of tilting the balance.

One key consideration is indeed that whereas the electoral weight of populist parties alone has so far rarely exceeded 27%, the support they enjoy in opinion polls and in run-off voting or decisive elections is often much larger – to the extent that a Donald Trump can become President, the Brexit option carry the day, and Marine Le Pen win 34% of the votes cast in the second leg of the 2017 French presidential election. In France, the "Yellow vest" movement garnered no fewer than about 75% sympathisers among survey respondents at its outset (December 2018), and still 45% a year later – despite all the disturbances it occasioned week after week until the current pandemic suspended it. The appeal of populisms thus extends way beyond their nominal voting weight. A halo effect is probably part of the equation, expressing wide dissatisfaction with the established party system. The possibility also exists of a bandwagon effect on the basis of a convergence between left-wing and right-wing populists – predicated upon options that their platforms have in common : sovereignty and what Rosanvallon terms "national protectionism"[11] – with possible transfers from Left to Right (rather than vice versa[12]). But even such a convergence could not possibly account for the large numbers who form the following of populisms and for the resonance of the themes they tirelessly hammer home. A more general explanation is required, that encompasses the context and the diffuse legacy of the last half-century in terms of citizens' everyday lives against the backdrop of evolving government and political practice.

4. The Drivers of Populisms

The factors behind the rise of populist movements, parties and attitudes are many, varied, and convergent. Some have been extensively studied ; others have yet to be explored. All are in some way related to the internal consequences of globalization, neoliberalism and the longer-term rise of individualization.

4.1 Socio-economic Issues

The lower-middle classes, long the stabilizing centre of Western democracies, are overrepresented in populist movements as among their sympathisers. The reason is hardly mysterious : they have been globalization's only losers.[13] Even in a context where cultural

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differences seem to matter more than socio-economic considerations, the latter still colour their experiences, assessments of the situation as well as emotions, and cannot entirely be ignored.

The opening of borders and the triumph of neoliberalism over the last three decades have widened social inequalities[14] – even if unevenly across countries. The mechanism is familiar : the sharing of the economic surplus has benefited shareholders more than wage-earners, whose incomes have stagnated relatively, thus increasing the importance of inherited or accumulated wealth – which happens to be much more unequal than incomes.

Countries, such as France, which have not been able to adapt their tax systems to these realities, impose additional difficulties on their lower-middle classes. Too "rich" to benefit fully from social welfare, too "poor" to take advantage of tax optimization schemes used by the upper classes (and large globalized companies), they bear a disproportionate share of the total tax burden. They discover with dismay that threshold effects provide those nominally below them in terms of skills or merit with standards of living comparable to theirs, while with much reduced tax-rate progressivity, the incomes of the richest individuals and companies do not give rise to the contributions that might be expected to national budgets and welfare safety nets. The stratospheric incomes enjoyed by a few star CEOs of major economic concerns have made even holders of upper-middle incomes feel poor, and has tended to demoralize (in all senses of that verb) the work force at all levels.

At the same time, a more or less continuous rise in real estate prices in cities (occasioned by global real estate investors and the onset of mass tourism), and in Europe the difficulties associated with intercultural relations in large suburban complexes initially designed to house them, have pushed back the lower-middle classes to places of residence further away from urban centres, thus increasing commuting distances (and forcing many households to own two or more cars).[15] Their exodus coincided in time, under the influence of budget constraints and a neoliberal philosophy now applying to them, with a shrinking of public services in sparsely populated areas, depriving many rural villages or peri-urban zones of their post office, primary school, local tax centre and police station, and pushing away access to administrative centres, courts or maternity wards by not inconsiderable distances. These areas were eventually condemned to see local businesses leave in search of better prospects and to turn into "medical deserts", making it even more imperative for locals to use their cars. After three decades, these processes ended up superimposing a territorial divide on the social fracture.

Another dimension of the social malaise relates to unequal school careers and the "breakdown of the social lift" caused in part by the general lengthening of the periods devoted to port-of-entry education and training in order to acquire credentials at a premium on the labour market, which places at a disadvantage families financially ill-equipped to sustain their progeny during long years of tertiary education (or whose progeny show little taste for such a prospect).[16] In some countries, high levels of youth unemployment have exacerbated the gap between low- and high-skilled early careers, and fostered the perception that for the first time since the immediate post-war period the socio-economic prospects of a generation will be lower for many than its predecessors'. To this must be added concern over the future of retirement pensions.

The fear of a drop in status and a growing sense of exclusion are part of a general landscape to which populisms, by their excesses, attract attention. It would be a mistake, however, to stop there as this social aspect does not exhaust the issue. Populist themes are echoed well beyond the lower-middle classes or the perimeter of rural or peri-urban habitat.

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The heterogeneous, fairly blurred or even incoherent demands mouthed by populists hardly sound like narrow interest-group or class-based claims. And if spontaneous movements have been known here and there to be motivated by populist social anger, such a feeling, as becomes apparent in the next phase, only acts as its "detonator" : it soon opens up on much more general, not least institutional, themes. The disputed decisions that trigger the movement are seen as the last straw – as one sign too many of the "neglect" or "contempt" they suffer at the hands of the "system" and its elites.

4.2 The Consequences of the Neoliberal Order

Much of the socioeconomic malaise in a large part of the citizenry and the widespread sense within it of being deprived of a citizen's say in determining the country's policy orientations are a more or less direct long-term consequence of the neoliberal order that has reigned supreme since the 1990s.

Neoliberalism is a doctrine whose intellectual roots can be traced back to Walter Lippmann's attempt in the 1930s, after the Great Depression, to reinvent liberalism in a clearly elitist and evolutionist vein.[17] His main idea was to help the masses, a creation of the Industrial Revolution, adapt to changing circumstances by overcoming their "cultural lag". While it retained classical liberalism's emphasis on personal autonomy and equal opportunity, Lippmann's view of the *Good Society* (1937) was one that adjusts to the growing inter-dependence of national economies through a deepening division of labour regulated by world market competition. A major departure, however, was the notion that, as neither laissez-faire nor the masses could be relied on to help societies adjust satisfactorily to history's accelerated course, government intervention through legal means guided by expert knowledge was necessary. As a result of this primacy of economic processes and law over politics, his recommendation was for a top-down democracy in which it is the duty of experts and enlightened leaders to educate citizens and persuade them to go along with inescapable change premised on the need to adapt to and survive competition through optimal efficiency (achieved by means emphasizing quantitative measures and procedure, often to the exclusion of any other criterion).

Such a doctrine mostly remained a dead letter after World War II as long as Keynesian-style administered national economies, welfare states, and Fordist organizations dominated the scene, namely until the late 1970s. The "stagflation" crisis that struck this post-war model in that decade spelled its doom. In major countries then in fear of severe decline (Thatcher's Britain, Reagan's America) to start with, then a decade later, with the onset of a new round of globalization of unprecedented magnitude, in the West as a whole (not least in the EU), the neoliberal doctrine was brought back to the fore and embraced by elite groups and decision-makers as the only way to face it (*cf*. Margaret Thatcher's "*There is no alternative*" mantra). From that decade on, open borders turned external competitiveness into a central imperative, while government policies maintaining budget deficits, high tax rates, redistribution or welfare faced the risk of seeing financial assets, high-skilled labour or production lines flee the country and move to more business-friendly locations. The rules imposed by multilateral organizations (GATT/ WTO, European Union, Eurozone), and the strings ("structural reforms") attached to whatever aid they provided (IMF, World Bank) further reduced governments' economic policy options and manoeuvring room. The cardinal faith placed in competition soon put pressure on public services and State bureaucracies to "rationalize" their budgets and work forces, and comply with New Public Management norms requiring them to conform as closely as possible to best business practice. As Foucault noted early on, the dominant doctrine shifted from

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markets regulated by States to States regulated by markets, not least financial ones. As a result, the cultural gap that had hitherto separated public service vocations from executive private employment eroded, while human resource management rules now emphasized work force "flexibility", and services until then delivered by government entities were now privatized or subjected to private sector competition.

The promise of neoliberalism was that higher efficiency would result in increased prosperity all round, starting at the top with star economic performers and eventually trickling down to the middle and lower classes. Decades later, to all appearances the promise has not been kept. Not only have middle-class incomes been stagnating, but the lower classes have also seen the protections they had enjoyed in post-war decades erode while the number of billionaires has dramatically increased. And whereas globalization has mostly benefited developing economies, its benefits have come, as already mentioned, at the detriment of large sections of Western populations now exposed to growing economic insecurity. The impact of sacrifices imposed on them in the form of austerity measures has been exacerbated by the realization that domestic politics can no longer redress whatever wrongs they suffer and heal the social malaise detailed above : all economic and social policy moves seem preordained by external constraints, and the previous contrast between left- and right-wing domestic options and parties has paled to the point that they are now virtually indistinguishable, leaving ordinary people with no recourse except protest outside established institutional frameworks.

The economic crisis which followed the 2007-2008 US financial crash only brought matters to a head. Such is the background against which populisms have prospered. But there are other factors behind their simultaneous rise in most of the West.

4.3 The Secession of Elites

The malaise has been aggravated by the hitherto uncommon phenomenon that nearly all elites now speak the same language – that of acquiescence to the neoliberal order and progressive values. Worse, they seem to have concentrated wealth, power and status to a degree unparalleled since the 1920s, and become autonomous from the rest of the population, to whom they no longer feel responsible or consider they have any civic obligations. In that regard, one is retrospectively struck by the prescience of authors like Robert Reich[18] and Christopher Lasch[19] who had predicted such a change decades before its effects became apparent. The latter noted that the latest technological revolution had spawned a new cognitive elite, made up of what Reich had termed "symbolic analysts" – notably professionals and managers, big media journalists, economists, bankers, lawyers, academics, or artists –, who deal in expertise, information or expressive symbols, and derive income, prominence and influence therefrom. As the market for their wares is worldwide, members of the new privileged class are less concerned with national or local communities than their predecessors, and have in effect "*removed themselves from the common life*". Yet they dominate culture and society.

In his already cited book, Goodhart describes today's elite group in Britain as an ensemble of people who did well at school, went on to a boarding university, live and work in major cities, enjoy high income, have "achieved" and "portable" identities, share similar cosmopolitan lifestyles and, as one reviewer put it,[20] "*pride themselves on being tolerant, meritocratic, egalitarian, autonomous, open to change, internationalist and individualist*". Such a portrait is likely to sound familiar to any observer anywhere in the West. While they come from more diversified family backgrounds than earlier, their families were affluent enough to

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allow them to spend long years in higher education. Their psychological affinities stem precisely from their career success as products of meritocracy, which sustains their claim to distinction from those with lesser levels of educational attainment, whom they tend to underestimate – if not privately or openly despise. Whereas intermarriage has been on the rise in the rest of the population, they tend to marry within their group. The share among their families of those entrusting their children to (more socially exclusive) private schools has risen. And as they live in upper-middle-class or gentrified districts, they have fewer occasions to intermingle with others below them : unlike elites of earlier periods, they have little need for servants, and their group is now large enough to afford them the possibility of living in relative but growing isolation.[21] Finally, they have become more interchangeable at the top in terms of competence, and those concerned easily move as a result from the private sector's higher circles to senior-level public employment and vice versa.

Over and beyond such shared characteristics, ideology is what most visibly unites that group, and it translates into political outlooks and voting patterns that are strikingly more homogeneous than was previously the case. The elite group disproportionately voted "Remain" in the Brexit referendum, "Democrat" in the latest US elections, and for Macron in France. How can one account for such a development ? The polarization mentioned earlier is a factor in that it tends to harden identities, bringing them closer to central stereotypes. The fact that this phenomenon first became apparent in the 1990s also draws attention to the role of the strong Western consensus on neoliberalism, suddenly deprived of the West's old ideological competitor after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The former incentive to keep the lower classes happy through redistribution and welfare suddenly disappeared. Instead of comparing, as earlier, two rival ideologies and finding "organized capitalism" superior to communism, the West now compared progressive ideals with realities, and found the latter wanting. From then on, it kept upping the moral ante in delivering the message it sent to the world at large as well as to its own populations : globalization is both fate and a boon, and economic efficiency the way to prosper in it ; individual rights, multiculturalism and the promotion of minorities are the recipe for harmonious, inclusive societies ; enlightened centrist ("Third Way") governments' duty is to ease adaptation to the new configuration through persuasion and "pedagogy" with the help of experts. Historical change was seen as a univocal evolution – "Progress" – in the direction of further cultural emancipation of individuals. "Populations" substituted for "peoples" in official parlance, and national sovereignties and symbols were conspicuously deemphasized. Ideology took on strong moral overtones (nowhere as explicit as in foreign policy pronouncements which described Western military interventions as, in Tony Blair's words, "*a force for good in the world*"). Such teleo-eschatology portrayed any expression of scepticism as unacceptable, indeed immoral, language.[22] And whenever dissent was more pointed, it was stigmatized as "politically incorrect" – on the wrong side of History. In effect, a neoliberal, "progressive" *doxa* took hold, to which the mainstream media subscribed to the point where annoyed publics increasingly lost confidence in the press,[23] broadly defined, and resorted to social networks to voice dissent, some of it virulent.

The new cognitive elite found the place it now occupied very comfortable, holding the moral high ground, securing better incomes, enjoying larger status differentials vis-à-vis those below them, and exerting greater influence on policy directly through expert advice, or indirectly through cultural channels where ideological conformity flourished. Elite class consciousness became apparent, and something like a class struggle re-emerged along the lines of the polarization alluded to above, as witnessed to a degree by the social composition (in terms of income, educational attainment, age and gender) of the audiences of rightist counterculture

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channels which have spearheaded resistance to the "progressive" *doxa* – and by that of populist movements' support base.

4.4 Excessive Legal and External Constraints

Curbs on the power to pass and implement legislation on the basis of an expression of the general will have been increasing in the last decades. One source of such change is the extended scope of judicial review. In the United States, where the battle pitting "strict" against "loose" constructionists has been raging for a long time and seemed structural, the balance between them has been disrupted in the last decades. This is what a controversial book published in 1977 by a (liberal) Harvard professor[24] drew attention to : though the US Supreme Court is not empowered to rewrite the Constitution, it has demonstrably done so under the guise of interpretation so that, as he wrote : "*Justices, who are virtually unaccountable, irremovable, and irreversible, have taken over from the people control of their own destiny*", mainly by abusing the 14th Amendment. Evidence that "government by judiciary" may indeed be a reality in America resides in the politicization of Justices' nomination and approval process. In Western Europe, the situation varies from one country to the next, but the trend is unmistakable. In 2009, to clarify the various (legislative and judicial) roles of the House of Lords until then confused (at least in lay eyes) by constitutional tradition, Britain felt the need to establish a Supreme Court of its own, with the power to review and overturn secondary legislation in cases where it contradicts the principles laid down by primary legislation. In September 2019, it handed down what a legal academic expert termed its most politically explosive judgement in its ten years of existence, a ruling which went further than what most lawyers had expected.[25] The German Constitutional Court, reputedly the most powerful court in the world, recently thought nothing of starting a constitutional showdown with the European Court of Justice over the European Central Bank's quantitative easing policies, thereby opening a period of legal disarray in the EU. Even a country like the Netherlands, which for over a century and a half has laid a constitutional ban on judicial review of Acts of Parliament, is now weighing the pros and cons of repealing it to conform to contemporary European standards. But perhaps the most interesting case is that of France, a country without constitutional review until 1958, where the Constitutional Council created by the Fifth Republic has (from 1971 onwards) ventured to turn the non-binding general principles contained in the Preamble of the Fourth Republic's Constitution (1946) into a set of normative rules which it uses to censure laws both before and (since 2008) after promulgation.[26] It was recently emboldened to extend the limits of its competencies by ruling on the expediency, rather than solely on the constitutional legality, of government initiatives.[27]

Western Europe has thus seen its legal traditions profoundly altered by the multiplication of such independent supreme bodies, which after a while affirm their roles and become tempted to arrogate to themselves ever greater power at the expense of other government branches. Interestingly, far from baulking at such a trend, cabinets and parliaments alike have actually welcomed it by easing conditions under which cases can be submitted to those unelected entities, as if they were happy to delegate authority to non-partisan institutions and thus be relieved of the responsibilities of power.

