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Has Populism Eroded the Quality of European Democracy?

Insights from Italy and the Netherlands

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Introduction

Populism is by no means a new or a fleeting phenomenon. While populism in Europe seems to be relatively recent, it has had a longstanding presence in Latin American politics, dating back to Peronism. In fact, Latin American countries such as Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia have witnessed a populist surge since the 1990s, similar to Europe. The recent election of Donald Trump in the United States demonstrates the global nature of populism. Given the persistent presence of populism, even in well-established democracies, the precise relationship between populism and democracy becomes a pertinent question. In particular, the question is often raised whether populism poses a threat to democracy, as the Introduction to this volume explains. Paradoxically, populism is in its essence of a democratic nature, because its point of departure is the ultimate right of the sovereign people to govern (see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; and Urbinati 1998). Indeed, conceptualizing democracy without reference to the people is inconceivable. Almost all definitions of democracy, from electoral notions (e.g., Schumpeter 2013 [1942]) to more radical versions of democracy (e.g., Pateman 1970), rest on the sovereignty of the people.

The picture becomes more complicated, however, when we place populism within the context of *liberal* democracy. First, to the extent that democracy is equated with the protection of societal pluralism, populism

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often seems to be in conflict with liberal democracy, given that it is critical of pluralism and minority rights. Second, because liberal democracy entails some form of procedural justice, it may be at odds with populism. This is especially the case given populism's emphasis on popular sovereignty, which may assign priority to the direct will of the people over procedural justice (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 83). Since contemporary democracy is liberal in nature, the pertinent question is whether populism constitutes a threat to *liberal* democracy.

In this chapter, we conceive of populism as a thin-centered ideology. All populist parties have a Manichean conception of politics: politics is seen as a battle between the pure people and the corrupt elite (Mudde 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017). Populist parties differ, however, in their notions of who constitutes the people and the elite: radical right-wing populists tend to have a nativist idea of the pure people, whereas left-wing populists point to the exploited (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; March 2007), and market-liberal populists think in terms of the honest, hard-working citizen, whom they view as oppressed by the overly bureaucratic welfare state (see Sawer and Laycock 2009). In turn, politicians and liberal intellectuals constitute the wicked elite in the eyes of radical right-wing populists, whereas left-wing populists lambast the global financial elite, and market-liberal populists condemn bureaucrats and welfare state politicians. Accordingly, despite their common song of the people versus the elite, populist parties borrow from other ideologies across the political spectrum to complement their populism (Mudde 2004; Stanley 2008).

This chapter seeks to assess the extent to which populism threatens liberal democracy by employing the set of criteria developed by Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 83), who distinguish between four positive and four negative potential effects of populism on democracy. We apply these criteria to two parliamentary democracies, Italy and the Netherlands.

We have chosen these two countries for several reasons. First, populism has been relatively successful in both Italy and the Netherlands. Italy has experienced three waves of populism, which have included three distinct parties. Populism began in the 1980s with the emergence of the Northern League (Lega Nord: LN), grew in size with the rise of Forza Italia (FI) in the 1990s, and has experienced a resurgence since 2009 with the formation of the Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle: M5S). Although populism came rather late to the Netherlands, it has had a constant presence since the emergence of the List Pim Fortuyn (LPF) in the 2002

elections. The populist upsurge in the Netherlands then continued with Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid: PVV). Dutch populism is now experiencing a third wave with the Forum voor Democratie (FVD), led by Thierry Baudet.[1]

Second, the dominant populist parties in both countries, FI and the LN in Italy, and the PVV in the Netherlands, have had governmental experience. Silvio Berlusconi, the head of the FI, is the only populist leader who became prime minister of a Western European country; he managed to hold this powerful position, off and on, for about a decade.[2] Consequently, for an investigation of populism's impact on liberal democracy, the Italian case is especially instructive. The LN, meanwhile, served as Berlusconi's main coalition partner. Similarly, Wilders' PVV in the early 2010s helped sustain a Dutch government through a detailed support agreement. Thus, populist actors in both Italy and the Netherlands are large enough to have a substantial impact on democracy, allowing us to apply Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser's criteria.

