

POPULISM REVIVED: *Donald Trump and the Latin American Leftist Populists*

The twenty-first century could well become known as the populist century. No longer confined to Latin America or to the margins of European politics, populism has spread to Africa, Asia, and, with Donald Trump's election, to the cradle of liberal democracy.¹ Even though it is uncertain what impact Trump's populism will have on American democracy, it is worth learning from Latin America, where populists have been in power from the 1930s and 1940s to the present. Even as Latin American populists like Juan Perón and Hugo Chávez included the poor and the nonwhite in the political community, they moved toward authoritarianism by undermining democracy from within. Are the foundations of American democracy and the institutions of civil society strong enough to resist US president Donald Trump's right-wing populism?

This lecture compares recent left-wing populist experiences in Latin American history with the more recent history of the Tea Party and Trump's right-wing populism in the United States. I make my argument in four parts. The first looks at how scholars have interpreted the relationship between populism and democracy in Latin America and the United States. The second section compares populist ruptures in the Americas generally with the more recent populist breakaway of the United States. Whereas Latin American left-wing populist ruptured the neoliberal order and the rule of traditional political parties, Trump promised to break down the neoliberal multicultural consensus of the elites of the Republican and Democratic parties. I then explore different constructions of the "the people," and analyze how "the people" is performed

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1. For volumes on global populism, see Francisco Panizza, ed., *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy* (London: Verso, 2005); Carlos de la Torre, ed., *The Promises and Peril of Populism Global Perspectives* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015); Benjamin Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, Representation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016); Ángel Rivero, Javier Zarzalejos, and Jorge del Palacio, eds., *Geografías del populismo* (Madrid: Tecnos, 2017).

to create solidarity among followers while elevating a politician as their savior. The fourth part analyzes the experiences of Latin American populists in power to speculate about the future of democracy under Trump.

POPULISM, DEMOCRACY, AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Writing after the traumas of fascism, the first round of historians and social scientists of modern populism were suspicious of the democratic credentials of mass movements that based their legitimacy in appeals to the people. Notions of crisis, of the irrational responses of the masses to stress, and manipulation in conditions of anomie were at the center of social scientific and historical scholarship. Analyzing McCarthyism, the sociologist Talcott Parsons wrote, “It is a generalization well established in social sciences that neither individuals nor societies can undergo major structural changes without the likelihood of producing a considerable element of ‘irrational’ behavior.”² The expected responses to the stress produced by major structural transformations were anxiety, aggression focused on what was felt to be the source of strain, and a desire to reestablish a fantasy in which everything would be all right—preferably as it was before the disturbing situation arose.

Going contrary to the prevailing view of the US populist movement of the 1890s as progressive and democratizing, historian Richard Hofstadter showed its ambiguities. He argued that populists “aimed at the remedy of genuine ills, combined with strong moral convictions and with the choice of hatred as a kind of creed.”³ Populists imagined the populace as innocent, productive, and victimized by predatory elites. This view of politics, he claimed, “assumed a delusive simplicity.”⁴ Populists held a Manichean and conspiratorial outlook that attributed “demonic qualities to their foes.”⁵ Populism was the result of an agrarian crisis, and the “expression of a transitional stage” in the history of agrarian capitalism.⁶ Populists aimed to restore a golden age. The base of support of populism, wrote Hofstadter, were “those who have attained only a low level of education, whose access to information is poor, and who are so completely shut out from access to the centers of power that they feel

2. Talcott Parsons, “Social Strains in America” in *The New American Right*, Daniel Bell, ed. (New York: Criterion Books 1959), 127.

3. Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1955), 20.

4. Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 65.

5. Richard Hofstadter, “North America,” in *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characters*, G. Ionescu and E. Gellner, eds. (New York: Macmillan Company 1969), 18.

6. Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 95.

themselves completely deprived of self-defense and subjected to unlimited manipulation by those who wield power.”⁷

Nonetheless, Hofstadter asserted that the Populist movement and party, “for all its zany fringes, was not an unambiguous forerunner of modern authoritarian movements.”⁸ He traced the reappearance of the paranoid style in American politics to McCarthyism, and other forms of crank “pseudo-conservatism.”⁹ This opinion was shared by prominent American social scientists like Parsons, who argued that the “elements of continuity between Western agrarian populism and McCarthyism are not by any means purely fortuitous.”¹⁰

Gino Germani, an Italian-born sociologist who sought refuge from Mussolini’s jails in Argentina only to later lose his academic job under Perón’s government, set the research agenda for the study of Latin American populism. Like Hofstadter, he viewed populism as a transitional stage provoked by the modernization of society. Relying on modernization and mass society theories, he argued that abrupt processes of modernization such as urbanization and industrialization produced in the masses a state of anomie that made them available for top-down mobilization.¹¹ The social base of Peronism was the new working class, made up of recent migrants who were not socialized into working-class culture, and who could therefore be mobilized by a single charismatic leader. “The political incorporation of the popular masses started under totalitarianism. It gave workers an experience of political and social participation in their personal lives, annulling at the same time political organizations and the basic rights that are the pillars for any genuine democracy.”¹²

Scholars have shown how Latin America populism emerged in oligarchic societies where the franchise was restricted; notables decided on the political destinies of their nations, in contexts of extreme inequalities; and the poor were considered a dangerous and irrational threat to civility, progress, and democracy. Under these systems of economic, political, and cultural exploitation and exclusion common people were humiliated in daily life. An Argentinean worker interviewed by historian Daniel James remembered the 1930s: “I always felt like a stranger when I went to the city, downtown Buenos Aires—like you didn’t belong there, which was stupid but you felt that they were looking down on

7. Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 71.

8. Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, 71.

9. Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York: Alfred. A. Knopf, 1965).

10. Parsons, “Social Strains in America,” 136.

11. Gino Germani, *Política y sociedad en una época de transición* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós 1971), 310–338.