European standards are, for the nations concerned, another major source of legal constraints and policy injunctions. The European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights act as ultimate courts of cassation now routinely overruling the highest national courts and effectively functioning as their superego. This would not sound awkward if a European citizenship had emerged other than on paper only, but absent such strong supranational allegiances many are led to ask what legitimate or relevant right have foreign

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Justices to meddle in internal civil, administrative, criminal or even constitutional affairs. The same applies to policy directives from Brussels, where a substantial (though in effect undetermined) share of national legislations and regulations now originate in the guise of "directives" transcribed into domestic law. The problem is that some are unpopular as they go against the grain of national tradition, especially since the EU wholeheartedly embraced neoliberalism. The resulting distrust is exacerbated by the temptation of domestic politicians to blame the Union for whatever goes wrong or incurs unpopularity at home.

Finally, constraints flowing from international law, public organizations and trade agreements frequently raise doubts as to their relevance, utility or appropriateness. The feeling here is that multilateralism in international relations has become a further source of erosion of national sovereignty, especially as treaties, once ratified, have a higher legal status than domestic legislation, and the citizenry has little say on their negotiation apart from the public opinion pressures it may exert before they are signed – at least when the options on the negotiation table are not kept secret (as is often the case). Even seemingly non-binding, often incantatory, agreements sponsored by the UN or other international agencies find their way into domestic case-law as a source of inspiration.[28]

These trends highlight the imbalance that has come about in the structural tension that exists in any liberal democracy between its two overarching principles – constitutionalism on the one hand, the people's will and sovereign power on the other. Seen in that light, populisms emerge as a corrective factor in situations marked by an excess of constitutional or multilateral international constraints.[29]

4.5 Multiculturalism and the "Tyranny of Minorities"

Next on the list is populist opposition to multiculturalism, often portrayed as resentment on the part of (often unavowedly racist) poor whites against minorities and welfare recipients who, thanks to the support of government and progressive elites, jump the social mobility queue and overtake hard-working people. These then vote conservative, against their material interests but in line with their emotional interest, and embrace populism and its vague but assertive rhetoric because spelling out their "deep story" would mean braving the stigma of racism.[30] There is no denying that such attitudes and definitions of the situation are part of the populist landscape, most often in nativist circles. But racial or ethnic minorities are not their only targets : populists are not known to support feminists, gays, or transgender people either. And again, the weakness of the "resentment" argument is that on their own such groups are not numerous enough to tilt the political balance decisively in their favour. They have to be joined by many other voters, and the topic should thus be approached in more general terms. A more promising approach is to consider majority-minority relations.

Democracy is necessarily governed by the majority principle.[31] Yet that principle has run up against a number of difficulties in the West over the last few decades. Electoral results are often tight, and the magnitude of abstentions as well as blank or void votes is such that the winner (or the victorious option in a referendum) only garners a minority among citizens of voting age. Moreover, by opening a growing gap between high- and low-skilled jobs, technologically-driven social change is slowly hollowing out the central, amorphous middle-class which previously provided the numbers for the emergence of political majorities. Finally, minorities have multiplied on a subjective rather than objective (i.e. assigned) basis, and they are now more influential than mostly unorganized majorities – a trend insightfully spotted forty

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years ago by French social-psychologist Serge Moscovici, who wrote : "*There are majoritarian ages, where everything seems to depend on the will of the greatest number, and minority eras, where the obstinacy of some individuals, of some restricted groups, seems sufficient to create the event, and to decide on the course of things. (...) [I]f I was asked to define the present time, I would say that one of its particular characters is the transition from a majority period to a minority period*".[32]

It is not therefore on uncertain and changing electoral majorities that the majority principle can rest, but on the supposedly central core of those who accept the duty of citizens : to pass their own (material, but also expressive) interests after the general interest, a condition on which the pursuit of the common good is premised. However, for half a century, social evolution has been in the direction of individual emancipation at the expense of citizen allegiances, threatening the production of shared goals or ideals, and turning political majorities into coalitions of minorities on which rest the electoral strategies of government parties.

These minorities are no longer just the sign of disagreements over political and socio-economic issues : driven by the growing need for expressiveness, they are cultural and thirst for recognition of their identities. They are defined by ways of life or moral causes rather than by material interests, and their numbers have soared : feminists, gays and lesbians, ethno-racial groups differentiated according to their origin, transgender people, vegans, zealots of the animal cause top a list that is hardly exhausted. Over the last half-century, they have made themselves heard, on the initiative of often virulent activists or moral entrepreneurs, by noisy transgressions of dominant norms in order to have their status as victims of discrimination or the moral legitimacy of their cause fully recognized, to lend credence to the "normality" of their practices, impose their vocabulary and language prohibitions, and finally to have them set, under pressure, in legislative stone. When media influence and sheer intimidation are added to the equation, a regime of self-censorship sets in, and censorship *tout court* is apt to affect writers, commentators or artists now vulnerable to the wrath of the judicial system.

The mainstream of Western societies long left them unchallenged, convinced that emancipation and its attendant hedonism, resulting in a new primacy of the individual, were a good thing, and that in the atmosphere thus created certain social norms and old stigmas were outdated. However, it began to stiffen when such change ceased to be entirely painless : when, for ever larger segments of societies, it became a source of multiple constraints in everyday life, both public and private. It baulked when insistent "politically correct" norms made their appearance, suggesting that outside of the liberal-libertarian path that was being traced for it, there could be no salvation. It stiffened even more when the media turned into self-appointed guardians of this *doxa* (now seen as a banner of moral virtue) and joined the activists in denouncing all reservations as the mark of mentally retarded hatemongers, subject to various "phobias" that the new laws now made it possible to prosecute.

This has led to situations where groups representing 4% or even 0.5% of the adult population can force the remaining 96 or 99.5% to adjust to new standards, to monitor their language at all times (or face the risk of inadvertently offending someone), revise their grammar and spelling, and even redefine their identities according to categories imposed by one or more minorities. The vogue among activists of the concept of "intersectionality" (the accumulation by certain groups of minority attributes seen as stigmatized or a source of victimization) suggests that the emergence of micro-minorities, each with its agenda of constraints to impose on the rest of society, is in the offing.

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Moreover, as new immigrant arrivals tend not to assimilate, difficult though essential questions are raised about possible cases of conflicting norms. This especially the case in Western Europe with second- or third-generation Muslim nationals, for whom religion is a marker of their rejection of a society that discriminates against them, and who often return to their cultural roots. In so doing, they raise such fundamental issues as rule of law in the areas in which they tend to concentrate (civil law *vs*. sharia), security (due to a halo effect which in perceptions makes these groups a potential breeding ground for home-grown Islamist terrorism), liberties (forced marriages, attitudes towards women, homosexuals, apostates, etc.), and identity (which up till then majorities scarcely claimed, but now seek a groping definition of in order to counter its dilution). Despite the promise of immigration as a welcome source of labour in countries where unemployment is unheard of (Germany, Scandinavia, Switzerland, the US and others), a non-negligible part of the population sees it as either a burden, a threat, or the introduction of an alien culture, and it has given rise to the emergence of parties that specifically target it – with a fair degree of electoral success. Other segments, seemingly more numerous, accept it as an irreversible fact, but nonetheless demand of immigrants tangible signs of integration and, in the face of a sudden increase in migratory pressure, stricter control of future inflows. Annoyance is palpable when activists of (self-mandated) associations or NGOs dress the issue in ethical garb (in terms of a duty of compassion, humanity, hospitality, etc., as if the sermon on the mountain could serve as a foundation for policy), and denounce as morally despicable those who question their options. And when the citizen turns to the past to ask how we got there, he or she does not recall ever having been consulted on an issue that, like this one, was apt to alter the face of society : one is referred back to the denial of democracy populists make so much of.[33]

A fearful mechanism is set in train when political elites, renouncing civic universalism, come to believe that the promotion of differences and "diversity" is the only way to manage the consequences of their predecessors' imprudence, and when the entertainment industry decides to give them a hand. This is what happens, for example, when TV viewers find that in most crime series, the investigation is conducted by a woman, or that, if male, the person in a position of authority very often comes from "diversity" backgrounds unless he is old, ridiculous, or pathetic. The average man on the other side of the TV screen eventually comes to understand that the director of the series sees him as a being steeped in prejudice that society needs to fight (which he will deem unpleasant if precisely he had never thought of denying anyone a rewarding merit-based career in the police). Perceiving that he is being assimilated to the undifferentiated mass of "dominant white males" suspected of sexism or racism, he may see good reason to question the insistence of an implicit message that describes him as a figure of the past. He may in turn – especially if he feels dominated rather than dominant – denounce ideological collusion among elites of all kinds who never miss an opportunity to deliver that message and take on the best role at his expense. In the worst case, he will mentally identify with the target group, and will be tempted by paranoia : a perfect case of self-fulfilling prophecy.

What these illustrations suggest is that for a very large part of the population, the subjective cost of a society that grants all the claims of cultural minority groups may be much higher than meets the eye. The alliance of political elites, judges and activists in all walks of life generates among a beleaguered majority a sense that it is being subjected to something amounting to a tyranny of minorities. The long-held frustration that results from such a predicament goes far to explain the populist style's appeal, and the popularity of leaders when they crudely give vent to it verbally – it brings many people psychological relief.

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Four decades into Serge Moscovici's "age of minorities", populist impulses sound like a call to democratic order : while majorities cannot do as they please all of the time, they have at least the right not to allow Gulliver to be bound to the ground by Lilliputians. Forgotten, their opinions ignored,[34] grassroots citizens are ranked (as Jacques Rancière would say, though in a very different sense) among those *who do not count*. They now invite their elites to come down to earth, and reverse course.

4.6 The Harassment and Infantilization of Law-Abiding Citizens

A further source of irritation is the discounting, on the part of experts, political and administrative elites, of citizens' capacity for discernment and responsible behaviour. This is manifest on a number of everyday life issues like road speed limits, substance use or child rearing, where they are treated as if they were unable to place the limit between what is morally and socially acceptable and what is not. Thus, norms are set based on expert advice (whose often somewhat arbitrary character is revealed by their variations over time or across borders) to promote "correct" behaviours ; manipulation becomes the order of the day under the guise of education and persuasion to "change mentalities", and surveillance systems are put in place to detect even the slightest involuntary infringement, especially if in the face of mounting disorders a "zero-tolerance" policy has been instituted. To illustrate : when, following recommendations from well-meaning professors of medicine or child psychology, government sets out to combat the ravages of smoking, alcoholism or child abuse by stacking taxes and surcharges on the sale of tobacco and liquor, or by enjoining parents from even verbally reprimanding their children, rather than combat abuse, addiction or proven ill-treatment, it prefers to coerce *all* consumers and families and make them feel guilty. In such cases, the same official disapproval or stigma attaches to sensible and excessive or harmful consumption or treatment : government presumes to be in a better position than private citizens to appraise contexts, and ends up *a priori* suspecting everyone of *vice* or brutality.

An enduring legacy of the last half-century is that political and social elites hate the thought of having to repress even serious deviants. Like Melville's Bartleby, they would prefer not to if they can avoid it, and rely instead on prevention. This, for instance, is what a French Catholic cardinal did in a well-publicized recent case when, upon hearing of repeated child sexual abuse over years by a priest in his diocese, he decided against reporting it to the judiciary (as was his legal duty) and embarked instead on an internal prevention campaign among the priests under his care by prohibiting one-on-one encounters behind closed doors. The unanticipated outcome of such an option is that by failing to discriminate, it places the burden of sin on the group or institution as a whole and turns everyone into a virtual suspect *a priori* ; it creates an atmosphere of distrust in which any innocent move or gesture (e.g., patting a child on the head as a sign of affection or approval) is apt to raise doubts as to one's real intent, personality or integrity. Such relativism blurs the boundary between good and evil, and tolerance of ambiguity becomes a greater problem than when mutual confidence was more in evidence.[35]

The clouding of the line separating grievous offences from peccadilloes carries often overlooked consequences in the context of increased all-round surveillance, especially in light of the fact that in spite of it serious offenders are hard to catch and their crimes frequently go unpunished. Thus, while the police identify burglars and violent robbers in only about 15% of reported cases, drivers – to take but one example – stand little chance of escaping the latest generation of roadside cameras, capable of detecting not only the slightest speeding, but also

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unfastened safety belts as well as mobile telephone use while driving, and of monitoring 126 cars simultaneously. Hence a growing sense among ordinary citizens of being literally hounded by public authorities[36] – whereas nearly 6 in every 7 serious offenders get away with their wrongdoing. Hitherto passive law-abiding citizens who counted on their governors for protection can be pardoned for feeling they are the designated victims of a system that finds it easier to harass them for exceeding a speed limit by 10% than to indict criminals, and whose elites' fixation is on changing their mentality and reforming their behaviours.

The same presumption that elites know better and can disregard popular sentiment even when it is entirely reasonable, decent (i.e. based on a clear sense of limits as well as of responsibility) and grounded in long-held freedoms (not to mention anthropological structures) is reflected in the manipulative methods used to "improve" individual conduct in everyday life matters. The resources provided by social psychology and behavioural economics are mobilized by no end of experts ready to feed the system with new ideas. One example is the application of Malcolm Gladwell's "Tipping Point" theory of social epidemics which posits that 20% of the population are enough to tilt the balance of public opinion or markets when selling ideas or products.[37] All it takes is favourable circumstances and "*people with a particular and rare set of social gifts*" (connectors, experts, charismatic influencers). Another is the practice of "nudging", introduced by the British government in 2010, then by Barack Obama in 2015,[38] to influence, inhibit or speed up private citizens' decision-making processes, at the appropriate moment, by a gentle "nudge" that resorts to various social engineering ploys, some seemingly harmless, but others downright annoying.

Spreading the good word and giving pride of place to zealous militants in the cause of neoliberal ideals under cover of worthy social and moral purposes was a tailor-made role that mainstream media pundits wholeheartedly embraced as self-appointed guardians of central values (and members of elite networks), thereby leaving precious little room for any dissenting opinion. Nobody has ever seemed to notice that this expert "pedagogy" amounts to treating the grassroots citizenry as a bunch of immature creatures or worse, whose reactions are unworthy of consideration. One French interviewee comments : "*As a loyal citizen and tax contributor, I'm not paying our rulers to change my mentality, but to adjust to it, and present me with a vision and policy programmes I can possibly adhere to and support – or not. I'm sick and tired of being lectured and morally bullied*".

Predicated on principles presented as enlightened, self-evident and consensual, such paternalism boils down to a transformation of neoliberal progressive tenets into social and moral gospel by means of mainstream influence channels, and if that proves insufficient, by judicial enforcement. The problem is that the elites' ambition to help a far from always willing citizenry overcome its supposed cultural lag (easily equated with irrationality or mental retardation) translates into ever-narrower limits on people's everyday life freedoms.