Third, although the two countries have both had important populist movements, they differ substantially in two respects, allowing us to identify specific conditions that may shape the effect of populism on democracy. To begin with, the Netherlands and Italy have different party systems: whereas accommodation prevails among Dutch parties, even across the left/right political spectrum, left–right confrontation runs high in Italy. In addition, these two countries vary significantly in the timing and political context of the emergence of their populist parties. These differences allow for particularly interesting inferences on the possible consequences of populism for democracy.

Fourth, Italy and the Netherlands have an important institutional similarity that offers an interesting contrast to the case of Donald Trump. Because both of these European countries are parliamentary democracies, the analysis below can elucidate the impact of this system of government, compared to the presidential system in the United States.

The chapter is structured as follows. First, we outline our criteria for assessing the positive and negative impacts that populism can have on liberal democracies. Second, we place Italy and the Netherlands within the context of European populism. Third, we trace the three waves of

[1] There are other actors that may be considered populist, such as the Socialist Party (SP). Due to space considerations, we have chosen not to include them in our analysis.

[2] Italy's current head of government, Giuseppe Conte, leads a coalition of two populist parties, namely the LN and M5S.

populism in Italy and the Netherlands. We then assess the impact of populism on Italian and Dutch democracy, with the intention of drawing conclusions for the US case.

We conclude that several patterns are discernible. Populist parties in both countries were able to bring new, often uncomfortable issues to the table, ranging from immigration in Italy and the Netherlands to decentralization in Italy. Arguably, this expansion of political debate increased the level of democratic legitimacy for those segments of the population who had felt that their interests and concerns were excluded from public debate and political decision-making. At the same time, however, it is also clear that populist leaders polarized politics and turned it into a moralistic struggle, often exacerbating political animosities between the left and the right, in particular. In the Italian case, where we find a bipolar alternation of political power and where the left and right compete directly against one another, populism solidified and intensified this ideological conflict. In the Netherlands, where consensus politics prevails, we see two developments occurring: electoral competition has increased between the left and the right, while the political spectrum has been pulled to the right, especially regarding cultural issues. Nevertheless, the long tradition of consensus and coalition politics means that government formation has attempted to bridge political cleavages, which were often introduced by populist forces.

In sum, we find several patterns that are important in both the Netherlands and Italy. Populist movements have sought to incorporate previously marginalized voices into the political system, introducing new, often controversial issues. These inclusionary moves have had a dual effect: they often mobilize those who feel disenfranchised, but they also lead to political polarization and to moralistic dogmatism in political discourse.

In the conclusion, we reflect on what our insights from Europe may imply for the United States. Three important lessons emerge. First, we can expect a hardening of political discourse, stoked by populists as well as anti-populists. Second, the electoral defeat of a populist movement does not mean the demise of populism and the definitive victory of liberal democracy. Populism is a political response to deeper structural divisions within society, which liberal democratic parties have failed to address. As long as the problems and discontent that gave rise to populism persist, it can easily reappear. Third, and most importantly, populism is unlikely to do serious damage to democratic institutions in advanced democracies, such as Italy, the Netherlands, and the United States, where the

institutional framework is strong and relatively resilient. Although populist leaders in these countries routinely violate democratic norms, their ability to undermine democratic institutions, such as the media and the judiciary, is limited.

Assessing Populism's Effect on Liberal Democracy

The democratic credentials of populism have always been a topic of hot debate. The most sanguine observers have regarded populism as a movement that succeeded in incorporating disenfranchised citizens into the political system. The fiercest critics, by contrast, have depicted populism as a path toward authoritarianism (Urbinati 1998). The current public debate places much emphasis on the non-democratic aspects and repercussions of populism, whose surge has sparked counter-movements across the globe. In the academic world, discussions of European populism have produced an overemphasis on radical right populist parties, due in part to their controversial anti-immigration message. This chapter seeks to present a more balanced view by assessing eight effects that a populist party may have on the quality and nature of liberal democracy, as summarized by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017: 83).

On the one hand, these authors distinguish four positive potential effects. First, populism may represent those citizens who feel excluded by the political elite. Second, populism may produce policies that reflect the preferences of disenfranchised voters. Third, populism may go beyond pure representation and integrate excluded voices into the political system. Lastly, populism may increase the legitimacy that citizens confer on the political system. In essence, therefore, populism may enfranchise the disenfranchised.