12. Germani, *Política y sociedad*, 337.

you, that you weren't dressed right. The police there treated you like animals too."¹³

Populism emerged as a force that promised free elections to eliminate electoral fraud, bring about the socioeconomic incorporation of workers and the poor, defend and expand national sovereignty, and raise high the symbolic dignity of the excluded. Populism transformed the stigmas that the elites had long used to despise the poor into qualities of virtue. In the 1930s and 1940s, the elites of Buenos Aires used the term *cabecita negra* to refer to the internal migrants' dark skin and black hair.¹⁴ They racialized Perón's followers as "black Peronists," or as "greasers," evoking not only the dirt and oil on workers' overalls but all that is cheap or in bad taste. Juan and Eva Perón transformed the shirtless masses despised by the elites into the embodiment of the Argentinean nation. Eva Perón, for instance, used the term *grasita* to affectionately refer to the poor.¹⁵

Once in power, populists like Juan Perón in Argentina or José María Velasco Ibarra in Ecuador simultaneously enacted policies to incorporate the excluded and policies that restricted their fundamental civil rights. They expanded the franchise, eliminated electoral fraud, and expanded social rights. Under Perón in 1951, women won the right to vote, and voter turnout during his first government grew from 18 to 50 percent of the population.¹⁶ Under Perón's first administration, the share of the national GDP represented by wages increased from 37 to 47 per cent, while real wages increased by 40 per cent between 1946 and 1949.¹⁷

Inclusionary populist democracy was at odds with notions of accountability and the division of power, and bypassed mechanisms of checks and balances.¹⁸ Populists constructed politics as confrontations with enemies who had to be contained. Perón said that when political adversaries became "enemies of the nation" they were no longer "gentlemen that one should fight fairly but snakes

13. Daniel James, *Resistance and Integration: Peronism and the Argentine Working Class 1946–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 29.

14. Natalia Milanesio, "Peronists and Cabecitas: Stereotypes and Anxieties at the Peak of Social Change," in *The New Cultural History of Peronism*, Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 55.

15. Milanesio, "Peronists and Cabecitas," 57.

16. Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón: A Cultural History of Perón's Argentina* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2003), 165.

17. Mariano Plotkin, "Final Reflections," in *The New Cultural History of Peronism*, Matthew Karush and Oscar Chamosa, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 273.

18. Enrique Peruzzotti, "Populism in Democratic Times: Populism, Representative Democracy, and the Debate on Democratic Deepening," in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia Arson, eds. (Baltimore and Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins University Press and Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013), 75.

that one can kill in any way.”¹⁹ The logic of populist confrontation denied democratic spaces for opponents, who were constructed as enemies of the poor and the nation. Sectors of the opposition, for their part, were also anti-pluralist and denied populists any democratic legitimacy. Historian Luis Alberto Romero wrote, “Much of the opposition was concerned to eliminate Perón by whatever means necessary.”²⁰ Perón, like other populists, was deposed by a coup d’état, in 1955. José María Velasco Ibarra, president of Ecuador on five occasions, was allowed to finish only one of his terms in office.

Hofstadter and Germani rightly show the importance of analyzing populism as simultaneously inclusionary and autocratic. Populists challenged exclusions, and politicized humiliations, resentments, and fears, but at the same time reduced the complexity of democratic politics to a struggle between two antagonistic camps. The populist leader was portrayed as the embodiment of the will of the homogeneous people, even as its savior and redeemer, in a transformation of politics into religious-like struggles. Yet for all their merits, these pioneer studies reduced class and interest-based politics to the alleged irrationality of the masses, especially of poor rural dwellers and recent migrants.

Scholars have shown that mass society theory wrongly viewed populist followers as irrational and populism as a transitional stage in the modernization of society. “Since the late 1950s, historians and other scholars have persuasively demolished both the portrait of the initial Populists as irrational bigots and the idea that those who supported populism were linked demographically to McCarthy’s followers.”²¹ Historian Charles Postel showed that US populists were not backward-looking but modern, and defended their interests in a movement that “resembled a type of reformist and evolutionary social democracy.”²² Argentinean workers’ support for Perón was rational because as secretary of labor he addressed workers’ demands for social security, labor legislation, and higher wages.²³

Departing from views that reduce populism to the irrationality of masses in a state of anomie, I have built on the work of historians and social scientists who have understood it as simultaneously autocratic and inclusionary.

19. Federico Finchelstein, *The Ideological Origins of the Dirty War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 86.

20. Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 124.

21. Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), 192.

22. Charles Postel, “The American Populist and Anti-Populist Legacy,” in *Transformations of Populism in Europe and the Americas: History and Recent Tendencies*, John Abromeit, Bridget Chesterton, Gary Marotta, and York Norman, eds. (London: Bloomsbury Press 2016), 119.

23. Miguel Murmis and Juan Carlos Portantiero, *Estudio sobre los orígenes del peronismo* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 1971).

I understand populism as a Manichaean rhetoric that pits the people against elites. The notion of “the people” incorporates both the idea of antagonistic conflict between two groups and a romantic view of the purity of the excluded population—“the people.” Those who do not agree with the populist’s interpretation of the will of the people are depicted as enemies. Unlike adversaries, who fight according to a shared set of rules, and whose positions could be accepted, enemies represent a threat that must be contained. Populists do not approach politics with self-limiting notions, nor do they accept the boundaries of existing institutions and norms. Their aim is to rupture institutions that exclude the people in order to create a new order.²⁴

Under populism, a leader acts as if he or she embodies the will of the people, and can lead them to their redemption. Populists concentrate power and reduce institutional spaces for the opposition under the assumption that enemies are constantly conspiring, and that their government will need to stay in power until the work of transforming the state and society are done. Perón boasted of securing 60 years of Peronist power.²⁵ Only cancer prevented Chávez from realizing his intention of becoming Venezuela’s permanently elected president. Populists see the presidency as a possession that should remain in their hands until they have liberated their people. Yet, populists also claim legitimacy through winning elections that they could conceivably lose and thus be bound by electoral results.²⁶ Populism hence grounds its legitimacy in the democratic precept of winning elections, and in the autocratic view of power as a possession of the leader.