The reactions of the body politic to such trends are only uneasily verbalized. But actions sometimes speak louder than words.[39] Their subtext is that the insistence on good intentions and lofty sentiments on the part of those holding the high ground is suspect – that it actually conceals an ideological big stick wielded by oddly unanimous ruling or expressive elites inclined to concessions made to militants of all stripes. And that "the people" is tired of being treated as a potentially uncontrollable pachyderm animated by "rancid" feelings "that do not do honour to mankind". It responds with cynicism, an uncomfortable attitude that is difficult to sustain for those responsive to civic ideals. Hence the suffocating sensation often mentioned in interviews – one that is without remedy, except revolt and demands for a popular right of veto on the policies conducted by the powers-that-be.

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4.7 The Twilight of Authority

Social dynamics account for the rise of cultural expressiveness and differentiation as against hitherto dominant societal norms (*cf. infra*). But this long-term change has been, if not positively driven then at least powerfully aided, on the Left, by the ascendancy of ideological ingredients notably derived from "French Theory" dating back to the 1960s and 1970s : not least from the writings of Foucault, Lyotard and Derrida.[40]

Foucault's cultural relativism combined with Lyotard's epistemic relativism and Derrida's view that language is a vehicle for social hierarchies in need of deconstruction, to produce a strong postmodernist intellectual movement enthusiastically embraced by many leftist intellectuals throughout the West. Following Nietzsche, such thinking turns power into the key factor governing truth, beauty and ethics. But unlike Nietzsche, it sides with those at the wrong end of material or symbolic power relationships, and seeks redress for such victims through "empowerment". To that end, it mounts a wholesale attack on objective knowledge, universalism and the "metanarratives" on which they rest ; it sees salvation in "mini-narratives" peculiar to groups free to cultivate their identities. Since all reality is seen as socially constructed, "arbitrary" culture is the prime political battleground on which the fight for social justice is played out, and noisy transgressive militant tactics the name of the game.

By a strange (though in retrospect not entirely unexpected) twist, far-right populists have opportunistically adopted these intellectual weapons and used the same transgressive methods against their leftist originators, and against the "system" in general. The message they send through social media and their dedicated cable networks can be formulated as follows : if anything goes, then our subjective truth is as good and every bit as legitimate as yours, and we're determined to fight for it. An indirect measure of public opinion's impatience of the dominant neoliberal *doxa* is its astonishing, vaguely amused tolerance of the untruths, transparent lies or inconsistencies populist leaders on the Right proffer with so much aplomb and glee (with or without an implied wink).[41]

The net result of all-round relativism and contestation has been the weakening of universal values and objective knowledge, thus of the shared certainties – the modicum of consensus – required by societal cohesion and effective decision-making in the name of collectives at all levels. The "post-truth" era may not have led (as yet) to a war of all against all, but it has undermined institutions to the point that they now all too obviously malfunction. The credit accorded to politicians in office, parliaments, parties, unions, the written press and electronic media is at an all-time low. Journalists are no longer welcome in many places or circles, and major electronic media anchors, treated as "public speech oligarchs", arouse barely less distrust than politicians. Experts, especially on sensitive topics, are suspected *a priori* of complaisance, bias or conflicts of interest ; so are social scientists when their findings are transparently tainted with ideological concerns or manipulation. As for intellectual influence, it seems to have literally vaporized outside of academia. After half-a-century of subversion of concepts as well as methods, and promotion of cognitive and cultural relativism, it is disarmed today when faced with the "monstrosity" of "alternative facts" or the prevalence of conspiracy theories on social media. No word seems able to carry weight any more : our age is experiencing a twilight of authority (of which contemporary comedians' derisive mockery of just about everything is emblematic). All of this paved the way for populist rhetoric and style, which would not have been otherwise possible.

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4.8 The Erosion of Trust and Life Satisfaction

Finally, subjective factors, trust and satisfaction in life chief among them, play a role as both effect and cause. They reflect public opinion moods that seem unhappy to an astonishing degree, and happen to be better predictors of the populist vote than most others.[42]

Many classics of social science have noted that trust, an "invisible institution", is an essential ingredient of viable societies. Its weakening has seemed a characteristic of Western societies for some time. Loss of people's faith in their elites has been analysed above. It has in turn affected political institutions. After shorter and shorter political honeymoons upon assumption of office, the confidence or popularity ratings of government leaders regularly fall, most often to vertiginous depths. Their capacity to deliver on their promises and for transforming society is now much lower than it used to be, and after a few decades the discredit they suffer has now extended to the representative system as a whole. In 2016, the degree of confidence in the US Presidency was a mere 36%, while the US Congress (9%) fared much worse.[43] In Europe, the corresponding figures were 31% for governments and parliaments, and 16% for political parties.[44] Empirical evidence on citizens' evaluation of their influence on their government's options shows severe deficits in confidence. In 2011-2012, only Denmark (50.1%) and Greece (then at an astonishing 70.9%) exhibited majorities of adults feeling that they had a say in what government did ; the United States stood at 43.8 and Canada at 35.1% ; in Europe, the Nordics were in the 40-50% range, while most of the rest were grouped in the 25-40% bracket ; the bottom of the league was shared, in descending order, by Germany (24.7%), Spain (23.4%), Italy (17.6%), and France (10%).[45]

Other indicators point in the direction of a deterioration in the level of legitimacy enjoyed by State or other public institutions. In the last four decades, the perceived capacity of government authorities to protect or rescue populations from natural or technological disasters has been damaged on a number of occasions in a variety of countries. Though less ill-inspired than it had been in the Great Depression, governments' response to the 2008 financial crisis caused inordinate suffering in many quarters, while inequalities rose in its aftermath, and in some countries of southern Europe government efforts to combat mass unemployment have so far repeatedly failed. To make matters worse, a string of scandals involving Cabinet ministers and parliamentarians in a number of nations revealed that the political class was less disinterested and trustworthy than desirable – that in fact politicians are exploiting their power for their own private interest and thus fall far short of the expected civic virtues. Confirmation bias may explain why perceptions of political corruption in most Western countries now exceed 50% of respondents. The judiciary is less suspected of being corrupt than seen as unfair – in surprisingly high proportions throughout the West.[46] The private sector brings little relief from this rather bleak picture, due to resounding systemic corporate failures, suspicions of pervasive greed or cronyism, and abuse of dominant market positions. "Lobby" has become a dirty word. The art world seems more interested in provoking the public (and securing astronomical market prices from investors not known for their artistic taste) than in pursuing beauty : at a time when huge crowds throng first-rank museums to visit the classics, current production and popular reception have divorced to the point that works of contemporary art deemed offensive have been known to be deliberately deteriorated. Even "hard" science, despite high ratings, does not entirely escape such strictures when reports of false data used in previously acclaimed studies surface in the press, or large public opinion segments worry about possible applications of new

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discoveries. The only highly trusted institutions or professions are generally those associated with security (fire departments, armed forces, police) and with care (health, assistance), which probably reflects subjective deficits in those regards as much as respect for their service ethic and the way they perform.

These observations, however, need to be qualified. Empirical measures yield mixed results. For one thing, the decline of trust is far from uniform across the board : it is more pronounced on some topics than on others, and on certain items trust has actually slightly risen over the last few years ; in some countries, like the Nordics or Canada, the situation is in fact favourable on the whole. For another, perceptions of a decline of trust tend to overestimate its scope, sometimes by substantial margins.[47] Interestingly, the greater part of that decline, if present and where longitudinally documented, took place before 2000, i.e. prior to the moment when populist movements and parties started gathering powerful momentum.[48] This is the case with the US as regards a variable – confidence in others – that reflects and in many ways sums up all trust variables : it went down from 46% in 1972 to 31% in 2018,[49] with 2/3 of the decrease effected before the turn of the century. In Europe, whereas no substantial decline has been registered since the early 2000s and the latest figure (2018 : 45%) places trust 14 percent above the US rate, some countries (e.g., France : 29%) actually do worse than America in that regard.[50]

While a uniform decline of trust in the West cannot be established, the fact remains that "trusters" are in a minority on a plurality of items as well as countries, and the well-publicized signals enumerated above meaningfully form part of the backdrop to the rise of populisms. It is hard not to relate this symptom of anomie to the "eclipse of community", connectedness, and civic engagement documented and analysed by early sociologists, and by Putnam in the contemporary context[51] – i.e. to the consequences of what Norbert Elias called the "society of individuals".

Can identifiable factors account for high levels of distrust as well as for differentials within that broad picture ? How does the incidence of distrust relate and contribute to the rise of populisms ? On the first issue, most of the factors listed in the preceding subsections qualify as serious contenders. Inequalities have been documented as a major (even *the main*) source of distrust.[52] So has multiculturalism, seen as an important source of weakening social ties through eroded common normative references and uncertain mutual expectations. Polarization is another (especially when combined with low social mobility and lack of intergroup contact), as is fast, disruptive economic or social change.[53] And whereas, based on published research, a number of official reports have recognized that mass surveillance is apt to harm social trust,[54] apart from passing remarks on the "*over-criminalizing* [of] *banal offences*", law-abiding citizens' sense of being harassed by public authorities remains to be empirically addressed.

As for the second question, statistical analysis strongly suggests that if the weakening of social trust fuels populist leanings, it does not do so in blanket fashion : it benefits right-wing populism[55] distinctly more than its opposing counterpart.

Beside erosion of confidence, life satisfaction is another strong predictor in that regard. As in the case of trust, empirical measures do not support the notion of a blanket decline of life satisfaction in the West.[56] But, as Algan and colleagues have duly noted, those dissatisfied with their lives are overrepresented among populist voters.[57] Dissatisfaction correlates with (low) income and educational level, and seems governed by relative deprivation (i.e. unfavourable

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comparisons with others regarded as one's peers), but it taps qualitative dimensions that objective measures fail to take into account, and more closely fits the statistical contours of the populist vote. The remarkable fact, however, is that – unlike social trust – dissatisfaction with life is common to both right- and left-wing populists.

5. The Rise of Populisms : A Narrative

Four decades of growing inequalities, stagnant median incomes, social malaise, territorial divides, increasing socio-economic and cultural polarization, unresponsive elites often seen as self-sufficient, self-interested and arrogant, low social trust and faith in public and private institutions would be enough to put any liberal democracy under strain. But what marks the period that has seen populisms pick up astonishing momentum is a sense that majorities have lost control of their destinies at the hands of a loose alliance of minorities, some of them of fair or significant size (meritocratic elite strata, ethno-racial groups), some whose influence is out of proportion to their actual demographic weight (militants, activists, experts), and others tiny in number but extremely powerful or influential (judges, media pundits). Caught between the anvil of globalization's attendant external constraints and the hammer of a self-righteous ideology justifying minority rule – to which the judiciary, media and government parties acquiesce –, the citizenry's central core feels disempowered. The dominant feeling is that something is definitely amiss : a democracy that allows culturally or ideologically defined minorities to rule majorities as a matter of course is no democracy at all. The equilibrium that is supposed to exist between constitutionalism and the sovereign people's will has been decisively disrupted. Such a disruption is beyond repair within the existing institutional framework, as centrist government parties, kept on a leash by judicial review bodies and multilateral restraints, have a record of following by and large similar policies of acceptance of neoliberal tenets, and of ignoring signals expressed in the ballot box (including such ominous signs as voter volatility and rising abstention levels). Moral bullying and everyday life constraints in the name of progress have added insult to injury, and turned annoyance into palpable irritation. After a while, the populist vote, for the Left or (more conspicuously) for the Right, started swelling as an ultimate means of protest. Where the "civic" centre eventually turned rebellious and yielded in part to the populist appeal, the world was dismayed to find that in frustration its oldest democracies had taken a leap in the dark, while among their democratic neighbours and allies the populist tide kept rising.

The issue raised by such developments is that of the deeper historical significance of contemporary Western populisms. One obvious source resides in globalization regarded as inescapable and welcome fate, and in neoliberalism (introduced shortly before for other reasons, already cited) as the best-adapted paradigm to draw its full benefits and avoid its dangers. The populist surge is a response to the substantial downsides that such a context has generated, especially for globalization's losers. Yet, another dimension is apparent : one that has other sources and is distinct from neoliberalism even if it has nicely dovetailed with it and reinforced its effects – the rise of liberal-libertarian values. Populisms can be read as a popular reaction against an omnipresent progressive ideology adopted by elite groups throughout the West.

5.1 The Ascendancy of Individual Rights

The rights of the individual have come to so pervade the universe Westerners inhabit that they no longer wonder about them : they take their benefits for granted and routinely wish for more at the expense of citizen duties without asking questions about the price their societies have

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had to pay for the development of such a powerful master trend. This ascendancy of rights has remained uncontroversial until recently populisms called attention to its drawbacks.

One part of the process which has led to this state of affairs is ideological in nature and relates to long-term legacies of major turning points in world history. The final defeat or collapse of 20th century totalitarianisms – Nazi Germany and its allies in 1945, the Soviet Union and its empire in 1989-1991 – understandably led to a diffuse but insistent symbolic de-emphasis and distrust of the polity, equated with federal government in America, and in Europe with the figure of the nation-State, now suspected of spontaneously generating nationalism (and, as President Mitterrand averred at a time when bloody conflict was raging in former Yugoslavia, "*nationalism means war*"). In the Post-Cold Era, the prestige that derived from the role anti-totalitarian thought and action had played in the fall of communism in Europe after the 1975 Helsinki Accords redoubled such inclinations by placing special stress on human rights.

But the main factor in that respect lies in widely shared internal social dynamics that have entailed an accelerated individualization of social relations throughout the West. The story runs by and large as follows. The mechanics of individualization are driven by various engines that were clearly seen *in statu nascendi* by classical sociologists.[58] All relate to long-term social equalization processes and to technological development (not least specialization and the complex organizational relationships that it induces) ; to the rise of the monetary economy and of much higher living standards ; to the emergence of social rights and the security they afford with regard to the hazards of life ; finally, to higher levels of education. All tend to diversify experiences, to free individuals from dependence on local (including family) groups and from submission to their norms – in short, they relax social ties, and strengthen personal liberty, free choice and critical mind.

Even if the Individual was from the beginning on the scores that Modernity plays, it was not until the consequences (notably on the younger generations from the 1960s onwards) of unprecedented economic development levels and new contraceptive techniques impacted societies that these engines started to run at full throttle. Hedonism ensued, which predominantly took the form of narcissistic expressiveness : the free manifestation of one's tastes and life choices – of one's individual "authenticity". In now affluent societies, where Fordist mass production had until then tended to impose a degree of uniformity on society, signs of differentiation or distinction were eagerly sought after. In the 1980s, the computer revolution, by making possible just-in-time production to individual consumers' specifications, afforded them the opportunity to use goods and services for expressive rather than for purely practical, utilitarian reasons : the rise of "post-materialism" can also partly be explained in this way. Except for a few still stigmatized groups, social identity is now often chosen rather than assigned : reference groups define it as much as membership groups, if not more. To sum up, the last half-century has seen a radical emancipation of the individual, one likely to deliver serious blows to citizen's allegiances.

The problem is that democracy stands in theory somewhere in the middle parts of the continuum of political regimes ranging from anarchy at one end (where individuals deny the polity any legitimate role) to totalitarianism (where the polity leaves individuals and civil society no room at all) at the other. In other words, it presumes an equilibrium between the private sphere and the public sphere. That balance normally wavers between a 'liberal' and a 'citizenship' State formula. The last seven decades have seen that balance move gradually but decisively closer to the individual pole of the continuum.[59] It now seems as if the stick has been bent too far on that side.