On the other hand, they identify four potential negative effects of populism on democracy. First, populism may disregard minority rights and thus hinder efforts at integration. Second, it may erode the institutions supporting the framework of minority rights. Third, populism may promote new political divisions that compromise political cooperation. Lastly, populism's Manichean worldview may foment a political culture in which moral antagonism thrives (see Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 83). In essence, therefore, populism may polarize the political system. Below, we describe the circumstances under which populist leaders in the Netherlands and Italy walked the thin line between enfranchising excluded voices and concerns and exacerbating divisions in the political system.

The Rise of Populist Parties in Western Europe

Populist parties have been commonplace in Western European democracies, especially since the turn of the millennium. In the 1970s and 1980s populism looked to many observers like a temporary phenomenon: the 1970s witnessed an unexpected upsurge of populist parties, such as the Danish and the Norwegian Progress Parties, followed in the 1980s and the 1990s by the success of the French National Front, Italy's Northern League, the Austrian Freedom Party, and the Swiss People's Party. Increasingly, however, it became clear that populism was there to stay (Zaslove 2008). At present there are more populist parties in more European countries than there were ten to 15 years ago. Moreover, while initially populist parties arose mainly on the right, they can now be found across the ideological spectrum.

In many countries, the recurring electoral success of populist parties has made them a stable component of the party system. Examples include Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Italy, Norway, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. Many populist parties have even succeeded in passing the litmus test of leadership succession (e.g., the Austrian Freedom Party, the Northern League, and the French National Front). Finally, populist parties have demonstrated that they are capable of governing both as full-fledged coalition partners (e.g., in Austria and Italy) and in supporting roles (e.g., in Denmark and the Netherlands). In some cases they have returned to power (e.g., in Austria, Italy, and Denmark).

In our two country cases, Italy and the Netherlands, populism has long played an important role. In Italy populism was prominent long before the populist wave of the twenty-first century. In the Netherlands populism appeared at the national level only in the 2000s, but since its initial appearance it has continued to thrive.

In Italy, populism first emerged with the rise of various regionalist movements in the 1980s, which merged into the Northern League in 1991. In the early 1990s the LN espoused regionalist populism, but in the mid- to late 1990s the LN moved toward a radical right variant of populism (Zaslove 2011). Forza Italia, founded by media mogul Silvio Berlusconi just before the 1994 general election, embraced market-liberal populism (McCarthy 1997; McCarthy 1996). Finally, the Five Star Movement is the most recent populist party to emerge in Italy. Initially the M5S combined populism with post-material issues, while more recently it has campaigned on issues often associated with the right, making it hard to classify this fluid grouping on a left–right dimension (Corbetta 2017).

Populism came rather late to the Netherlands. Its first real incarnation was the List Pim Fortuyn. This party combined an anti-immigrant and anti-Islamic message with elements of a liberal stance. For instance, the LPF opposed the overly bureaucratic welfare state and advocated free-market economic policies (see Lucardie 2008). Since the death of the LPF's leader, Pim Fortuyn, and the subsequent demise of his party, the Party of Freedom, led by Geert Wilders, has become the dominant populist party. It espouses a strong anti-Islam and anti-EU message (Vossen 2017). More recently the Forum voor Democratie has emerged as a new populist contender. In both Italy and the Netherlands, therefore, populism has established itself as a permanent fixture of the political system.

Populism Italian Style: Three Waves

In order to assess the impact of populism on Italian democracy, we need to focus on three phases: first, the origins and initial rise of populism in the 1980s, spearheaded by the LN; second, the institutionalization of populist parties, specifically the LN and the FI, in the 1990s; and, finally, the counter-populist response by the M5S to the dominance of FI and, to a lesser extent, the LN in the 2000s. Elsewhere, we have referred to this development as "mutating populism" (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016) – that is, a situation in which new populist parties emerge in reaction to earlier forms of populism.