The contradiction between governing as if they were the embodiment of the people, and at the same time asking the people to approve of their presidencies in open elections that they could lose, explains populists’ ambiguities toward democratic institutions and practices. Although populists have honored elections free of fraud, they cannot accept pluralism: the populist who assumes that he or she is the embodiment of the people also assumes that the people would vote for no one else. Populists close spaces to rivals who they accuse as conspiratorial and antinational enemies who are attempting to regain power to reinstate the old regime. Populism thus simultaneously accepts democracy and subverts it to remain in power until liberating the people.

24. Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (London and New York: Verso, 2005).

25. Finchelstein, *Ideological Origins of the Dirty War*, 92.

26. Isidoro Cheresky, *El nuevo rostro de la democracia* (Buenos Aires: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2015).

POPULIST RUPTURES IN THE AMERICAS

Populist narratives paint existing institutional arrangements as impediments to the people's expression of its voice and will. As a consequence, the populist aims to overhaul the establishment and promises to give power back to the people. Populist ruptures have often taken place when the institutional framework of democracy was in crisis. Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, and Rafael Correa ruptured the elite consensus that linked neoliberal policies with electoral democracies. They overhauled neoliberalism, enacted new constitutions, and displaced traditional political elites. Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador underwent major crises of political representation. Political parties were perceived as instruments of local and foreign elites, implementing neoliberal policies and thereby increasing social inequality. Traditional political parties collapsed as political outsiders rose to power on platforms that promised to eliminate corrupt politicians, make new constitutions that would revamp existing institutions, experiment with participatory forms of democracy, abandon neoliberal orthodoxy, and implement policies to redistribute income.

A second factor that led to populist ruptures was the widespread popular resistance to neoliberalism. A particularly notable insurrection was the February 1989 *Caracazo*, Venezuelans' massive protest against a gasoline price hike, which was brutally repressed and resulted in the deaths of at least 400 people.²⁷ Mass movements of resistance met the attempts of three presidents of Ecuador to implement neoliberal structural reforms; all were prevented from finishing their terms in office between 1997 and 2005.²⁸ A cycle of protest and political turmoil in Bolivia resulted in the collapse of both the party system established in 1985 and the neoliberal economic model.²⁹

A third factor that led to populist ruptures and the rise of left-wing populism in Latin America was the perception that politicians and neoliberal elites had surrendered national sovereignty to the US government, and supranational institutions like the International Monetary Fund. Left-wing populist leaders proposed a counter-project to US-dominated neoliberal trade initiatives—the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas (ALBA)—which aimed for Latin American and Caribbean integration based on social justice. Its goals were to

27. Margarita López Maya and Alexandra Panzarelli, "Populism, Rentierism, and Socialism in the Twenty-First Century: The Case of Venezuela," in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty First Century*, Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia Arnson, eds. (Baltimore and Washington: Johns Hopkins University and the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013), 244.

28. Carlos de la Torre, *Populist Seduction in Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), 152–155.

29. James Dunkerley, "Evo Morales, the 'Two Bolivias' and the Third Bolivian Revolution," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 39 (2007): 133–166.

stop US domination in the region by promoting Latin America unity, and to create a multipolar international system.

Nestor Kirchner came to power in Argentina in 2003 in a conjuncture that could have led to a populist rupture. Political parties were in crisis, the country had just gone through a deep economic collapse (2001–02), and there were strong movements of resistance to neoliberalism as workers took over factories and the unemployed occupied the streets and plundered supermarkets. Despite using a similar rhetoric as Chávez, and promising the refoundation of their nation, the Kirchners were not committed to a populist rupture.³⁰ But most important, their ambivalence in following the populist script can be explained by the ways in which social movements and civil society reacted against what they perceived as authoritarian policies and practices. Thousands mobilized against Cristina Kirchner's agrarian policies. Her attempts to modify the constitution to allow for her reelection were resisted by civil society and an independent constitutional court. In sum, Argentina's relatively stronger democratic institutions and complex civil society were impediments to a populist rupture there.³¹

In the United States, Donald Trump's electoral campaign and presidency have ruptured the elite consensus that linked globalization with limited policies of multicultural recognition for women, non-whites, and the LGBTQ communities.³² In his campaign he promised to revise free trade agreements, pledged to bring back manufacturing jobs from other nations, and used blatantly racist language against Mexicans and Muslims that challenged views of the United States as a post-racial society. He was the inheritor of the Tea Party, a right-wing insurrection against the first non-white president and his limited policies of redistribution, such as universal health care.

The Tea Party was a collection of grassroots organizations, the right-wing media with FOX News most notable, and elites who funded conservative candidates and ideas.³³ These groups opposed Obamacare and mortgage relief as an attack by liberal elites against hardworking citizens, with the aim of giving handouts to the undeserving poor. They also shared a conservative reaction to the first

30. Enrique Peruzzotti, "El kirchnerismo y la teoría política: la visión de Guillermo O'Donnell y Ernesto Laclau," in *¿Década ganada? Evaluando el Kirchnerismo*, Carlos Gervasoni and Enrique Peruzzotti, eds. (Buenos Aires: Debate, 2015), 400.

31. Oswaldo Iazeta, "Democracia y dramatización del conflicto en la Argentina kirchnerista (2003–2011)," in *¿Qué democracia en América Latina?*, Isidoro Cheresky, ed. (Buenos Aires: CLACSO and Promoteco, 2012), 285.

32. Carlos de la Torre, "Trump's Populism: Lessons from Latin America," *Postcolonial Studies* 20:2 (2017): 187–198, doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13688790.2017.1363846>.