5.2 Weak Political Leadership

This has carried an important consequence for democratic political systems : as emancipated individuals (and the minorities they may identify with) feel weak and vulnerable to institutions, organizations and society in general, they tend to fear power in whatever form,[60] and to resist it as much as they can. They challenge it collectively, or rely on the pressure applied by the most militant to erect walls of legal protection around them, guaranteeing new rights and furthering their emancipation from hierarchies and binding social ties. Tellingly, starting in the 1970s, the term "domination" (not to mention "repression", still worse) assumed increasingly negative connotations – even when domination was in theory legitimate. Intellectuals, in the broadest sense including teachers and journalists, turned into critics of whatever emphasis on the interests of the polity remained part of the dominant order, and adopted liberal-libertarian counterculture tenets as their central reference. The thinkers who gained fame are those who did not shy away from negativism. The powerful trends towards increasing individualization have made this predicament a profound legacy.

In the face of all-round contestation, societies become difficult to govern,[61] and for this reason the wielders of authority and power in a democracy do not directly impose their options any more (except in technical matters, which for this reason they tend to favour as sources of solutions) : they seek (or hide behind) advice from experts in the media eye, consult or negotiate with the most vocal activists, delegate to independent non-partisan authorities or committees of ranking academics, and grant concessions, soon turning into new standards, to the agenda of militant associations or cultural minorities, in the name of humane feelings or pacification of controversies in the public domain.

Winning the next election or remaining in office at all costs tends to become the only clear objective pursued by mainstream ruling politicians. In the context of tight election results, one of their favourite strategies is to take their core support base for granted and endeavour to attract middle-of-the-road voters on the other side of the fence through calibrated concessions to the opposition's agenda, all the while keeping a keen eye on opinion polls. In some cases, they rely on "spin doctors", and following their advice they resort to more or less systematic "triangulation", co-optation of dissent, and power-sharing schemes between elected government and unelected activist or expert entities : a politics of accommodation mitigating the expected effects of the majority principle and leading to a dilution of political accountability. In the long run, their core supporters' repeated disappointments (or feelings of betrayal) weaken their leadership, and further delegitimize government. To cover themselves, they use law and worthy sentiments as fig leaves. The main thing for weak rulers is to appear *benevolent*: they rarely resort to force at home, even when exercise of democratic authority would recommend itself. Other than the blurring (to which it contributes) of the boundaries separating egregious from trifling offences, this is the main reason behind their utmost reluctance to be seen favouring repression of even serious wrongdoing (blood crime included) if it can be avoided and dominant ideology condones it – while they make no bones about pursuing criminal prosecution against scofflaws.

5.3 The Media Crisis and its Effects

The loss of confidence that has affected the mainstream media in the last decades has also been instrumental in the rise of populisms. The situation, factors at play, and outcomes differ according to type of media considered. The written press, long a guarantor of opinion diversity, has suffered economically from the competition of social media and specialized websites as news sources – from the loss of subscriptions and advertising revenues that has ensued. Many lesser newspapers have disappeared, and while some major (national) ones have managed to survive by publishing online versions, the rest have sought their salvation in ceding ownership to financial interests : in most countries, press titles of the first rank are now concentrated in the hands of a few multi-billionaires. While journalists can usually resort to the conscience clause in case of disagreement with owners on editorial matters, such capitalist concentration hardly enhances trust among a dwindling readership. But the link between the rise of populisms and print media is also more direct : in newspapers hungry for compelling stories and controversy in order to maintain their readers' attention or attract new ones, the former generate more echoes than seems strictly justified by the news they create,[62] thus amplifying the phenomenon.

The picture is different as regards electronic media, though there again sensationalism is rife[63] and concentrated capitalist ownership may play a role. One facet of it resides in a vicious circle : in the face of debased standards of public debate introduced by social media and in the US by rightist cable television and talk radio networks for which "[t]*ribal outrage works as a business model*",[64] mainstream media responded by adopting a progressive (on occasion overtly anti-populist) editorial line[65] as a token of respectability, inducing the creation by infuriated conservatives of more counterculture channels. Another (long unnoticed) problem emerged much earlier, in the 1960s, when nationwide media visibility turned news anchors into celebrities wielding considerable influence and power in terms of deciding how to interpret current events, which topics to highlight, which people to invite on news shows, which tone to adopt when addressing government leaders or policies, or which editorial line to follow on societal issues. Through their personal touch, entertainment style, and inclusion in a wider star system, such figures are, wittingly or not, in a position to impress their own subjective worldview upon mass audiences day after day, even though their only legitimacy derives from market success where competition exists and their appointment process is opaque. Some among the most popular acquire independent status, remain in place for decades on end, moving from one station or chain to another, and after a while become part of quasi-aristocratic influence networks including political, economic, intellectual or artistic elites of the first rank (among whom intermarriage is not unheard of). As Lasch phrased it, "*the machinery of celebrity recognizes no boundaries between the public and the private realm*",[66] and may thus be detrimental to democracy.

The growing distrust elicited in the last decades by such figures and the ascent of populist counterculture via conventional or online communication vehicles have meant that, with the legitimacy of their expressive privileges now openly questioned, media stars and established presenters no longer entirely dominate the scene as before and find themselves on the defensive.[67] The next question, not yet on the table (but that probably will soon be if this analysis is correct), is who speaks to millions and on what basis of legitimacy.

5.4 Dysfunctions : Political Stalemates, Destabilization of Representative Democracy

The present configuration of relationships between large and small numbers is not without raising fundamental sociopolitical questions. Cultural minorities that have become expressive and clamour for the free manifestation of their differences in public spaces (instead of reserving them, as in the past, for their private spheres) are tempted to isolate themselves by cultivating their identities apart from the rest of society.[68] The image of society looming on the horizon if this logic's momentum were given free rein is that of populations divided into silos and "echo chambers", where only those who feel they belong to the same minority are in contact with one another, and protect themselves from whatever looks alien to it. This raises the question of the possibility of generating enough common ground between social groups to form viable societies, or even of peaceful coexistence among them. This vision is sufficiently problematic for even authors who place discriminated groups at the centre of the plebeian "people" they wish to see emerge, like Laclau or Arditi, to worry about the perspective it opens up : a system of voluntary apartheid as the culmination of an integral differentialism whose aporia they emphasize.[69]

The repercussions of the ascent of minorities on the functioning of Western political systems have been manifest for some time. The ideal advanced by the supporters of such trends is to dispense with the majority principle and transform democratic polities into polyphonies of minority voices. But of course there is no guarantee that polyphony will not in fact result in cacophony : the outcome will turn on a number of conditions not easily brought together – the absence of a clear cultural majority resisting the idea, enough in common to make it possible to harmonize positions and compromise, a collective history unburdened by past intractable conflict, and "a tolerance for tolerance". The harmonious sharing of power presupposes the will to continue living together as one polity. In other words, the substitution of "polyphony" for the "body politic" as the political metaphor of reference may not yield all its expected results, and may well prove overly optimistic : waving rainbow flags instead of traditional national banners is not enough to bring about viable government systems.

Indeed, the examples of culturally divided polities exhibiting successful power-sharing schemes, whether among a plurality of minorities or between a majority and minorities, are discouragingly few and far between. The politics of accommodation advocated for half a century by Arend Lijphart[70] may well avert violent face-offs, as in Lebanon or Northern Ireland, but in such contexts marked by past episodes of political violence civil peace remains fragile (especially in case of rapidly changing demographic equilibria). In countries where such violence is unheard of and in which cultural and internal territorial boundaries coincide, such as Belgium or Spain, centrifugal forces threaten even liberalized constitutional arrangements designed to avoid the polity's disintegration. The practice of coalition cabinets, especially where proportional representation is in force, becomes problematic when voting results make coherent alliances difficult, obliging the country to vote again – sometimes several times in a matter of months (as in Israel and Spain recently). Another weakness of majorities consisting of minorities brought together is their potential instability. Worse, in such circumstances, parliamentary splinter groups representing very small percentages of the citizenry are apt to become kingmakers. To boot, centrist alliances may not be an ideal solution either where and when culture conflict does not play a defining role since they amount to a denial of party politics : in today's conditions, German-style "grand coalitions" or President Macron's gamble on a cabinet and policy lines transcending traditional Left-Right cleavages increasingly look like open invitations to populist movements to work their way up through protests on the streets and eventually in the ballot box. Even Switzerland's "magic formula", the most successful example of accommodation

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politics, could not prevent the rise of a strong populist party (and much of the Swiss political system's success relies on the mitigation of coalition government by popular referendums anyway). The conclusion seems clear enough : power-sharing is at best a makeshift or partial solution ; liberal democracy works best where politics is not mainly structured by cultural cleavages, a strong civic culture has been preserved, and circumstances, not least institutions, allow clear majorities to emerge.

The absence of a promising alternative to the final say of majorities in the polity's orientations is by no means all there is to the crisis of Western political systems in the face of the trends enumerated above. The loss of faith in political elites has now called into question another basic principle of modern democracies – representation. In stark contrast with the deference they had long enjoyed, the citizenry no longer regards its rulers as "the best and the brightest" : after so many unimpressive showings in previous economic, health or other crises, it often openly doubts their competence to solve its more serious problems and their capacity to respond to its needs or wishes. Encouraged by experience of grassroots endeavours brought to successful conclusions by means of social media (as well as emboldened by higher average education levels), it has come to feel that collective intelligence and good sense would not do worse (and might actually do better) than professional expertise or elite political know-how.[71] This sentiment has led to three types of demands, strongly emphasized by populists but echoed in larger segments of the citizenry : (1) that professional politicians' number and privileges be cut and their tenure in elected office curtailed (in cases where that possibility does not exist, that they be subject to recall) ; (2) that they be more socially representative – i.e. that the social composition of the political class better mirror society ; (3) that the citizenry be allowed to participate in the formulation of policy (notably, in some cases, to initiate Swiss-style referendums).

Interestingly, the same type of demands are addressed to other than political elites, whose material, social and expressive privileges (income and wealth, status, access to media, influence and power) are deemed excessive compared to median situations. Likewise, due to unequal educational opportunity as a function of family background, elite groups are felt to be insufficiently representative of society as a whole. This is assumed to account for their peculiar (strongly post-materialist) cultural orientations as well as their proclivity for supporting, and politically allying themselves with, minorities of every stripe. Premised on (in this instance, rational) relative deprivation, this social facet of the representativeness crisis gives it far broader scope, and calls into question a credo that has reigned supreme since the post-WW II period : the faith placed in (educational as well as workplace) meritocracy to achieve social justice. A growing feeling is afoot that while meritocracy worked to that end for previous generations, it is now broken and merely reproduces privilege instead of allowing a fair circulation of elites.[72]

6. Remedies

Can liberal democracy's woes be repaired ? Comparing the list offered on pp.3-5 of its fundamental principles and requirements to the outcomes of the many social and political trends enumerated at length above confirms that "civic" populists have a point : the last half-century has seen it deviate from its basic tenets in the West to the point that its future looks uncertain here or there (and some authors do not shy away from announcing the dawn of a "post-democratic era"). The issues populists raise and the weaknesses they target – elite-people and majority-minorities relations, a surfeit of external and judicial restraints, the primacy of economics and law over politics, paralysis of the general will – are relevant to the problem. And indeed, it is difficult to imagine that populisms would have acquired their current traction if the

grievances they voice were not grounded in reality. Does it mean that we need to follow populist prescriptions ? If so, what difficulties can we expect, and what dangers are lurking for us on the way ?

One certainly is that if, as surmised here, the long-term growth of individualization is (along with neoliberalism) the main culprit, there is no guarantee that its engines will grind to a halt. Barring major war or crisis, there is little chance that the beauties of the civic virtues unexpectedly rediscovered during the 2020 coronavirus pandemic will not be lost sight of as soon as the social dynamics of affluence resume their normal course – even if a change of paradigm away from globalization and neoliberalism were to occur. A hard look at countries such as South Korea, where the spirit of citizenship has survived the spectacular rise of purchasing power and education levels over four decades, might in that respect usefully inspire imaginative policies to that end in Western countries.**[73]**

Another is that the problems involved in a greater active role for citizens when it comes to policy formulation are not insignificant. Ralf Dahrendorf long ago identified some of them : policy incoherence, paralysis, deadlock.[74] If, as seems desirable, action is nevertheless taken along those lines, the constitutional issues generated by a restoration of balance between the people's sovereign will, international treaties, judicial review of legislation, and the preservation of pluralism promise to be both delicate and arduous. Though Western democratic institutions seem more robust than most, the examples of Hungary and Brazil suggest that the dangers of "illiberal democracy" from (far) right-wing populist rulers should not be taken lightly. As of today the risk posed, should they come to power, by far left-wing populists seems less as they do not enjoy the same potent support, and the few (far from encouraging) extant or recent examples of their experience in office[75] may act as a foil in countries that might be tempted to follow that road. No such serious risks are involved in applying civic populist remedies, some of which are actually being experimented on an official basis in a number of nations.[76]

6.1 Minorities-Majority Relations

Populist demands typically concern the institution of procedures guaranteeing less distortion of the general will and better representation of voter preferences, such as popularly-initiated referendums, random selection of representatives, or integral proportional voting. None of these tools are *perfectly* suited for such a purpose, and all have serious downsides.**[77]**

Popular initiatives, like all referendums, are known to overly simplify the matters to be decided upon. They cannot be used too often, under pain of making light of coherence and political accountability and of rendering polities even more difficult to govern. Worse, if too frequent, they are apt to promote abstention through sheer voter fatigue or loss of interest,[78] in which case active minority militancy rather than majority preference stands to gain from the procedure. To the risks posed to policy coherence and accountability, random selection of decision-makers or representatives ("stochocracy") adds the possible absence of any real motivation, competence or dedication among those thus appointed to office. And while it seems egalitarian *ex ante*, it is less so *ex post*. What's more, entrusting the common destiny to chance leaves something to be desired. As for integral proportional voting, the examples of countries that have adopted it suggest that it often results in a large number of splinter groups, making the formation of a cabinet with enough support in Parliament the outcome of laborious negotiations among party leaders. Government instability threatens as new divisive issues arise, and real power to dictate a solution is left in the hands of a tiny number of party negotiators.

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Caution is thus of the essence, lest the remedy prove worse than the disease – with attempts to restore some balance to minorities-majority relations, or between stasis and flux, ending up granting even more say to activist minorities, or accelerating the "flight forward" towards ever more individual rights at the expense of citizenship norms.

Having said that, however, a right of veto over policies deemed unacceptable by large chunks of public opinion, or of initiative to impose a measure it feels strongly about,[79] would probably go in the right direction, provided referendums to that effect remain limited in number over a period of time (and conditions placed on initiating them are neither too relaxed nor too restrictive). Likewise, opening the possibility of subjecting constitutional court rulings to ratification by referendum on the people's initiative would ease the tension between constitutionalism and popular sovereignty and avoid embarrassing situations where a handful of Justices are in a position to rule against the will of tens or hundreds of millions.

Second, the only way to make the contribution of randomly appointed citizen assemblies both harmless and useful is to keep their proposals non-binding, and rely on their echo in the media and public opinion to exert influence on governments and parliaments (or, again, on issues of cardinal importance, put those proposals to a referendum, as in Ireland recently). Finally, while full proportional representation is inadvisable for the reasons already cited, there is no harm in introducing a dose of it, German-style, in order to mitigate somewhat (but *not* annihilate) the amplified parliamentary majorities relative to electoral results that first-past-the-post voting systems (arguably the best-adapted and most effective[80]) are apt to produce.

6.2 Elite-People Relations

While populists target elites and their ways, they seldom advance solutions to the problems they identify and denounce : inequalities, social polarization, cultural dominance, ideological homogeneity. The present subsection explores the types of measures that could be envisaged in order to bring present democratic societies closer in line with their professed ideals.