Phase 1: The Northern League and the Origins of Italian Populism

Populism emerged in Italy in the 1980s with the rise of various regionalist movements in the north, in particular in Lombardy, the Veneto, and Piedmont (Diamanti 1996). These social movements started organizing as so-called movement parties (see Kitschelt 2006), which achieved their initial success due to several structural changes that Italy experienced during the 1970s and the 1980s. First, the recession of the 1970s ushered in a process of economic restructuring. The epicenter of Italy's industrial production moved from the traditional "Industrial Triangle" (Milan, Turin, Genoa) to what is called the "Third Italy," located in the northeastern and central regions. This shift coincided with a transformation from large-scale factory production to small and medium-sized, often family-based, businesses and industrial districts (Zaslove 2011).

The second change concerned the unfreezing of the political system. The Italian party system had been stagnant since World War II: because of the Cold War, the largest opposition party, the Italian Communist Party

(Partito Comunista Italiano: PCI), was not considered *salonfähig* – that is, admissible to the halls of government power. Moreover, the largest party, Christian Democracy (Democrazia Cristiana: DC), was not large enough to govern on its own, but needed to rely on the support of several smaller parties (see Diamanti 1996; Biorcio 1997; and Zaslove 2011). The result was decades of similar coalitions in which the DC dominated a center-right (and sometimes center-left) government. Effectively, this DC dominance caused a lack of true democratic alternation (see Dahl 1971).

In the 1980s this socioeconomic and political situation was no longer sustainable. First, the DC's economic policies were seen as increasingly out of touch with the needs and demands of large segments of the population located in its traditional electoral stronghold, the above-mentioned Third Italy. Second, the ruling DC was viewed as a southern-dominated political party that sustained its predominance through patronage and corruption in the south. Due to these geographic tensions, the regional leagues began to challenge this stagnant and archaic political system. Soon the Northern League, under the leadership of Umberto Bossi, espoused a political message that combined regionalism and populism (Schmidtke 1993; Biorcio 1997). This populist revolt galvanized support in northern Italy by using a regionalist identity discourse and populist appeals that pitted a pure people against a corrupt elite.

As with other forms of populism, Italian populism cannot stand on its own. Accordingly, the LN combined populism with regionalism, nationalism, and a radical right ideology revolving around nativism and authoritarianism. In the 1990s, when the LN also highlighted its opposition to immigration and espoused demands for "law and order," it achieved significant electoral gains even before the collapse of the so-called First Republic. In the 1992 general election the LN received more than 10 percent of the vote in Piedmont and the Veneto, while in Lombardy it garnered approximately 20 percent (Biorcio 1997: 64).

As populist mobilization started in northern Italy, the end of global communism and the discovery of entrenched corruption among the DC (the *mani pulite* scandal) led to the complete collapse of Italy's post-WWII party system. The main political parties, especially the DC, fell into disrepute because they were implicated in a broad web of scandals and corruption. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent transformation of the PCI into a social democratic party meant that voters who no longer supported the DC but who had strategically voted for the party out of fear of communism were now free to switch to a party such as the LN (Passarelli 2015: 228–229). As a result of both developments, most

parties that had dominated the post-WWII era were transformed (e.g., the Communist Party) or fell apart because of their involvement in the corruption scandals (e.g., the DC).

These profound changes ushered in the so-called Second Republic, which revolved around a new electoral and party system. Moving from pure proportional representation (PR) to a combination of PR and majoritarianism, Italy's new electoral rules were designed to offer voters a clear choice between left and right. Subsequently the party system developed into a bipolar multi-party configuration in which smaller parties clustered around center-left and center-right positions, creating a window for the rise of a new type of populism (FI) that would prove capable of governing.

Phase 2: Forza Italia and the Governing Experience of Italian Populism

Forza Italia is the key actor in the second phase of Italian populism. Its unexpected success in 1994 helped to strengthen and eventually institutionalize Italian populism. Silvio Berlusconi, after a long association with socialist leader Bettino Craxi, decided to enter politics himself by founding a separate political party: Forza Italia (fans' battle cry for the nation's successful soccer team). After all, the success of the LN had taught Berlusconi that the political system was no longer closed and that there was ample electoral space on the center-right. Thus, Berlusconi sought to exploit the demise of the DC by forming his own populist movement at the national level.