33. Theda Skocpol and Vanessa Williamson, *The Tea Party and the Remaking of Republican Conservatism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 190.

non-white president. Obama was perceived as a foreigner, “an invader pretending to be an American. . . . His academic achievements and social ties put him in league with the country’s intellectual elite whose . . . cosmopolitan leanings seemed unpatriotic.”³⁴ Donald Trump, an avowed birther who denied Obama’s Americanness, reached beyond the Tea Party’s social base of older, white, wealthier, and more educated conservatives to appeal also to the white working class.³⁵

In his campaign Trump challenged some basic tenets of neoliberalism, including free trade. He opposed both NAFTA and the Trans-Pacific Partnership. He linked national decline with the absence of industrial production. He told crowds, “We don’t win any more. We don’t make anything. We are losing so much.”³⁶ Trump singled out corporations like Ford, Apple, Nabisco, and Carrier for moving factories overseas and promised to bring manufacturing jobs back to the United States. His nationalist critique of globalization was linked to the construction of illegal immigrants as parasitical others. In 2011 he wrote, “Illegal immigration is a wrecking ball aimed at U.S. taxpayers.” He urged elites to fight for “We, the People, not for special interests who want cheap labor and a minority voting block.”³⁷ In his book *Great Again: How to Fix Crippled America*, he wrote, “We are the only country in the world whose immigration system places the needs of other nations ahead of our own.” He argued that foreign governments encourage illegal immigration “to get rid of their worst people without paying any price for their bad behavior.”³⁸

In his presidential campaign, Trump used blatant racist tropes to describe Muslims and Mexicans, destroying the myth that the United States was becoming a color-blind, postracial society. Elites and many ordinary citizens believed that the election of their first black president showed that the country was moving in that direction, that overt racism was a thing of the past, and that the goals of the civil rights movement had been achieved.³⁹ Launching his presidential candidacy from Trump Tower in New York City, he asserted, “When Mexico sends its people, they’re not sending their best . . . They’re bringing drugs. They’re bringing crime. They’re rapists. And some, I assume,

34. Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party*, 79.

35. Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 187.

36. Joseph Lowndes, “Populism in the 2016 U.S. election,” in *Comparative Politics Newsletter* [American Political Science Association], Matt Golder and Sona Golder, eds.] 26:2 (Fall 2016): 99.

37. John B. Judis, *The Populist Explosion: How the Great Recession Transformed American and European Politics*, Columbia Global Reports (New York: Columbia University, 2016), 70.

38. David Smith, “Populism, Nationalism, and U.S. Foreign Policy,” in *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 26:2 (Fall 2016): 104.

39. Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York and London: Routledge, 2015), 257.

are good people.”⁴⁰ Expanding his racist platform, he called Muslims terrorists, promised to monitor Muslims within the United States, and announced he would ban those who wanted to enter the country. Trump’s anti-immigrant, racist, and xenophobic words expressed the views of many Tea Party supporters, who view illegal immigrants as freeloaders who are draining US taxpayers by using social services and government funds. Tea Partiers have advocated “restrictions on birthright citizenship, abridgments on freedom of religion for Muslim Americans, and suspension of protections in the Bill of Rights for suspected terrorists.”⁴¹

Like the Tea Partiers, Trump did not use openly racist terms but instead spoke in coded phrases to describe African Americans as people who are held back because of their own personal failings. His expressions of hostility were directed against what he saw as African American militant groups, including Black Lives Matter. Right-wing populist rhetoric and open racism against Mexicans, and more broadly, all Latinos, is explained by long-enduring views of Mexicans as outsiders to the national community.⁴² Similarly, Muslims were targeted by The Tea Party and Trump because their religion makes them alien to US Christianity. Instead of repudiating his white-supremacist supporters and members of the Ku Klux Klan and other white nationalist groups, Trump embraced them, signaling that African Americans were also “members of the out group.”⁴³

He depicted liberal multicultural elites as hypocritical and corrupt, accusing them of wanting to pay cheaply for Mexican labor and then turn Hispanics into a voting bloc that favored them. Trump aimed to abolish political correctness, promising a new dawn in which white heterosexual males would be free to express their views and opinions. “The big problem this country has is being politically correct.”⁴⁴ Some of his fervent white supporters were filmed yelling, “Fuck political correctness.”⁴⁵

40. Donald Trump, presidential candidacy announcement speech, June 16, 2015, reprinted in *Time* on same date, <http://time.com/3923128/donald-trump-announcement-speech>, accessed June 15, 2018.

41. Skocpol and Williamson, *Tea Party*, 50.

42. Suzanne Oboler, “Disposable Strangers: Mexican Americans, Racialization, and the Question of Latino/as’ Belonging in the Era of Globalization,” unpublished paper delivered at the Conference on Global Racism, University of Kentucky, Lexington, February 23, 2013.

43. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Journey to the Heart of Our Political Divide* (New York: New Press, 2016), 226.

44. Joshua Green, *Devil’s Bargain: Steve Bannon, Donald Trump, and the Storming of the Presidency* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 169.

45. Ashley Parker, Nick Corasaniti, and Erica Berenstein, “Unfiltered Voices from Trump’s Crowds,” *New York Times*, August 3, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/04/us/politics/donald-trump-supporters.html>, accessed June 15, 2018.

Trump's message made sense to white voters who felt themselves the victims of economic anxiety and racism.⁴⁶ He became the voice of "white Americans who felt left behind by globalization and the shift to a postindustrial economy."⁴⁷ However, his base of support was not only the losers of globalization and uneducated white males but also included many middle-class white men who felt they were not getting their fair share, and believed they faced economic insecurity. They felt that women, blacks, Hispanics, and gay people were empowered by unfair policies of affirmative action and political correctness that negatively targeted white heterosexual males. Many "also felt culturally marginalized: their views about abortion, gay marriage, gender roles, race, guns, and the Confederate flag all were held in ridicule in the national media as backward. And they felt part of a demographic decline . . . They'd begun to feel like a besieged minority."⁴⁸ In sum, Trump was "the identity politics candidate for white men."⁴⁹

Populist ruptures in Latin America led to the abandonment of neoliberal policies. Chávez, Morales, and Correa all strengthened the state and used it to redistribute wealth and reduce poverty and inequality. Venezuela, Bolivia, and Ecuador reaped huge benefits from the commodity boom of the 2000s, which sent oil and natural gas prices to record levels and made possible the skyrocketing of public investment and social spending. Poverty rates—and to a lesser extent inequality—fell when the prices of oil and other commodities were high.⁵⁰

The extent to which Trump's administration will dismantle the institutions and policies of the last decades that linked open markets and globalization to the limited cultural inclusion of minorities, women, and the LGBTQ communities remains to be seen.