To begin with, nothing apart from unregulated market competition and open borders can justify income differentials of 1000 : 1 or even 100 : 1 and tax avoidance or evasion opportunities favouring star performers in a number of fields (corporate world, law, entertainment, sports, etc.). In democracies undermined by high levels of relative deprivation[81] on this account for the last decades, social justice but also functional harmony and even economic efficiency[82] more than ever militate against a highly unequal distribution of income and wealth. As of this writing (in the midst of the coronavirus crisis), a now likely de-emphasis of neoliberalism and re-emergence of (at least some) border controls should take care of such excesses : a change of paradigm appears on its way as the pandemic experience has placed a premium on solidarity (rather than competition), care (rather than private profit), and public service (rather than best business practice). Nor is this likely to be a temporary trend if epidemics such avian flu, SARS and coronavirus continue following one another at relatively short intervals, if climate change issues look as if they require more radical solutions, and should financial crises (such as those which followed 9/11 and the Lehman Brothers crash of 2007) arise. In other words, events – added to the wear-and-tear of support for neoliberalism after four decades of dominance – stand a good chance of changing the game substantially in a matter of a few years. The days of supply-side economics, trickle-down theory and generous tax loopholes for the very rich seem counted.

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The new Zeitgeist will probably affect the mainstream media and the star system. One of the populist grievances is that majorities have become "invisible". To address the problem, the regime governing media visibility (more broadly : the public arena) will probably have to be revised in order to alleviate the now manifest relative deprivation on that score. Several non-mutually exclusive options offer themselves. One way of going about it would be to remove the immense symbolic privileges accorded to established media figures by returning to the practice that was dominant before the 1960s, namely that of anonymous voices (unless opinion editorial material was offered, in which case its author had to take full responsibility). Another is to limit the total tenure of programme presenters and producers, so as to limit the effects of personalization through a rotation system. One last option is to subject public arena visibility to the regime that applies to occupation of public property for private purposes, i.e. tax visibility as a source of considerable advantage, according to the time spent or editorial space occupied in the public eye beyond a given threshold – just as pedestrians or car drivers can freely use streets or public places but terrace café owners pay a tax for the public space they permanently use for private gain. Indeed, one wonders how societies obsessed by inequality in the name of democracy, and in theory premised on the pluralist expression of equal voices, can indefinitely tolerate the huge material differences, symbolic domination by a few, and standard discourse that the star system has inflicted on them.

While globalization does not look as though it will entirely fade away (instant communications and the Internet cannot be uninvented), the various (financial, terrorist, health) crises it has made easier in the last decades portend future restrictions to it. The re-emergence of some border controls and reverse relocation at home of production lines for essential or strategic goods hitherto imprudently entrusted with faraway countries can be expected to mitigate the secession of cosmopolitan elites. But more proactive policies will be required to accentuate this trend. One will have to address the reasons why meritocracy in education promotes fewer sons and daughters from working-class backgrounds today than it did in the 1950s or earlier.[83] Another might usefully institute a selective system of national service that would invite graduates to serve[84] for a given period upon degree completion, in functional and territorial areas where neither the market nor public bureaucracies provide badly needed (health, education, welfare, security) services for their less fortunate compatriots.[85] Such services, rendered in return for the privilege society has granted them, would make them aware of the existence of others groups with which they would not normally intermingle, and instil among them, as future elites of a cohesive polity, with a sense of responsibility towards those groups.

Finally, socio-economic and cultural polarization could be overcome by dividing the elite group, notably through a re-compartmentalization of private employment and public service. Care should be taken to avert ideological slants on public media funded by the taxpayer. Public policy should also discourage the formation or maintenance of elite influence networks. A delicate (and explosive) issue that will need to be tackled sooner or later concerns the unanticipated social outcomes of mass tertiary education. But since one of the springs of the rage expressed by populists lies in majorities' perceived invisibility and denial of dignity – especially among the lower-middle classes on whom, as the present health crisis has revealed, societies rely to function effectively –, the entertainment and media industry would be well-advised to put the spotlight on them more often.

These remedies (and no doubt others tending towards the same end) should take care of much of Western democracies' present predicament. They have the potential to heal the woes of "civic populists", and perhaps even pacify some on the far-left and far-right whose stance amounts to a protest vote rather than to the endorsement of extreme views. This is important as democracies probably could not endure long periods of strong populist expression, whether in opposition or in power, without allowing themselves to drown in derision or cynicism. Historical precedents (in 19th century Britain and America) fortunately suggest that when rulers see the writing on the wall and eventually act on it, populism evaporates soon enough.

If this analysis is correct, populisms are for the most part an expression of nostalgia for a time when the public domain did not limit itself to markets and bookkeeping exercises, competition and external constraints, individual rights and a disintegrating polity, weak rulers and self-interested politicians acting under the sway of experts and activist minorities. Neoliberalism is a spent force, and the individual-is-king philosophy, the other main source of the general malaise that has taken hold, was destined to reveal its natural limits sooner or later. The populist phenomenon bluntly informs us that these limits have now been reached. Rather than a rejection of liberal democracy, it is the product of a gradual deviation away from, or a deactivation of, some of its key principles. Far from being solely the expression of extremes of Left and Right in new garb that its critics often portray, it is for the most part a call for a reactivation of citizenship, for elite groups to return to the civic virtues, and for the polity to reaffirm itself as a political subject.[86]

7. Locating the Civic Populist Centre

The whole argument advanced in this paper rests upon the assumption that there is such a thing as "civic populism", and that it plays a cardinal role in bringing additional strength to the populist wave. This is what happens, or so the thesis goes, when large parts of the citizenry become alienated due to the perceived negative impact on their everyday lives of societal trends driven by minority militancy that elite groups condone and weak political leaders are powerless (or unwilling) to stem : there comes a time when an as yet undetermined proportion among citizens without entrenched political leanings are tempted to send a stronger signal to their governors. Such an assumption is based on the conclusions drawn from Figure 1 (p.5), i.e. on the existence of populist votes that do not bear the marks of the more extreme populisms of Left or Right.

Yet, there is an overriding need to make sure that this is not an artefact born of the way populist parties have been classified by the authors of the serious research on populisms in Europe (conducted, sponsored and published in 2018 by *The Guardian*) on which Figure 1 relies[87] – unless proof positive is provided that an identifiable reservoir of such support exists in societies. The object of this section is precisely to locate such a reservoir and broadly assess its size.

Whereas ample evidence of the extent of overall citizen alienation is available in the form of opinion data, only very few empirical studies have explored that subject-matter in enough depth to produce typologies that would support or invalidate this paper's central assumption. Most promising in that regard is the aptly named *More in Common* (MiC) Project, which to date has produced five general country studies (US, France, Germany, Italy, Greece) probing what unites or – more importantly – divides and polarizes these societies, with a view to bridging the gaps observed and finding ways to bolster their unity in a perspective of citizenship revival.[88]

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The comparison of the 4 European countries studied yields unmistakable results in support of the thesis that demoralization and frustration affect shares of the population that by far exceed nominal populist audiences. Fully 62% of French survey respondents feel that democracy does not work well in their country ; while the corresponding figure (52%) in Germany is less, 70% of German and French subjects alike think that their respective nations are headed in the wrong direction. Only 5% of the Italian citizenry describe the country as "open, optimistic, and confident". Public debates are deemed "far too aggressive" by 89% in France, and "increasingly hateful" by 75% in Germany. When asked whether they agree that more attention is given to the needs of minorities than to the welfare of the majority, only 37% of French respondents disagree. Two-thirds of Germans opine that "people like me do not benefit enough from the country's economic success", and 82% that "politicians do not care about what people like me think". Seventy-three percent of the Italian population declare that "traditional parties and politicians do not care about people like them" (Greece : 79%). Seventy percent of French and 73% of German respondents feel that some legitimate opinions are no longer allowed to be expressed publicly. In Italy, only 16% believe that globalisation has had a positive impact on the Italian economy, and half the population report that they sometimes feel like strangers in their own country. An even larger number (59%) feel that Italian identity is disappearing. The corresponding percentages are 54% and 64% for Greece, where 65% opine that Islam and Greek society are incompatible and 60% that if the migration crisis continues, everyday Greek citizens should start protecting their shores and borders themselves. In Germany and France – the only two countries where the question was asked (apart from the US : see below) –, a perceived excessive polarization elicits responses to the effect that "we need to stick together and face our problems together despite our differences" – at the rate of 70% and 83%, respectively.

Likewise, 80% of US respondents believe that political correctness has gone too far[89] and 82% that hate speech is a problem. Large sections feel pressured to think a certain way about immigration (51%), race (64%), LGBT people (53%) or Islam (66%). A full 74% are of the opinion that they "should be able to say what they really think, even when it offends people", and two-thirds that "most mainstream media are biased in their coverage". Finally (but the list is hardly exhausted), 47% believe that "the rights of immigrants are more protected than the rights of American citizens". As in West Europe, a yearning for unity and a reaffirmation of citizenship norms is expressed by 77% of Americans who aver that divisive trends and polarization are "not so big that we cannot get together".

The most precious contribution of the *More in Common* Project, however, is its probing of cleavages among the populations under study through cross-tabulations of attitudinal data by 'core beliefs', i.e. subjective variables that happen to offer a clearer analytical picture – higher explanatory and predictive power – than do conventional objective variables such as socio-demographics, educational level, income range or party affiliation. This leads to an identification of population segments[90] subsequently grouped by affinity into clusters.[91]

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The following table summarizes the five *More in Common* (MiC) country studies' findings as to identified population segments :

USA	FRANCE	GERMANY	ITALY	GREECE
Progressive activists **8%**	Disillusioned activists **12%**	Open **16%**	Cosmopolitans **12%**	Multiculturals **20%**
			Humanitarians **16%**	
Traditional liberals **11%**		Involved **17%**		Moderate humanitarians **28%**
Passive liberals **15%**	Stabilizers **19%**	Established **17%**		
	Optimistic pragmatists **11%**			
Politically disengaged **26%**	Disengaged **16%**	Detached (pragmatists) **16%**	Disengaged moderates **19%**	Instinctive pragmatists **19%**
	Left behind **22%**		Left behind **17%**	
Moderates **15%**		Disillusioned **14%**	Security concerned **12%**	Detached traditionalists **15%**
Traditional conservatives **19%**			Cultural defenders **17%**	Alarmed opponents **3%**
Devoted conservatives **6%**	Identitarians **20%**	Angry **19%**	Hostile nationalists **7%**	Nationalist opponents **15%**

Table 1 : Summary of MiC Results

Legend : **Red** = open/ cosmopolitan/ progressive segments ; **Blue** = closed/ identitarian/ nationalist segments ; **Black** = in-between segments.

Though the segment labels adopted vary from one country to the next, they do so only marginally, and do not preclude their grouping by affinity into three main clusters (as the colour codes above suggest) :

	USA	FRANCE	GERMANY	ITALY	GREECE
Open	8%	12%	16%	28%	20%
Middle	67%	68%	65%	48%	62%
Closed	25%	20%	19%	24%	18%

Table 2 : Clusters (adapted from the five MiC country studies)

These findings look strikingly similar in that a majority of about 2/3 of the distribution emerges at the centre in four of the five monographs – Italy is the odd-man-out with a strong showing of the "open" cluster and a middle group barely representing half of the total. But other results stand out : in France and the US the "closed" clusters outnumber their "open" counterparts by appreciable margins, whereas in the other three countries, "closed" and "open" are broadly more balanced.[92]

If the purpose of the demonstration is to isolate the hypothesized reservoir of potential "civic populists", the above findings need to be qualified. Indeed, what the US country study calls the "*exhausted majority*" may well include segments whose sympathies go to mainstream parties rather than to populists : that is the case with American "passive liberals", "stabilizers" in France and the "established" in Germany. In addition, given that the middle clusters are characterized by mixed views, it is fair to assume that other segments identified in Table 1 will be internally divided, with some leaning towards conventional parties of the Left[93] or the Right[94] and others siding with populist or activist groups on either side, or in the civic middle. These attributions of attitudes are based on the qualitative profiles supplied by the country studies on the strength of findings from interviews or focus groups. But for want of any quantitative indications, 50-50%, 66-34% or 33-33-34% distributions (detailed next page) will be assumed here for middle segments. This leads to a new, "adjusted" table in which the middle cluster is thus replaced by an estimate of mainstream leanings and the reservoir of potential civic populists:

	USA	FRANCE	GERMANY	ITALY	GREECE
Progressives	13%	12%	24%	28%	20%
Mainstream	Left 29% Right 16%	Left 20% Right 20%	Left 17% Right 19%	Left 15% Right 20%	Left 24% Right 23%
"Reservoir"	**17%**	**14%**	**13%**	**13%**	**15%**
Far-right	25%	34%	26%	24%	18%

Table 3 : Adjusted Attitudinal Clusters and Reservoir of Potential Civic Populists

While, though grounded in the available qualitative information as to their relevance, the weights attached here to the various segments in composite clusters[95] are only tentative, interestingly the figures supplied in Table 3 do not appear overly unrealistic. Indeed, despite the gap that exists between political attitudes and actual votes – due to the influence of immediate contexts, institutional arrangements, the forces and programmes in competition, or the effects of possible coalitions in any given election –, the orders of magnitude broadly seem to espouse the contours of opposing political forces and recent voting results in the countries concerned. If that is the case, the 15 or so percent of potential civic populists are – as surmised – in a position to act as kingmakers in decisive elections (or tilt the balance in referendums) in four of the five country studies (with France this time as the odd-man-out). Their degree of alienation is thus key to understanding the place of populisms in current national political landscapes and the fate of Western liberal democracies in years to come.
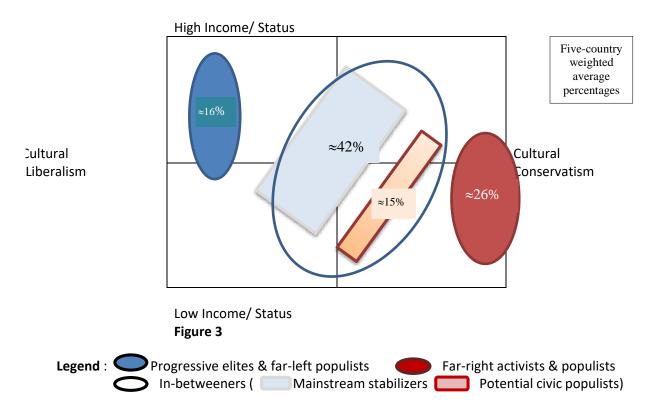
Who are these potential civic populists holding the balance of power ? If the evidence supplied by the MiC Project is anything to go by, they're a collection of "politically disengaged" or "detached", "left behind" or otherwise "security-concerned" moderates, i.e. citizens among the least politicized in partisan terms, and thus presumably most susceptible to the factors negatively affecting their everyday lives. That the citizenry's future may be in the hands of those least engaged should come as no surprise : it is the way liberal democracy functions in highly polarized electoral circumstances giving rise to tight voting outcomes. Their detachment may be in part the result of recent disenchantment with the established party system or of perceived pressures on their freedom of speech[96] ; but beyond present circumstances it serves as a reminder that in a liberal democracy citizens are also free private persons who need to tend to their personal affairs and cannot allow the public realm to keep them occupied full-time[97] : this is in line with (and a source of) the populist distrust of professional politicians.