Unlike the DC – or any Italian party, for that matter – Berlusconi's FI offered a market liberal alternative that was almost like that offered by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Party in the United Kingdom. Indeed, there was considerable support among Italians for a party that championed less state, less bureaucracy, lower taxes, and more market (McCarthy 1996; McCarthy 1997). In addition, Berlusconi worried about the electoral prowess of the PCI's successor, the newly formed Democratic Party of the Left (Partito Democratico della Sinistra: PDS). Even though the fear of communism had waned, Berlusconi was able to profit from, but also to fuel, latent fears of the left, a game he would continue playing even in the 2010s.

Employing the resources of his media empire, Berlusconi succeeded in building a new party from scratch in just a few months, and proved highly successful in the 1994 election. Gaining 21 percent of the vote,[3] FI was

[3] Italian Ministry of Interior: see www.interno.gov.it/it.

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able to form a center-right government with the LN and the post-fascist Alleanza Nazionale (AN). FI is a highly personalized party, thriving on the image and charisma of its leader (McDonnell 2013). As with the LN, Berlusconi conceives of the hard-working common man, especially the entrepreneur, as representing the people. More than the LN, however, he holds a relatively nuanced conception of the elite: being a member of the economic elite himself, Berlusconi concentrates his attacks on the left-wing political elites and the judicial elites in his Manichean view of good versus bad (see McCarthy 1997).

The change in the electoral system and the unexpected rise of center-right populism transformed the Italian party system. The new electoral rules were meant to give the Italian electorate the possibility of choosing between distinct alternatives. The success of Berlusconi's electoral coalition in 1994, combined with his tempestuous first government, caused the party system to polarize as the center-left rallied against Berlusconi as a person, a party leader, and an ideological opponent (see Bartolini, Chiaramonte, and D'Alimonte 2004).

Overall, the dominant political culture in Italy took on increasingly Manichean tendencies, with the center-right and the center-left perceiving each other as arch-enemies. Italian politics thus became *polarized*, ironically even more so than during the First Republic (see Verbeek, Zaslove, and Rooduijn 2018). Moreover, political conflict turned increasingly *moralistic*, because the opposition and Berlusconi viewed each other as ethically reprehensible: Berlusconi accused the center-left of being crypto-communist, and the center-left charged Berlusconi with being corrupt, authoritarian, and unfit for power due to the conflict of interests caused by his media empire. This polarization and moralistic struggle galvanized the emerging bipolar yet fragmented party system throughout the 1990s and 2000s.

Phase 3: A New Twist in Italian Populism: The Rise of the Five Star Movement

In 2009 Beppe Grillo, spurred on by public enthusiasm for the increasing political edge of his standup comedy shows, founded his own political party: the Five Star Movement. The five stars represented post-material values that Grillo regarded as worth fighting for: public water, transportation, development, the public use of the internet, and the environment (Pedrazzani and Pinto 2015: 79). This orientation gave the M5S a progressive, left-wing flavor. Italy's dominant political elites, in particular those surrounding Berlusconi, have constituted the main target of the

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M5S's anti-elitism. Grillo has accused them of representing a corrupt political class and attacked them as "the political caste."

In recent years the M5S has become more critical of the European Union and has at times even taken an anti-immigrant stance, making it look more right-wing. Throughout its existence the M5S has advocated an innovative sort of participatory politics based on new technologies. Accordingly, it has depicted itself as a democratic movement rather than a political party (see della Porta et al. 2017). Grillo argues that, with the rise of the internet, politics operate differently. M5S has consistently advocated more direct participation by citizens, and has designed its own system for selecting candidates and determining party positions in parliament in a way that allows ordinary M5S members to directly influence these processes (Tronconi 2015; Corbetta 2017).

Grillo's movement has steadily grown, becoming the single largest party in parliament in the 2013 general election. It did not join the government, however, refusing to form a coalition with any other party. The M5S repeated its success in the 2018 parliamentary election, winning one-third of the popular vote. In this contest the LN also scored an all-time high of 17 percent of the popular vote, and therefore it took over the baton of center-right leadership from the FI. Based on their combined majority, the M5S and LN teamed up in a populist coalition government under Giuseppe Conte.