CONSTRUCTING AND PERFORMING THE PEOPLE

"The people" is a not a primary datum but a discursive construct, a claim made in struggles between politicians, activists, and intellectuals. "Populist discourse does not simply *express* some kind of popular identity; it actually *constitutes* the latter."⁵¹

46. Katherine Cramer, "Listening to Rural Populist Support for Right-Leaning Candidates in the United States," in *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 26:2 (Fall 2016): 89.

47. Judis, *The Populist*, 75.

48. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 221.

49. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 230.

50. Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia Arnson, "Introduction: The Evolution of Latin American Populism and the Debates Over Its Meanings," in *Latin American Populism in the Twenty First Century*, Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia Arnson, eds. (Baltimore and Washington: Johns Hopkins University and the Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2013), 12.

51. Ernesto Laclau, "Populism: What's in a Name?" in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Francisco Panizza, ed. (London: Verso 2005), 48, emphasis in the original.

The people could be constructed with ethnic or political criteria, as a plural population or as a unitary actor.

Ethnic constructs can be exclusionary, as when the enemies of the people are identified as minority populations such as Muslims and non-whites in Europe and the United States. “The people,” as constructed by Donald Trump, faces ethnic enemies such as Muslims, Mexicans, and militant black activists. In contrast to Trump’s exclusionary view of the people as white, Evo Morales and his political party, Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), successfully used inclusive ethnopolitist appeals.⁵² Given the fluidity of race and ethnic relations in Bolivia, its leaders were able to create an inclusionary ethnic party grounded in indigenous organizations and social movements. Going further, the MAS and Morales were successful because they also incorporated mestizo organizations and candidates. Morales portrayed indigenous people as the essence of the nation, but the term “indigenous” was politicized to include all Bolivians who defended national sovereignty and natural resources from neoliberal elites. It was an embracing category that signified a claim to postcolonial justice, and provided the base for a broader political project of nationalism, self-determination, and democratization.⁵³

Hugo Chávez and Rafael Correa articulated political constructs of the people. Chávez framed the political arena to exclude political rivals, and identified an oligarchy that he defined as the political enemy of the people: “those self-serving elites who work against the homeland.”⁵⁴ Similarly, Correa faced off against a long list of political enemies to his government, his people, and his nation, among them traditional politicians, the privately owned media, journalists, leaders of autonomous social movements, the “infantile left,” and almost anybody else who questioned his policies.⁵⁵

Hugo Chávez, Rafael Correa, and Donald Trump have claimed, in various words, that they, and only they, represent the true people.⁵⁶ Chávez, for example, professed to be the embodiment of the Venezuelan people. He is quoted boasting, “This is not about Hugo Chávez; this is about a ‘people.’ I represent, plainly, the voice and the heart of millions.”⁵⁷ On another occasion Chávez

52. Raúl Madrid, *The Rise of Ethnic Politics in Latin America*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

53. Andrew Canessa, “Todos somos indígenas: Toward a New Language of National Political Identity,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 25:2 (2006): 241–263.

54. José Pedro Zúquete, “The Missionary Politics of Hugo Chávez,” *Latin American Politics and Society* 50:1 (2008): 105.

55. Carlos de la Torre, “Rafael Correa: un populista del siglo XXI,” in *¿Qué Democracia en América Latina?* Isidoro Cheresky, ed. (Buenos Aires: CLACSO Prometeo, 2012), 256–257.

56. Jan Werner Müller, *What is Populism?* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 40.

57. Zúquete, “Missionary Politics,” 100.

commanded, “I demand absolute loyalty to me. I am not an individual, I am the people.”⁵⁸ Those who did not belong to the people with which he identified were viewed as the external and antinational—the dangerous other.

Unlike Chávez’s autocratic constructs of the people as one, the views of the people held by Morales and the MAS were plural. Bolivia’s 2009 constitution declared it to be a plurinational and communitarian state. Nonetheless, Morales at times attempted to be the sole voice of the people. When indigenous people from the lowlands challenged his policies of mineral extraction, they were dismissed as having been manipulated by foreign NGOs and as not authentically indigenous. But because of the power of social movements in whose name he argues he is ruling, Morales has not been able to impose his vision of the people-as-one.⁵⁹

“The people” is performed and embodied in struggles and confrontations between politicians who claim to be their leaders—even their saviors—and those constructed as their enemies. Drawing attention through innovative use of television to create media spectacles, and social media like Twitter, Trump’s campaign, like that of other populists, also made ample use of mass rallies, at which Trump would inspire his followers, who were for the most part whites, that they were no longer a “besieged minority.” Finally, a politician who claimed to represent their interests and identities had come to the fore, addressing them and thousands like them. As Trump said, he was the candidate of “the forgotten men and women of this country”: the white working and middle class.⁶⁰ To those “who attended his rallies, the event itself symbolized a rising tide.”⁶¹

Rafael Correa, a college professor of economics turned politician, creatively used television, the Internet, and mass rallies. In his first bid for the presidency of Ecuador in 2006, he blended music and dance with speech-making. He spoke briefly, presenting an idea, and then music was played, and Correa and the crowd sang along to the campaign tunes and danced. When the music stopped, Correa spoke briefly again, and his words were again followed by music, songs, and dance. These innovations allowed people to participate and built supporters’ feelings that under Correa’s leadership all his followers were part

58. Luis Gómez Calcaño and Nancy Arenas, “El populismo chavista: autoritarismo electoral para amigos y enemigos,” *Cuadernos del CENDES* 82 (2013): 20.