And while detachment may be a weakness if seen as only a mark of tepidness, it also has its bright side as it ensures that the univocal value preferences of those highly motivated ideologically will not have the last word in the polity : if their very moderation is the sign that they are torn between conflicting values, potential civic populists may well serve as the guardian angels of true value pluralism.

Finally, there's something more that the MiC Project holds in store for us : a glimpse of the profile of each of the population segments in terms of income brackets, educational attainment, habitat and age. These indications confirm that progressives and liberals (including far-left populists) earn more, are more highly educated, live more often in major cities or their privileged immediate surroundings, and are younger on average than other population sections. They (progressives more so than traditional liberals) tend to regard their ideology[98] as a central part of their personal identity.

As they occupy positions of influence or power more often than members of other segments, it is thus with some show of reason that they are seen as core elements of the elite – those targeted by populists of the Right and Civic middle (less willingly by far-Left populists, whose favourite target is the "system"). Such indications further show that in terms of income and education the middle segments range from least privileged (those "disengaged", "left behind", etc.) to average (or slightly above average in the case of "moderates" and mainstream "stabilizers"). But they also suggest that far from *always* being predominantly recruited from the poor and less educated, in the US and Italian cases far-right activists (not least populists among them) are average in those regards[99] – the stereotype only holds in the other three cases (France, Germany, Greece).

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On the strength of this evidence, it is possible (and no doubt of interest) to return to Figure 2 in order to correct (as to proportions) and enrich (by filling the middle void) the stylized picture it offered of Western societies' current polarization in cultural/ socio-economic terms : this is what Figure 3 below attempts to do.

Figure 3

Legend : 🔵 Progressive elites & far-left populists   🔴 Far-right activists & populists
⚪ In-betweeners (▫ Mainstream stabilizers   ▭ Potential civic populists)

8. Summary

Though they spring from different sources and appeared on the scene at different times – accelerated individualization in the sixties, neoliberalism in the late seventies, full-force globalization in the early 1990s –, the three main factors at play in this unfolding drama have combined, from the mid-nineties onwards, to produce mutually reinforcing effects all pointing in the same direction – headlong emancipation of self-interested individuals thirsting for expressiveness, resulting in a hedonistic, narcissistic and highly differentiated culture.

Such long-term change has been readily espoused by meritocratic, cosmopolitan elites eager to move forward unencumbered by past (not least national) cultural legacies, and who enjoy its rewards. For ideological reasons as well as to bolster their dominant position and affirm their superior identity, these now sizable elite groups[100] have taken to allying themselves with minorities. This has come at the price of a growing polarization which pits such upper strata against ordinary people with far less urge to deconstruct culture and society along lines that in many ways go against the grain.

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This writer has argued that populisms are a blunt response to the general malaise generated over time by such a context. Exasperation is high among large swaths of the citizenry – majorities ranging from half to well over three-quarters in opinion surveys depending on country and topic – irked by an existing state of affairs that has entailed increased economic insecurity for many, everyday freedoms gnawed away by insistent "politically correct" pressures to adjust to it, harassment of law-abiding grassroots on trivial matters, a "tyranny of minorities" and "tribalism". These ordinary people sceptical of open borders and immigration, and happy with only two genders, have now embraced cultural conservatism to varying degrees. As, rightly or wrongly, the social question appears less central, this has deprived the traditional Left of part of its big battalions, and given the mood of the times its distinctive pessimistic and rightist flavour. These mostly invisible "exhausted majorities", as the American MiC country study phrases it, yearn for a political landscape that "*no longer airbrushes* [them] *out of the picture, but puts them in the centre*" : they "*may be the key to countering polarization*".

Among the said majorities, while some (though disenchanted) remain faithful to mainstream orientations and parties, others have turned in protest to sympathising with populist movements, parties or leaders. The populist vote has considerably swollen over the last two decades as a result. Yet this paper has noted that its sole weight would not allow it to win majority or first-rank contender status in the ballot box – unless supplemented by additional votes.
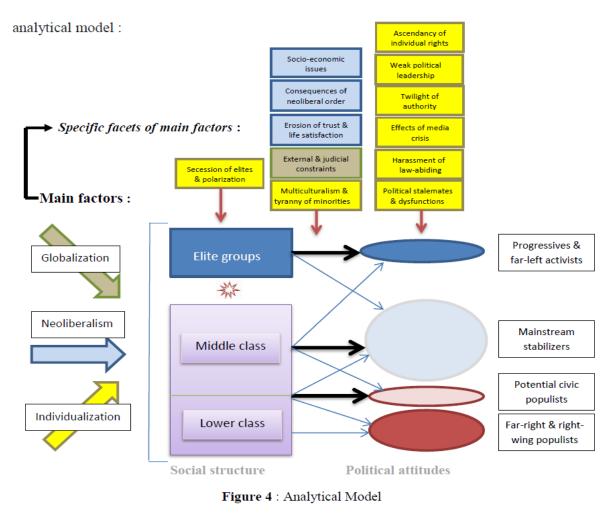
This author has also pointed out that the populist vote's internal distribution among the two usually identified varieties of hard Right and Left is unequal : the movement's right wing dominates the scene (and in places its counterculture has become vehement and transgressive). But having detected between these two a third ("civic") variety, it has further contended that this "civic middle" is apt to play a pivotal role as a natural attractor within the existing populist audience. It can refocus those least ideologically motivated among protest voters who have already joined the ranks of the populists and may find the moderation of the civic variety appealing. The same effect could result from a softening of their stance on the part of far-right and far-left populist parties through "convergence" or "transversalist" strategies seeking to broaden their support base.

Yet such shifts would not affect the overall volume of populist votes. Nothing decisive can take place unless, angry or annoyed at the way ruling elites run their country's affairs, a large enough proportion of politically indeterminate disaffected voters in the exhausted majorities – the so-called "civic populist reservoir" mentioned above – are prepared to vote against the system or the way it works. Thus can recent voting outcomes that have astonished the world be accounted for.

Based on the empirical findings of MiC's five country studies, the present research has produced an estimate of the volume (around 15%) of the said reservoir. In four of the five national cases, this was enough to place "potential civic populists" in a position to decide the issue on a critical vote – even if only half of them take the leap. Still, the proposed estimate may be on the conservative side, since the reckoning presumed that (if, as the case may be, they present similar social profiles) half or two-thirds of their respective immediate adjacent segments would join forces with progressives or far-right activists. Absent such a presumption, the reservoir estimate would exceed 20% or more at the expense of activist clusters on either side (but leaving the mainstream unaffected), which would only strengthen this paper's working hypothesis. The figure offered next page summarizes this study's main points and resulting analytical model.

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Examining the influence of each of the various drivers directly or indirectly related to the three main factors has only confirmed that they converge to depress confidence in the "system" and rouse strong feelings on the part of substantial majorities against the policies, attitudes and *doxa* of those steering it. The large numbers involved are thus sensitized to the topics raised by populists, for whom they provide moral support in opinion polls far beyond their electoral following. This has led the analyst to highlight and probe issues affecting individuals regardless of backgrounds or political attachments. One key finding in this respect is that in analysing atomized societies turned into "archipelagoes" of assumed cultural identities, subjective variables often have higher explanatory and predictive power than conventional ones : core beliefs provide a better map of societies, low trust and life satisfaction are strongly related to populist votes, and relative deprivation plays a role in many societal issues.

The following representation of its analytical model attempts to tie up loose ends and recapitulate the principles, categories and factors that underpin the whole approach :

Figure 4 : Analytical Model

Legend : specific factors related to globalization ▭ , neoliberalism ▭ , and individualization ▭ .

The paper ends with a review of possible remedies to the current predicament, on the dual assumption that liberal democracy can be saved, but that majorities cannot possibly be indefinitely ignored without jeopardizing it. It proceeds from the informed belief that populist impulses need to be pacified before they run out of control and go astray, and a return to majority rule is of the essence. The tentative proposals it advances start from the premise that populists, for all their faults, have put their finger on what ails Western societies and political institutions in light of their professed democratic ideals. It also warns against possible false solutions that would exacerbate the ills rather than cure them.

Conclusions

The worldview and ideals of which civic populists are the bearers offer an effective way-out of such difficulties. Their implicit stance is that society is an intersubjective reality formed by democracy into a community of citizens, rather than an aggregate of atomized individuals[101] or separate groups. Their apparent demand is for a return to republican order,[102] stressing moderation over exaltation and excess, sober virtue rather than self-interest and narcissism, substance over procedure, the polity as a whole rather than factions, commitment and service over identity and social separatism, meaning and quality over sheer numbers and algorithms. They place a premium on true merit, as opposed to privilege, inheritance or co-optation. They do not share the belief that givens and objective knowledge are "fascist", or that social engineering is a better way of achieving the public good than citizen enlightenment. They picture the State as ideally neutral or agnostic, and served by ideologically diverse elites less intent on lecturing the citizenry. They wish their societies would avoid invasion of the public sphere by complacently advertised private or intimate concerns, and restore some balance in the interplay of continuity and change, desire and existence, products of the star system and "real people". So much comes out strongly in the interviews conducted as part of this study.

If all of the above is correct, then the fundamental issue that needs to be considered as a last step is whether or not future circumstances will easily allow a return to republican ideals and requirements within the existing framework of nation-states. Is a throwback to national sovereignty a viable option ? As things presently stand, such a reversal of hitherto dominant trends can reasonably be regarded as problematic. What's more, at a time when major issues (climate change, pandemics, financial crises, or poverty as a driver of uncontrolled migration flows) can only be effectively dealt with at world or regional level, is it a wise solution ?

The now predictable turn away from neoliberalism and globalization will no doubt alleviate some of the more acute problems. But the individualization of social relations will remain part of the scene, and ways to contain its excesses will have to be devised. However painful it promises to be, the current pandemic's long-term economic fall-out (not to mention the prospect of perhaps more such crises to come) offers a silver lining in that regard : it will likely maintain solidarity and citizen discipline as major requirements. In other words, circumstances may not be as unfavourable as they look *prima facie* – if facilitated by creative policies.

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The major confrontation looming on the horizon between the US and China will hinder the kind of solidarity and cooperation the world needs on a number of critical issues. But, as was the case during the Cold War, it will reinforce them within each of the blocs formed around them. And though, as in that previous period, the probability of falling headlong into the "Thucydides trap" remains limited due to the deterrent effect of mass destruction weapons on both sides, the re-emphasis on national interest and power politics will hardly favour the strengthening of multilateralism that major cross-border problems affecting the world at large seem to call for.

Multilateralism, under attack for good reason from populists in many countries, is in a pretty bad way today. The question of whether efforts should be made to bolster it has become politically highly charged. The reason for this is hardly mysterious : therein lies a powerful dilemma. Nations can resolve to sign new multilateral agreements in the name of overriding worldwide concerns, but then fresh external constraints on internal options are in the cards and, if present, create the risk of frustrating policies that the body politic at home may strongly support. What's more, in such a case a lot of decision-making power on key fine-line detail rests with a handful of senior diplomats, thus creating the possibility of a divorce with domestic public opinion on sensitive issues (as has often been the case recently with trade agreements). Alternatively, when nations, following populist prescriptions, shy away from multilateral accords in the name of sovereignty, they have to accept another risk : that of ineffective international agencies unable to protect them in dire collective emergencies, and of governments reacting to tragic events in an uncoordinated, even contradictory, manner to the detriment of all concerned (as is the case at this writing when it comes to lockdown, face masks and closed or open borders in the face of the coronavirus pandemic). As a tangle of bilateral accords would probably make a world crisis unmanageable, the only solution seems to walk the fine line between the "closed" and "open" options on the basis of a pragmatic case-by-case analysis.

What is true at world level also applies to the regional level, especially as concerns the European Union. Except that what is at stake for it is of even graver concern : despite its demographic weight and prime markets, a disunited Europe would resemble the proverbial grass trampled by fighting elephants. On the other hand, in the present format a more closely united continent would continue labouring under the same old tiresome regime of endless negotiations in quest of improbable compromises on each and every issue arising. An ideal outcome would of course consist in a harmonization of EU member-nations' cultural and geopolitical outlooks, and the construction of a European patriotism that would justify, and render painless, the surrendering of national sovereignties. Yet, seeing that the modern European Design has proved unable to achieve such desirable ends in its 63-year official history, there's no cause for optimism in the short or medium term.

We are thus referred back to the nation-state, despite the issues its renewed affirmation raises on the international scene. Civic populists have a point : for want of a larger and better viable option, it is still the natural locus of democratic citizenship and the institution which best guarantees a chance of mastering collective destiny while preserving decency, personal freedoms and equality before the law. It was thought to be on the way-out as a relic of the past waiting to be deconstructed, but has proved astonishingly resilient and become the object of a powerful nostalgia of which populisms (their civic variety chief among them as their centre of gravity) are the maladroit expression.

It may not be idle to note in closing that such resilience may have something to do with the nation-state's usual association with a given culture and a given history as the reference that binds territorially situated populations together and determines their will to live as one polity premised on civil peace through social justice. We should not let go of that reference. It would be bitterly ironic if, after three generations have successfully managed to remove the prospect of the nation-state's erstwhile disease : nationalism and major war, Western societies finally allowed the identity politics that individual narcissism generates to expose their citizens to internal wars of all against all. We are indebted to populists for drawing our attention, in their own peculiarly derisive ways, to such often unrecognized dangers.

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[1] There is a common core that cuts across the diverse varieties of populism, reflected in the votes of their MPs : in the Dutch Parliament, for instance, between 2004 and 2010, left-wing (SP) and right-wing (Geert Wilders' PVV) populist deputies voted the same way in 44% of cases. *Cf*. Simon Otjes & Tom Louwerse, "Populists in Parliament : Comparing Left-Wing and Right-Wing Populism in the Netherlands", *Political Studies*, vol.63, n°1, 2015, pp.60-79 : https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9248.12089.

[2] Cas Mudde & Cristobál R. Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, New York, Oxford U.P., 2017.

[3] Alain de Benoist, *Le moment populiste : Droite-Gauche, c'est fini !,* Paris, Éd. Pierre-Guillaume de Roux, 2017.

[4] Populist language has become contagious and now affects leaders of mainstream parties, eager as they are to speak like "real" people. So that today's populisms are as much a matter of degree as of kind.

[5] However, a minority among populist leaders (e.g., Pim Fortuyn or J.M. Le Pen) conspicuously shun the sloppy dress or language style so common among their peers, and hold themselves to exacting standards of conventional elegance in word and attire – in strong contrast to the substance of their discourse. This is probably a way to affirm the dignity of "the people", who deserve leaders belying the charge of impropriety levelled at populists.

[6] E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, London, Verso, 2005.

[7] In Europe, only Ireland, Malta and Portugal have – so far – escaped that trend. In North America, Canada seems distinctly less affected by it than the US.

[8] Not to mention social-psychological mechanisms involving social identity and self-categorization processes : *cf.* Nicola Gennaioli & Guido Tabellini, "Identity, Beliefs, and Political Conflict", CESifo Working Paper Series 7707, Munich, CESifo Group, 2019 : https://www.ifo.de/DocDL/cesifo1_wp7707.pdf.

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[9] *Cf*. J.-Y. Camus, "Comment expliquer le retour fracassant des populismes ?", *Les Inrockuptibles*, 3 September 2018.

[10] To take but a few examples, in French and Spanish far-left populist movements (La France Insoumise and Podemos), tensions have appeared between a "sovereignist" or "tranversalist" wing trying to win extra support from moderates and a hard-line leftist wing holding fast to its purist stance. The French far-right Rassemblement National is now flanked on its left by Debout la France and Les Patriotes, two small populist movements (originally launched by former Gaullists) whose platforms tend to make anti-immigration feelings less central.