59. Nancy Postero, “El pueblo boliviano de composición plural. A look at Plurinationalism in Bolivia,” in *The Promise and Perils of Populism*, Carlos de la Torre, ed. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2015), 422.

60. Scott Shane, “Combative Populist Steve Bannon Found His Man in Donald Trump” November 27, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/27/us/politics/steve-bannon-white-house.html>, accessed June 15, 2018.

61. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 226.

of a common political project, a “citizens’ revolution” against neoliberal politicians.⁶²

Populist mass rallies are designed to gratify followers and to make them feel that they are “right.” Trump often animated his audience by urging them along with, “Let’s go and have fun tonight.” Chávez’s mass rallies were often parties where he and his followers danced, and proudly occupied public spaces.⁶³ Ecuadorian populist Abdalá Bucaram in his presidential campaign of 1996 used music and humor to make fun of elites and challenge their symbolic power. He questioned the social order by poking fun at it, as when he referred to women of high society as “a bunch of lazy old women who have never cooked or ironed.” On the other hand, he also accepted and strengthened the structural bases of domination. He believed in neoliberalism, professing that it would benefit the poor. However, Bucaram’s authoritarian appropriation of the people’s will, which he claimed to embody, posed fundamental dangers to the nation’s democracy, and he was deposed after six months in the presidency.⁶⁴

Both Chávez and Bucaram politicized the feelings of exclusion and anger to speak to the humiliations that the poor and the non-white have to endure in daily life. Other populists used violence to generate solidarity. “Violent antagonism played a particularly strong role in the case of George Wallace [four-term governor of Alabama, famed for fighting black students’ admission to the University of Alabama], the threat, anticipation and performance of which was central to his image and success.”⁶⁵ Trump has used verbal and physical racial violence to mark frontiers between his people and the out-groups, and to arouse anger at these groups at his rallies. The sociologist Arlie Hochschild has reported some of Trump’s solutions for what to do with those protesting at his rallies: “I’d like to punch him in the face.” “Knock the crap out of him, would you? I promise you I will pay the legal fees.”⁶⁶ During a campaign rally, Trump pointed to a critic, and declared, “There is a remnant left over there. Maybe get the remnant out. Get the remnant out.” The crowd, taking its cue, then tried to root out other people who might be dissenters, all the while screaming “USA.” The candidate interjected “Isn’t this more fun than a regular boring rally?”⁶⁷ Some Trump supporters have felt empowered to attack non-whites. In Boston, for example, two white men beat and urinated on a homeless Latino man saying,

62. De la Torre, *Populist Seduction*, 184.

63. Carlos Carcione, “Como en abril del 2002,” <https://www.aporrea.org/actualidad/a174691.html>.

64. De la Torre, *Populist Seduction*, 89.

65. Joseph Lowndes, “From Founding Violence to Political Hegemony: The Conservative Populism of George Wallace,” in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Francisco Panizza, ed. (London: Verso, 2005), 148.

66. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 224.

67. Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons From the Twentieth Century* (New York: Tim Duggan Books, 2017), 45.

“Trump was right—all these illegals need to be deported.” Instead of denouncing them, Trump justified their attack, stating that “people who are following me are very passionate. They love this country, and they want this country to be great again.”⁶⁸

Populist gatherings are also intended to make a leader into a character larger than life. Chávez was elevated into a savior who had risked his life leading a military insurrection against president Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1992. At a rally launching his candidacy in July 1998, the former leader of a coup d'état was transformed into the embodiment of the democratic ideal: “Chávez donned his trademark paratrooper’s red beret and pumped his fist in the air before a cheering throng of ten thousand supporters . . . ‘Go ahead, call me a coup leader,’ he bellowed. Then he added: ‘Raise your hands if you think the coup was justified.’ A sea of hands went up.”⁶⁹

From the beginning of his campaign, Trump has referred to his extraordinariness. “We need a truly great leader now. We need a leader that wrote *The Art of the Deal* . . . We need somebody that can take the brand of the United States and make it great again.”⁷⁰ Billionaire Donald Trump, himself “not a perfect fit for upper class America,” has claimed to represent people’s dreams for social mobility.⁷¹ He has flaunted his wealth; his name has become a brand for skyscrapers, hotels, casinos, and other commodities; he has owned the Miss Universe franchise; and he has been and is a media celebrity. People at his rallies told Arlie Hochschild they were amazed to “be in the presence of such a man.”⁷² Despite his wealth, he was like common people, but also incredibly superior to all of them. He shared their taste for wrestling, but unlike most fans he was inducted into the World Wrestling Entertainment Hall of Fame in 2013, with the words “Donald Trump is a ‘WrestleMania’ institution.”⁷³

Like Juan Perón, Hugo Chávez, and Rafael Correa, Trump has personalized politics and demonized enemies.⁷⁴ Unlike Hillary Clinton, who used a sophisticated technocratic language to make arguments about the economy and world politics, Trump resorted to commonplaces and generalities. He argued that what is needed to “Make America Great Again,” is a successful

68. Lowndes, “Populism,” 100.

69. Bart Jones, *iHugo!* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2007), 215–216.

70. Donald Trump, presidential candidacy announcement speech, June 16, 2015.

71. Judis, *The Populist Explosion*, 71.

72. Hochschild, *Strangers in Their Own Land*, 226.

73. Aaron Oster, “Donald Trump and WWE: How the Road to the White House Began with WrestleMania,” February 1, 2016, <https://www.rollingstone.com/sports/features/donald-trump-and-wwe-how-the-road-to-the-white-house-began-at-wrestlemania-20160201>, accessed June 15, 2018.

74. For examples of how populists in Latin America personalized politics, see De la Torre, *Populist Seduction*.

businessman and popular culture impresario who has not been corrupted by the deals of politicians and lobbyists. He stirred emotions, and was able to construct politics as a wrestling match between good (incarnated in his persona) and the crooked establishment (personified by Hilary Clinton). She was portrayed as the embodiment of all that is wrong with America. Without benefit of a trial, Trump and his followers condemned her to prison, chanting in his rallies “Lock her up!” Many supporters proudly wore tee shirts or carried signs that read “Hillary for Prison.”

Trump claimed to be “someone who could represent what Americans really think, and perhaps more importantly, feel.”⁷⁵ A member of the group Bikers for Trump told journalist Ed Pilkington that Trump “speaks his own mind.” A woman with the colors of the American flag in her hat manifested that Trump spoke from the heart, unlike professional politicians, “He’s down to our level. He speaks it like it is.”⁷⁶ British journalist Matt Taibbi, reports that a young Pennsylvanian supporter of Trump told him, “When Trump talks, I actually understand what he’s saying. . . . But like, when fricking Hillary Clinton talks, it just sounds like a bunch of bullshit.”⁷⁷

Like left-wing populists who confronted traditional political parties and the oligarchy, Trump has claimed that “the establishment, the media, the special interests, the lobbyists, the big donors, they are all against me.”⁷⁸ His final campaign TV ads indicted the “failed and corrupt political establishment” for giving up America’s sovereignty to global and greedy elites that brought “destruction to our factories.” Speaking over images of the predominantly white crowds that attended his rallies, he concluded, “The only thing that can stop this corrupt machine is you. I am doing this for the people and for the movement.”⁷⁹

POPULISTS IN POWER

In Latin America, populist governments included the formerly excluded but simultaneously undermined democracy from within. What lessons can we learn

75. Lowndes, “Populism,” 99.

76. Ed Pilkington, “Inside a Donald Trump Rally: Good People in a Feedback Loop of Paranoia and Hate,” October 30, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/oct/30/donald-trump-voters-rally-election-crowd>, accessed June 15, 2018.

77. Matt Taibbi, “Trump’s Payback,” *Rolling Stone*, December 1, 2016, 38.

78. Judis, *The Populist*, 72.

79. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-1354417/We-ll-country-Trump-s-final-campaign-ad-released.html>.

from Latin America to speculate about the future of democracy in America under Trump?⁸⁰

By 1950, after a constitutional reform that allowed Perón's reelection, all institutions of government were in Peronists' hands. Perón "had already replaced the members of the Supreme Court with staunch defenders of the regime, had gained firm control over Congress, and had tamed the labor movement."⁸¹ As historian Luis Alberto Romero argues, "At every level of government, all power was concentrated in the hands of the executive—whether mayor, governor, or president—making it clear that the movement and the nation were considered one."⁸²

Similarly, Hugo Chávez gained, in increments, near-absolute command of all institutions of the Venezuelan state. His supporters were a super-majority in the legislature, and in 2004 he put the highest judicial authority, the Supreme Tribunal of Justice, in the hands of loyal judges. Hundreds of lower court judges were fired and replaced by unconditional supporters.⁸³ The National Electoral Council was politicized. Even though the council made sure that the moment of voting was clean and free from fraud, it did not enforce rules during the electoral process but routinely favored Chávez and his candidates. In Ecuador, Rafael Correa also put loyal followers in charge of the electoral process and electoral board, the judicial system, and the offices and institutions that would validate accountability, such as ombudsman and comptroller.⁸⁴

To impose their versions of reality, Chávez and Correa created laws to control the content of what the privately owned media could publish or broadcast. In 2000, the Organic Law of Telecommunication allowed the Chávez government to suspend or revoke broadcasting concessions to private outlets whenever it was "convenient for the interest of the nation."⁸⁵ In 2013, Rafael Correa enacted a law that created a government institution tasked with monitoring and regulating the content of what the media could publish. These presidents took radio and television stations away from critics. Under Chávez, the Venezuelan state became the main communicator, controlling 64 percent of television channels.⁸⁶ Correa created a state media conglomerate that included the two

80. De la Torre, "Trump's Populism: Lessons from Latin America."

81. Mariano Plotkin, *Mañana es San Perón*, 98.

82. Luis Alberto Romero, *A History of Argentina*, 110.

83. Kirk Hawkins, "Responding to Radical Populism: Chavismo in Venezuela," *Democratization* 23:2 (2016): 252.

84. Carlos de la Torre and Andrés Ortiz Lemos, "Populist Polarization and the Slow Death of Democracy in Ecuador," *Democratization* 23:2 (2016): 225.

85. Javier Corrales, "Autocratic Legalism in Venezuela," *Journal of Democracy* 26:2 (2015): 39.

86. Corrales, "Autocratic Legalism," 41.

most watched TV stations in Ecuador, as well as several radio stations and newspapers.⁸⁷ Chávez and Correa suffocated the private media by reducing government advertisement to critical media venues and by manipulating the subsidies for the price of paper.⁸⁸ They used discriminatory legalism, understood as the use of formal legal authority in discretionary ways, to sue, harass, and intimidate journalists and private media owners.⁸⁹

Populist administrations regulated the work of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In Venezuela, NGOs that defended political rights or monitored the performances of public bodies were forbidden to receive international assistance.⁹⁰ Correa enacted legislation that gave the government the authority to sanction NGOs working in Ecuador for engaging in politics or for interfering in public policies in a way that contravened internal and external security or disturbed public peace. For example, the environmentalist organization Pachamama Alliance was closed down for deviating from the original organization's goals and for interfering with public policy and security.⁹¹

To counteract the power of labor unions and unionized teachers, students, and indigenous groups, loyal social movements were created from the top down. Protest was criminalized in these nations. Union leaders and striking workers, even if they were sympathizers of Chávez, were charged with terrorism.⁹² Hundreds of peasant and indigenous activists were accused of terrorism and sabotage in Ecuador.⁹³ In contrast to the old ruptures of democracy by means of a coup d'état, Chávez and Correa slowly displaced malfunctioning presidentialist democracies as they moved toward authoritarianism. These leaders created hybrid regimes based on elections conducted on skewed playing fields. They respected some democratic freedoms and institutions while simultaneously restricting the rights of the opposition.