[11] Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le siècle du populisme : Histoire, théorie, critique*, Paris, Seuil, 2020.

[12] This has been attested in the French case recently : 58% of voters for the hard-left populist party La France Insoumise (LFI) no longer demonize Marine Le Pen's hard-right Rassemblement National, and 36% declare they might vote for it in future (Odoxa survey, 17 May 2019). This seems due to far-left ambivalence on immigrant workers, officially supported by LFI leaders but seen by sympathisers as capitalism's "reserve army".

[13] Branko Milanovic & Christopher Lakner, *Global Inequality : A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*, Harvard University Press, 2016.

[14] Michel Forsé's application of the principles of thermodynamics to social processes (in *L'ordre improbable*, Paris, P.U.F., 1987) taught us that in a closed society with a stable workforce, any increase in available resources results in a spontaneous tendency to equalize socio-economic statuses and lifestyles (and that this tends to loosen social bonds). Conversely, the opening of the system's borders generates a resurgence of inequalities within it, which illuminates the social impact of globalization almost everywhere since the 1990s.

[15] The extreme sensitivity that emerged in France with the "Yellow vest" movement about fuel prices and new environment-friendly technical standards threatening to force people to discard suddenly devalued old vehicles for more recent model cars should thus come as no surprise.

[16] Such a mechanism has been around for some time as regards professional training – "*Extending the number of years of required schooling has long been a means of excluding poor and working-class candidates from any profession, with medicine and law as the outstanding examples*": thus wrote James W. Fraser in *Reading, Writing and Justice : School Reform as if Democracy Matters* (New York, SUNY Press, 1991, p.189). But "educational inflation" seems to have extended its scope in the West over the last 40 years. And what *prima facie* looked like a democratic blessing, as it democratized access to tertiary education, may turn out to have serious democratic downsides if (as seems to be the case) percentages of the youth population pursuing higher education were to peak and stagnate at around 50%, thus neatly dividing society in two halves with unequal career and life chances : *cf*. Emmanuel Todd, *Où en sommes nous ? Une esquisse de l'histoire humaine*, Paris, Seuil, 2017. The same author adds that by creaming off the lower strata's elites, meritocracy on a large scale disarms the working-class and hardens social polarization. More on that topic on pp. 36 and 37 below.

[17] Philip Mirowski & Dieter Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pèlerin*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2009 ; Serge Audier, *Néo-libéralisme(s): Une archéologie intellectuelle*, Paris, Grasset, 2012 ; Barbara Stiegler, *Il faut s'adapter : Sur un nouvel impératif politique*, Paris, Gallimard, 2019.

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[18] Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations : Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, New York, Knopf, 1992.

[19] Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy*, New York, Norton, 1995.

[20] Scott London : https://scott.london/reviews/lasch.html.

[21] This is documented in the French case by Jérôme Fourquet, "1985-2017 : Quand les classes favorisées ont fait sécession", research note, Paris, Fondation Jean Jaurès, 2018.

[22] Christopher Lasch (*The Culture of Narcissism*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1979, p.29) already noted

> *"the ability of the rich and powerful to identify their ascendancy with lofty moral principles, which make resistance a crime not only against the state but against humanity itself. Ruling classes have always sought to instill in their subordinates the capacity to experience exploitation and material deprivation as guilt, while deceiving themselves that their own material interests coincide with those of mankind as a whole*."

[23] This is the case in the US, where public confidence in the media has gone through a long-term decline : from 72% in 1976 to 50-55% between 1997 and 2005, before falling to just over 40% on average over the next decade. It stood at 32% in 2016 (*cf.* https://news.gallup.com/poll/1663/media-use-evaluation.aspx). Interestingly, over the 1997-2017 period, supporters of the Democratic Party were more satisfied with the media (around 60% on average) than declared Independents and Republicans (whose trust went down respectively from 50 to 35% and 45 to 25% between the first and second half of that period), which signals a perception by more than half the adult population of a "progressive" bias in the media treatment of news.

[24] Raoul Berger, *Government by Judiciary : The Transformation of the Fourteenth Amendment*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1977.

[25] James Grant, "What Boris Johnson's Defeat in the UK Supreme Court Means", *Time Magazine*, 25 September 2019 : https://time.com/5685731/supreme-court-boris-johnson-prorogation/.

[26] Among its latest rulings, the most adventurous affirmed "Fraternity" (the third term in the Republic's motto) as a new constitutional principle in a case involving aid provided by humanitarian activists to migrants illegally trying to enter French territory (2018). The issue raised by such a judgement is of course that, if any undocumented alien wishing to enter the country is to be welcomed on humanitarian grounds, the country loses control of its borders, and sovereignty becomes devoid of meaning. At a time when predominant domestic public opinion insists on stricter controls on immigration, the Justices could not have appeared more unresponsive to its sensitivities.

[27] In 2019 it ruled against a government decision to increase university tuition fees for non-EU foreign students, arguing that such fees needed to remain "modest". This prompted a former secretary general of the Council to publish an op-ed piece asking what manoeuvring room was

left for governments thus exposed to injunctions and prohibitions on the strength of ever more inventive interpretations of French law's founding charters : Jean-Éric Schoettl, "Que peut encore un gouvernement aussi surveillé par le Conseil constitutionnel ?", *Le Figaro*, 15 October 2019.

[28] Especially infuriating for the populists are UN conferences, like those held in Marrakech in October and December 2018 on human rights or international migration, whose conclusions and grandiloquent pronouncements are likely to remain a dead letter in countries that should heed them most, and only serve symbolically to strengthen the hand of progressives in the West, where they are hardly a critical issue.

[29] Yves Mény & Yves Surel, *Par le peuple, pour le peuple : Le populisme et les démocraties*, Paris, Fayard, 2000.

[30] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land : Anger and Mourning on the American Right*, New York, The Free Press, 2016.

[31] Jean Baechler, *Democracy : An Analytical Survey*, Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 1995. The alternative known as "consociational" democracy, in which majority and minorities share power and govern together in polities deeply divided along religious, ethnic or language lines, offers few convincing examples of successful or even viable government systems (and does not entirely escape the majority principle). More on that topic on p.28.

[32] Serge Moscovici, *Psychologie des minorités actives*, Paris, P.U.F., 1979.

[33] In France, the 1976 decision to ease family reunion for immigrant workers, a move that transformed French demographics in a generation and a half, was made by executive order, and passed largely unnoticed at the time.

[34] Public opinions in France and the Netherlands have not forgotten that their governments ignored their "no" votes in their respective 2005 referendums on the proposed European constitution, nor do Irish voters forget that they were strongly invited to reconsider and vote again in 2002 after their initial rejection of the Nice Treaty.

[35] This is made worse by anticipatory resocialization processes deriving from progressive ideology's evolutionist emphasis on unidirectional change : a female French judge confessed recently that, while under current law she had no alternative but to sentence anti-speciesist militants to jail terms for arson against a fishmonger's shop, she did not feel at all confident that ten or twenty years down the road her ruling will not be seen as reactionary. Source : "Les pieds sur terre", France-Culture public radio, 7 October 2019.

[36] This feeling was reinforced by the announcement that traffic enforcement was to be entrusted, in typical neoliberal fashion, to private operators whose profits would depend on the number of fines imposed on drivers.

[37] M. Gladwell, *The Tipping Point : How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, Boston, Little, Brown, 2000.

[38] "Barack Obama to bring Whitehall's 'nudge' theory to the White House", *The Independent,* September 16, 2015.

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[39] A prime illustration of active, though silent, protest was the fact that hardly three months into the "Yellow vest" movement in France, fully 60% of the country's traffic enforcement cameras had been destroyed or neutralized. The meaning of such actions was never spelled out, which can only mean that there was no need for elucidation of a message that was clear to many : enough is enough ! This is all the more noteworthy as the movement has consistently made a point of putting citizenship above party or union affiliation, as expressed by its ample display of tricolours and symbols borrowed from 1789 and 1830 imagery (Marianne, Phrygian caps, Delacroix's Liberty Guiding the People). Though its demonstrations in big cities have been regularly infiltrated or outflanked by violent elements of the far-left or far-right, in many ways it embodies the populist civic centre.

[40] See for instance : François Cusset, *French Theory : How Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Co. Transformed the Intellectual Life of the United States*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2008 ; Helen Pluckrose, "How French 'Intellectuals' Ruined the West : Postmodernism and Its Impact, Explained", *Areo*, 2017 : http://ift.tt/2nb2vzS.

[41] Anecdotal evidence of the following type is frequently noted in the press : " '*I don't believe a word that comes out of* [Boris Johnson's] *mouth', said Jenny from Derbyshire, before cheerfully confirming that she would be voting for him*". *Cf.* "Boris Johnson benefits from UK voters' lack of trust in politicians", *Financial Times*, 19 November 2019.

[42] Y. Algan, E. Beasley, D. Cohen & M. Foucault note (in *Les origines du populisme : Enquête sur un schisme politique et social*, Paris, Seuil, 2019, pp.106-107) that taking these subjective variables into account on top of socio-economic and religious variables in order to model individual voting patterns in the last French presidential election (2017) doubles the model's explanatory power.

[43] Gallup, 2016 : http://www.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx . Trust in government in general declined in the US from close to 80% in 1965 to slightly above 20% in 2015 (OECD calculations based on Pew Research Center [2016] historic trends of public trust).

[44] Standard Eurobarometer n°86, Autumn 2016, *op.cit.*, p.44.

[45] Table A.19. "Having a Say in What Government Does", p.384 in OECD, *How's Life ?, 2017 : Measuring Well-Being*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2017. Available online at : https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2017_how_life-2017-en#page386.

[46] See : https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2019/04/29/why-are-people-dissatisfied-with-how-democracy-is-working/.

[47] IPSOS MORI, "Trust : The Truth ?", 2019 : https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2019-09/ipsos-thinks-trust-the-truth.pdf, p.13. In addition, experimental trust is known to be higher than self-reported trust : OECD, "Trust and its Determinants: Evidence from the Trustlab Experiment", Working Paper n°89, 2018 :

http://www.oecd.org/officialdocuments/publicdisplaydocumentpdf/?cote=SDD/DOC(2018)2&docLanguage=En.

[48] IPSOS MORI, *op.cit.*, pp.10-11.

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[49] US General Social Survey, 2018 : https://gssdataexplorer.norc.org/variables/441/vshow.

[50] European Social Survey, round 9, 2018.

[51] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone : The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000 ; "E Pluribus Unum : Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century; The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture", *Scandinavian Political Studies*, vol.30, n°2, 2007.

[52] For instance : Béatrice d'Hombres, Leandro Elia & Anke Weber, "Multivariate Analysis of the Effect of Income Inequality on Health, Social Capital, and Happiness", European Commission's Joint Research Centre, Report EUR 2688, 2013 : https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC87580/eur%2026488.pdf ; Nicholas Buttrick & Shigehiro Oishi, "The Psychological Consequences of Income Inequality", *Social & Personality Psychology Compass*, vol.11, n°3, March 2017.

[53] Christian Bjørnskov, "Determinants of Generalized Trust : A Cross-Country Comparison", *Public Choice*, vol.130, 2007 : http://www.socialcapitalgateway.org/sites/socialcapitalgateway.org/files/data/paper/2012/09/07/pc.pdf.

[54] Such awareness shows through a number of official quotes : "*Most profoundly, all of today's surveillance processes and practices bespeak a world where we know we're not really trusted. Surveillance fosters suspicion*" (A Report on the Surveillance Society for the Information Commissioner, by the Surveillance Studies Network, September 2006**,** p.3 : https://ico.org.uk/media/1042391/surveillance-society-summary-06.pdf) ;

> "*Mass surveillance reverses the principle of presumption of innocence. With mass surveillance, everyone is suspect until proven innocent. Even the innocent may be suspect because they happen to fall within some predetermined profile, which the police use for pre-crime prevention*" (European Commission, *Trust at Risk*, 2017, p.61) ;

> "*Expressions of such distrust are visible in officials' unwillingness to involve citizens in decision-making, in their unwillingness to take their views seriously (…), or in an overall relatively sceptical attitude toward citizens (…). The reason for such distrust can be multifaceted, ranging from negative prior experience, over a belief that citizens are not sufficiently knowledgeable to play a role, to a conviction that citizens have profound negative intentions when interacting with government*" (*ibid*., p.118) ;

Neoliberal managerial doctrine reinforces this trend and its effects :

> "*A core feature of* [New Public Management] *is that it takes organisations' and public officials' self-interest maximisation as a basic assumption, unlike other approaches that tend to see these actors as altruistic and public interest-inspired. It follows*

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> *from this basic assumption that distrust-based mechanisms of control are necessary for actors to control each other* (*ibid.*, p.124).

[55] Algan *et al.*, 2019, *op.cit.*, again note that the link between low confidence in others and right-wing populist vote was highlighted in the 2016 US presidential election : the Trump vote was highest in districts where social trust and civic engagement are lowest. The same applies to the French National Front's historical surge in North-East France.

[56] Among the 35 OECD countries, between 2005-2007 and 2014-2016, only 17 have seen a decrease on that score (as against 18 where life satisfaction measures have either increased or remained stable), and the magnitude of such variations remains limited (–3% on average). While Central and East European nations, from Germany (+7.7%) to the Baltic States (+14% on average), have registered improvements on that score, while Italy (–11.9%), Spain (–9.8%), France (–5.9%), the US (–5.5%), and the UK (–2.9%) have suffered in that time frame. Source : Table A.26, "Life satisfaction measures from the Gallup World Poll", p.402 in OECD, *How's Life ?, 2017 : Measuring Well-Being*, Paris, OECD Publishing, 2017. Available online at : https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2017_how_life-2017-en#page404.

[57] Algan *et al.*, 2019, *op.cit.*, chapters 3 (France) and 8 (Europe and USA).

[58] **Tocqueville** (progress of equality, hence of competition and relative deprivation, at the expense of solidarity), **Tarde** (logic of dispersion induced by the development of means of communication, which by exempting individuals from physical co-presence erodes their sense of community and transforms them into members of impersonal "publics"), **Durkheim** (deepening division of labour), **Simmel** (money as a universal medium that liberates people from dependence on proximate others ; the individual at the crossroads of multiple social circles, free to choose among their norms those to which he or she will submit), **T.H. Marshall** (progress of social rights, which substitute the welfare state for the family or local solidarities of old) ; **Lipset** (effects of rising standards of living and education levels on the independence and critical thinking of individuals).

[59] Evidence of the pervasive effects of such a drift is in no short supply. Even the judiciary seems to have internalized it. For instance, the director of ENM, the national school in charge of training France's professional judges, did not fear to claim in a recent op-ed piece that a magistrate's mission is to protect individual liberties (*cf. Le Monde*, 23-24 February 2020, p.10). This assertion drew a critical comment from a retired high-ranking public prosecutor, to the effect that holding the balance between protection of society and safeguarding civil liberties would be more like it. Likewise, a controversy erupted recently over the charge by a conservative lobby organization that for years the European Court of Human Rights had thought nothing of recruiting some of its judges from among lawyers closely associated with civil liberties NGOs such as Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch : *Le Monde*, 4 March 2020, p.15.

[60] In a similar vein, Lasch (1979, p.74) included "fear of dependence" among the defining traits of narcissistic culture.

[61] Lasch (*ibid.*, p. xv) : "*A pervasive distrust of those in power has made society increasingly difficult to govern*".

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[62] This is what Prof. Matthijs Rooduijn noted in *The Guardian* dated November 20, 2018 : while this "quality" British newspaper published some 300 articles containing the terms "populism" or "populist" in 1998, this same figure rose to 1,000 in 2015, and doubled yet again in 2016. *Cf*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/political-science/2018/nov/20/why-is-populism-suddenly-so-sexy-the-reasons-are-many.