At the time that Trump won the US presidential election, democracy in the United States was not in crisis. Even though citizens distrusted parties and traditional politicians, the institutional framework of democracy was robust. The US constitution “separates governance between three branches of government, breaks up representation over time and space (staggered elections, overlapping electoral units), divides sovereignty between the national

87. De la Torre and Ortiz Lemos, “Populist Polarization,” 231.

88. Silvio Waisbord, *Vox populista, medios, periodismo, democracia* (Buenos Aires: Gedisa 2013).

89. Kurt Weyland, “The Threat from the Populist Left,” *Journal of Democracy* 24:3 (July 2013), 23.

90. Javier Corrales, “Autocratic Legalism,” 39.

91. De la Torre and Ortiz, “Populist Polarization,” 229–230.

92. Consuelo Iranzo, “Chávez y la política laboral en Venezuela, 1999–2010,” *Revista Trabajo* 5:8 (2011): 28–31.

93. De la Torre and Ortiz Lemos, “Populist Polarization.”

government and the states, and filters political expression into two parties.”⁹⁴ Under these institutional constraints, it is difficult to find the kind of majoritarian control of government that has emerged in Latin America, and until Trump’s election populism was confined to the margins of the political system. Under this hypothesis, the institutional framework of US democracy and civil society could be assumed strong enough to process populist challenges without major destabilizing consequences.

An alternative and plausible scenario is that Trump, who comes to the presidency at a time when executive power exceeds that of the legislature, with the US Senate and Congress in the hands of Republicans, and with the power to name ultraconservatives to the Supreme Court and lower courts, could attempt to follow the Latin American populist playbook of controlling all the institutions of the state. He would put loyalists in key positions of power. He has threatened Republicans who do not support him wholeheartedly, and it is not inconceivable that he might want to transform the Republican Party—a party to which he has no long-lasting loyalty—into his personal instrument.⁹⁵

Trump does not like the media. At his campaign rallies, he led his followers to heckle journalists, who were seated in a separate section. He threatened to use libel law, and menaced newspapers with lawsuits. After assuming power, he tweeted that the *New York Times* and the NBC, ABC, CBS, and CNN television networks are [collectively] the “enemy of the American people.”⁹⁶ His policies of massive deportation, stop-and-frisk in poor and predominantly black and Latino neighborhoods, surveillance of American Muslims, and the rollback of gender and LGBTQ rights lead to confrontations with civil and human rights organizations.

Even if the institutional framework of democracy does not collapse under Trump, he has already inflicted considerable damage on the democratic public sphere. Hate speech and the denigration of minorities are replacing the politics of cultural recognition and tolerance built by the feminist and anti-racist social movements since the 1960s. Trump’s incremental attacks on civil liberties and human rights, and confrontations with the media—as they have in Venezuela and Ecuador—disfigure democracy.⁹⁷

94. Lowndes, “Populism,” 97.

95. Joshua Green, *Devil’s Bargain*, 190.

96. Jenna Johnson and Matea Gold, “Trump Calls the Media ‘The Enemy of the American People,’” *Washington Post*, February 17, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-politics/wp/2017/02/17/trump-calls-the-media-the-enemy-of-the-american-people/?utm_term=.099b48375f77, accessed June 15, 2018.

97. Nadia Urbinati, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth, and the People* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This lecture has shown how different constructions of “the people” can lead to autocratic forms of populism. Contemporary right-wing American populism is based on ethnic portrayals of the people, and racist and xenophobic constructs of the out-groups. Its adherents also view the people as a unitary collectivity threatened by non-white and Muslim foreign others. Right-wing populists like Trump do not promise more democracy. He looks backward, and imagines the restoration of a glorious exclusionary past.

The populist promise of redemption made in the name of a unitary people by Chávez and Correa ended in authoritarianism. In these nations, populism did not limit itself to restricting the rights and freedoms of the oligarchy, the right-wing, and the upper classes. Chávez and Correa silenced, co-opted, and repressed critical social movements, NGOs, and parties of the left. They used discriminatory legalism to silence critics, and undermined the freedoms and rights that would allow social movements to push for their demands. Populists did not obliterate democracy. They created hybrid regimes that preserved some democratic freedoms like elections, and regulated but did not totally dominate civil society and the public sphere. Their hybridity meant that some institutional spaces could be used to resist the leader’s attempts to create the fantasy of the people as one.

Chávez and Correa tried to construct the people as one homogenous entity whose will they claimed to embody. Evo Morales and the MAS differed from them in that their autocratic constructs included a more pluralistic view of the people. Morales at times tried to follow the populist playbook by attempting to be the only true voice of all Bolivians, yet other powerful social movements used the same notion—that they were the voice of the people—to challenge Morales.

Populists in power attack the institutions that are “an indispensable bulwark against political despotism.”⁹⁸ Constitutionalism, the separation of powers, and freedom of speech and assembly and the press are necessary to the politics of participatory democracy: they strengthen the public sphere, and they allow independent social movements to push for their democratizing demands. Latin American populists who came to power, even those who promised greater democracy and the end of neoliberalism, targeted precisely the constitutional framework of democracy. They began to derail democracy by using democratic procedures and tools such as elections to achieve undemocratic ends. In the

98. Richard Wolin, “The Disoriented Left: A Critique of Left Schmittianism,” in Richard Wolin, *The Frankfurt School Revisited* (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), 251.

end, their systematic attacks on civil rights and liberties and their attempts to control and co-opt civil society and the public sphere pushed democracies in crisis into authoritarianism.

More institutionalized democracies are not immune to populist autocratic challenges. As in Perón's Argentina, or in the Bolivarian nations, Trump's politics of populist polarization is eroding the possibilities of democratic dialogue and compromise. He has already disfigured the democratic and tolerant aspects of the public sphere by normalizing sexism, hate speech, xenophobia, and racism. The examples of Chávez and Correa illustrated that the future of democratic institutions is uncertain under Trump.

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