[63] A communication scholar notes that : "[N]*eo-populism and the media have a symbiotic relationship in part because coverage of politics follows an entertainment model based on shock-value, controversy and emotional rather than rational discourse*". *Cf*. Jennifer R. Henrichsen, "The Emergence of Contemporary Populisms and Mediated Discourses: An Introduction", in Nelson Ribeiro & Jennifer R. Henrichsen, *Media and Populism*, Lisbon, First Winter School for the Study of Communication, 2019. Available online at the following URL address :

https://www.academia.edu/41744266/Media_and_Populism_1st_Lisbon_Winter_School_for_the_Study_of_Communication?email_work_card=title.

[64] Stephen Hawkins *et al*., *Hidden Tribes : A Study of America's Polarized Landscape*, New York, More In Common, 2018, p.136 : https://hiddentribes.us/pdf/hidden_tribes_report.pdf.

[65] The director of France Inter, the country's flagship national public radio channel funded in part by mandatory licence fees, makes no bones about declaring it "a progressive station". Though consistently denied, the same charge has been levelled at the BBC for decades in Britain.

[66] Lasch, 1979, *op.cit*., p.231.

[67] Evidence of this now defensive posture may be found in a new habit adopted by French national public radio : that of the presenter citing the full list (sometimes as long as over 30 names) of her or his collaborators at the end of each programme. The meaning of such a move has not been spelled out to date, but it implicitly betrays the sense that the presenter's privilege, not as legitimate and taken for granted as it used to be, needs to be bolstered by sharing it and thus making it sound more democratic.

[68] Their demands of the outside are such that they make intercourse with them a rough experience, and they end up limiting any interaction and dialogue to their members (a possibility afforded them by social networks). When on the defensive, they are tempted to protect themselves from "micro-aggressions" in "safe places" from which any presence other than that of their members is banned. (Safe places were initially meant to protect vulnerable groups, e.g., disabled or autistic people. This practice was soon adopted by groups that are not : race or feminist groups have recently taken to organizing meetings closed to whites or men. This practice, now common in some circles in the United States, is beginning to creep into Europe). Going on the offensive, they attack any cultural, including artistic, language or portrayal at variance with their specific values, or any content borrowed from types of expression they consider strictly their own. In doing so, they turn their identities into essentialist sanctuaries while at the same time criticizing the mainstream for tentatively defining what characterizes it.

[69] E. Laclau, *La guerre des identités : grammaire de l'émancipation*, Paris, La Découverte, 2000 ; Benjamin Arditi, *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism : Difference, Populism, Revolution, Agitation*, Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

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[70] Arend Lijphart, *The Politics of Accommodation : Pluralism and Democracy in the Netherlands*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1968 ; *Patterns of Democracy*, New Haven, CT, Yale U.P., 1999.

[71] Though probably very few citizens have read John Dewey, those attitudes on their part thus espouse that author's position in the 1930s polemic that pitted him against Walter Lippmann. *Cf*. Stiegler, 2019, *op.cit.*

[72] Thomas B. Edsall, "The Meritocracy is Under Siege", *New York Times*, 12 June 2019. This echoes one of Emmanuel Todd's favourite theses : see footnote 18 *supra*.

[73] *Cf*. Josh Rogin, "South Korea shows that democracies can succeed against the coronavirus", *The Washington Post*, 11 March 2020 **;** Christophe Gaudin, "Coronavirus : La façon dont l'épidémie a été gérée en Corée du Sud devra servir d'exemple", *Le Monde*, 18 March 2020.

[74] Ralf Dahrendorf, "Citizenship and Beyond : The Dynamics of an Idea", *Social Research*, vol.41, n°4, 1974.

[75] Greece, where the far-left (SYRIZA) lost power in 2019 after four years in office during which it proved unable to resist strong external pressures and to implement its platform ; even more discouraging is the case of Venezuela, where two decades of "chavism" have generated economic chaos, general impoverishment, mass exodus and the threat of civil war.

[76] Aware of the limitations of their traditional democratic representation systems and of public opinion pressures for more active citizen participation in between elections, some countries are experimenting with new methods. Ireland, Belgium, Britain, France and several Canadian provinces, for instance, have recently instituted randomly-selected consultative citizen assemblies charged with proposing solutions to Parliament and/or government on specific issues.

[77] *Cf.* P.-H. Tavoillot, *Comment gouverner un people-roi ? Traité nouveau d'art politique*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 2019*.*

[78] Little noticed is the fact in Switzerland, a country (rightly) vaunted as an exemplar of citizen participation, the level of voter abstention has reached the unparalleled figure of 61% on average in recent elections. Source : Pew Research Center Fact Tank, 21 May 2018 : http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/21/u-s-voter-turnout-trails-most-developed-countries/.

[79] Concerns about possible rash decisions on highly charged issues, such as restoring the death penalty, that this procedure allegedly would allow have been belied by experience : no popularly initiated referendum has produced such outcomes in the West so far.

[80] Baechler, *Democracy*, 1995, *op.cit*.

[81] A recent study confirms the influence of high relative deprivation on populist persuasion and engagement : Linda Bos *et alii*, "The effects of populism as a social identity frame on persuasion and mobilisation : Evidence from a 15-country experiment", *European Journal of Political Research*, vol.59, n°1, 2020, pp.3-24.

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[82] Thomas Piketty, *The Economics of Inequality*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2015.

[83] A good example is provided by the rate of access of working-class progeny to French elite schools (Polytechnique, École Normale Supérieure, École Nationale d'Administration), which has dwindled from 21% to 7% between 1955 and the present day. Part of the problem relates to the fact that primary and lower secondary schoolteachers, ideologically opposed (from the 1970s onwards) to discrimination on the basis of merit in the name of "equal success for all", have ceased to assist deserving students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in sharpening their skills and career ambitions at a young age. "Selection" only sets in during the last two years of high school, by which time social determinisms operate at fuller power and early overachievers from poorer families, lost in the mass, are left without the special impetus for academic success that their predecessors had enjoyed. The situation is worse in the US, where meritocracy is mitigated by financial considerations. At Harvard, the daughters and sons of wealthy families with connections to the university and/or potential donor status ("legacies") are accepted at the average rate of 33% compared to an overall acceptance rate of under 6%. At 64 colleges across the nation the admission rate for such students is 31% higher than the official admission rates for all applicants. *Cf*. Daniel A. Gross, "How elite US schools give preference to wealthy and white 'legacy' applicants", *The Guardian*, 23 January 2019 : https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/jan/23/elite-schools-ivy-league-legacy-admissions-harvard-wealthier-whiter.

[84] If the objective is to thwart the mechanisms that lead to a secession of elites, there is no need to make such a system universal and mandatory : targeting graduates and prompting them to serve on a volunteer basis is enough. Key to the success of such a system is a powerful incentive – for instance, turning national service into a requirement for any later executive position.

[85] "National service" has given rise in the US to an abundant literature on a civilian equivalent of military conscription, starting with William James' famous 1906 speech on a "Moral Equivalent of War" and extending to a height in the 1970s and 1980s, notably among sociologists of the pragmatic school.

[86] French philosopher Paul Thibaud, writing in the late 1990s, advanced the "deactivation of democracy" thesis in the following words :

> "*As has become clear since 1989, the problem of contemporary democracies is* (...) [that] *they have increased and institutionalized the distance between the people and those in office.* (…) *They have empowered any amount of new intermediate bodies interposing between the will of the people and the management of public affairs. The shift from the sovereignty of the law to that of the constitution, and then of declarations of rights, has increased the power of exegetes, but diminished that of representatives to the point of making suffrage a lazy king. The rule of law (especially when the law is internationalized) is closed to citizens, suspected of liberticidal leanings. European regulations, justified by the necessity of practical compromise, do not refer to any general will nor even to any general interest, and illustrate how the body politic has been set aside.* (…) *The rulers who have taken politics out of the political for short-term gains (have others dictate terms that*

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they themselves dared not propose) are now impotent in the face of a reluctant and withdrawn society".

The author added : "*Those who ring alarm bells believing this is 1933 all over again do not seem to understand the difference between a rejection of democracy and the effects of its deactivation*" (Paul Thibaud, in *Vingtième Siècle*, n°56, October-December 1997, pp.236-238).

[87] "Revealed : one in four Europeans vote populist : Exclusive research shows how populists tripled their vote over the past two decades", *The Guardian*, 18 October 2018 : https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2018/nov/20/revealed-one-in-four-europeans-vote-populist. The article describes the methodology of the study thus :

> "*To conduct the research,* The Guardian *enlisted the help of more than 30 political scientists to assess which European parties could be considered populist, under academic definitions of the word, at various points over the past 20 years. Matthijs Rooduijn, a political sociologist at the University of Amsterdam, oversaw the project, and made the final decision on all party classifications*".

[88] The studies mentioned are : Hawkins *et al*., *Hidden Tribes : A Study of America's Polarized Landscape*, 2018, *op.cit.* ; Laura-Kristine Krause & Jérémie Gagné*, Fault Lines: Germany's Invisible Divides*, 2019 ; François-Xavier Demoures (ed.), *Finding France : A People in Search of Their Country*, 2020 ; Tim Dixon *et al*., *Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Italy*, 2018 ; Tim Dixon *et al*., *Attitudes towards National Identity, Immigration and Refugees in Greece*, 2019. All are available online at : https://www.moreincommon.com/our-work/publications/. (As of this writing, a UK study is under way). *Most of the figures cited below are drawn from these sources*.

[89] Yascha Mounk ("Americans Strongly Dislike PC Culture", *The Atlantic*, 10 October 2018) adds, on the basis of the research conducted on behalf of More in Common for *Hidden Tribes*, that "*what the vast majority of Americans seem to see*" in progressive elites' insistence on political correctness "*is not so much genuine concern for social justice as the preening display of cultural superiority*".

[90] The methods applied are the same in all national monographs. They are expounded in the Greek country study as follows :

> "*This study employed a cluster analysis methodology that draws on a range of attitudinal characteristics of the Greek public. The cluster analysis included a factor analysis, and the use of random forest and discriminant analysis techniques. This form of segmentation provides a rich composite picture of how a population is divided in its views, going beyond basic demographic factors and therefore uncovering how networks of attitudes and opinions are connected. The segmentation analysis identifies the profile of the population segment most supportive in their attitudes of refugees and migrants; the profile of those most hostile; and the profile of the groups with mixed views./ To obtain a better understanding of how Greeks*

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form their moral judgments and how values influence their political behaviour, we deployed insights from social psychology around people's deepest values and beliefs. In particular, we used the framework put forward by Jonathan Haidt and colleagues, known as Moral Foundations Theory, which identifies a set of 'moral foundations' that underlie people's moral judgements".

[91] The data were collected by means of questionnaires administered to large-scale representative national samples supplemented by interviews across and focus group sessions within segments. The issues raised centred on national identity and patriotism, immigration, security, race, religion, social justice, gender and sexuality, media, political discourse, political correctness and censorship, belief in conspiracy theories, globalization and distribution of economic benefits. The core beliefs examined revolve around group identification (in terms of nationality, gender, political party, ethnicity, etc.), perceived threats, parenting style and authoritarianism (seen as predictive of attitudes towards more general public policies), moral foundations (extent to which people endorse certain moral values, including fairness, care, purity, authority and loyalty), and personal agency (extent to which people view personal success as the product of individual factors versus societal factors).

[92] Albeit with a slight advantage accruing to the "open" clusters in Italy and Greece – thus somewhat contradicting the assumption drawn from Figure 1 that in Europe the far-right populists predominate over their far-left opposite numbers : what is true overall may not be the case in some particular countries, especially as Figure 1 represents voting results where Table 2 deals with representative samples of the adult population, including non-voters and sympathisers who may have cast their votes against their sympathies.

[93] "Traditional liberals" in the US, the "Involved" in Germany, "Moderate humanitarians" in Greece.

[94] "Moderates" in the US, the "Left behind", "Disillusioned", "Security concerned" and "Detached traditionalists" in the other 4 countries.

[95] The detail of these hypothetical weights is as follows :

🇺🇸   *Far-left* (13%) = 8% "Progressive activists + 5% "Traditional liberals" ; *Mainstream/ Left* (29%) = 6% "Traditional liberals" + 15% "Passive liberals" + 8% "Politically disengaged" ; *Mainstream/ Right* (16%) = 8% "Politically disengaged" + 8% "Moderates" ; *Reservoir of civic populists* (17%) = 10% "Politically disengaged" + 7% "Moderates".

🇫🇷   *Mainstream/ Left* (20%) = 10% "Stabilizers" + 5% "Pragmatic optimists" + 5% "Politically disengaged" ; *Mainstream/ Right* (20%) = 9% "Stabilizers" + 6% "Pragmatic optimists" + 5% "Politically disengaged" ; "*Reservoir*" (14%) = 6% "Disengaged" + 8% "Left behind" ; Far-right (34%) = 20% "Identitarians" + 14% "Left behind".

🇩🇪   *Far-left* (24%) = 16% "Open" + 8% "Involved" ; *Mainstream/ Left* (17%) = 9% "Involved" + 8% "Established" ; *Mainstream/ Right* (19%) = 9% "Established" + 10% "Detached pragmatists" ; "*Reservoir*" (13%) = 6% Detached pragmatists" + 7% "Disillusioned" ; *Far-right* (26%) = 19% "Angry" + 7% "Disillusioned".

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🇮🇹 *Mainstream/ Left* (15%) = 6% "Disengaged moderates" + 9% "Left behind" ; *Mainstream/ Right* (20%) = 6% "Disengaged moderates" + 8% "Left behind" + 6% "Security concerned" ; "*Reservoir*" (13%) = 7% "Disengaged moderates" + 6% "Security concerned".

🇬🇷 *Mainstream/ Left* (24%) = 14% "Moderate humanitarians" + 10% "Instinctive pragmatists" ; *Mainstream/ Right* (23%) = 7% "Moderate humanitarians" + 9% "Instinctive pragmatists" + 7% "Detached traditionalists" ; "*Reservoir*" (15%) = 7% "Moderate humanitarians" + 8% "Detached traditionalists".

[96] The US country study notes that "*Americans in the Exhausted Majority are often hesitant to weigh in for fear of saying the wrong thing. This contributes to the detachment of the 41 percent of Americans who belong to the Passive Liberal and Politically Disengaged tribes*".

[97] Thus can the seeming contradiction between the 'civic' label applied to them and their (relative) disengagement be resolved. Tavoillot (2019, *op.cit*.) notes that if it is justified in terms of the liberal-democratic balance between public and private spheres, it also sets limits to participatory democracy as a remedy.

[98] Leftist elites are more cosmopolitan-oriented, sensitive to inequalities and secular than average.

[99] They are also older, more religious, and more often live in rural areas.

[100] One interesting hypothesis would be that their larger numbers and more varied family origins make their superiority subjectively more uncertain and fragile than was the case when elites were a much smaller group. This would explain why they insist on differentiating themselves from those below them in the social structure.

[101] In philosophical terms, such an implied vision resonates with the positions of Michael Sandel, Charles Taylor and Michael Walzer, and amounts to a rejection of John Rawls'.

[102] That such republicanism and citizen ideals are more relevant to solve democracy's current predicament than minority rule or power-sharing schemes among culturally-defined factions is suggested by Lebanese demonstrators clamouring today on the streets for such a solution after decades of that diet have led to a failed State and chaotic society faced with moral as well as material bankruptcy.