Effects of the Three Waves of Populism on Italian Democracy

As argued above, populism can have both positive and negative effects on the quality and functioning of democracy. Positive effects include giving voice to and mobilizing marginalized sectors, and producing policies that represent the interests of those who feel disenfranchised. These inclusionary moves may legitimize the political system and induce citizens to feel better represented.

During the first and second phases of Italian populism the LN and then FI managed to place new issues on the political agenda. The LN, in particular, successfully challenged the existing political consensus by raising controversial issues, including the questions of immigration and EU integration. In these ways, the LN gave voice to a segment of society that no longer felt that its concerns were represented by the traditional political elites in Rome and that saw itself threatened by migration and European integration. Emphasizing ("inventing") a distinct northern

identity, the LN was able to mobilize northern center-right voters and to include them in the political system.

The LN also stimulated a debate regarding economic policy and Italy's development model, arguing that the old policies centered on the traditional Industrial Triangle were no longer adequate. Its fellow populist party, FI, was also able to galvanize loyal support among the center-right and among advocates of market reform. Its core constituents were mostly older voters, who supported lower taxes and higher pensions and who were particularly apprehensive of the left. Whether FI and the LN were able to mobilize new voters or whether they were simply able to incorporate voters from other parties is not clear, though volatility did increase substantially in the 1994 election (Verbeek, Zaslove, and Rooduijn 2018).

As for the potential positive effects of the M5S on Italian democracy, Grillo's party also drew new voters into the political system, especially younger people, particularly in its early years. Moreover, the M5S raised new issues, focusing on institutional reform and corruption. Opening politics to the young and to a new crop of politicians gave the M5S a unique place in Italy's political landscape, which had previously been dominated by old professional politicians. Last but not least, the M5S's practice of using the internet to enhance participation constitutes an interesting democratic innovation (Ceri and Veltri 2017). Even so, it is too early to tell how successful the party has been in renewing democracy.

As noted in other chapters in this book, populism may also have negative effects on democracy. In short, populism may hinder minority rights, it may erode the workings of democratic institutions, and, perhaps most importantly, it may polarize politics and turn it into a moralistic struggle, thus making collaboration more difficult. The first and second phases of Italian populism put two types of political institutions under strain: the media and the judiciary. While the media and the courts had always been politicized to some degree, Berlusconi, as a media mogul who owned numerous publishing houses and television stations, was able to challenge the information monopoly held by established parties. When he became prime minister he also took charge of the state-run television and media stations, prompting considerable concern about his undue influence on the media (*Stampa* 2006a; *Stampa* 2006b). In addition, Berlusconi had frequent conflicts with the Italian legal system, because of his populist transgressions, but also because of his financial and personal endeavors. The FI leader skillfully turned adversity to advantage, attacking the judges as being biased (e.g., *Stampa* 2006c).

It does not seem, however, that minority rights and democratic institutions suffered significant, lasting damage. The leaders of both the LN and FI commonly made inflammatory and outrageous comments. In particular, the LN drew strong criticism for what critics decried as its racist rhetoric. The EU Commission, for instance, expressed concern about the LN's pejorative pronouncements concerning Roma and Albanians (TicinOnline 2002). Berlusconi was less concerned with immigration and therefore did less damage in this respect, but the populist prime minister challenged the democratic framework through his antagonism toward legal institutions. In the end, however, Berlusconi fell from power in 2011 in part due to his norm violations and legal troubles (Fella and Ruzza 2013: 44–45). Additionally, international pressure had helped mobilize Berlusconi's opponents in Italy (Verbeek and Zaslove 2016: 315–316). Ultimately, therefore, public opinion and the threat of judicial action, coinciding with international pressure, managed to constrain populist leadership, helping to protect the institutional framework of Italian democracy.

Populism also polarized politics and exacerbated the ideological differences between Italy's political parties. Ironically, the party system was more divided during the 1990s and early 2000s than during the Cold War period (Verbeek, Zaslove, and Rooduijn 2018). Polarization prevailed along several dimensions. The LN stirred up moralistic divisions and fomented political conflict. A strident discourse pitting the north of the country against the south, and the common citizen against the corrupt elite, was spreading. The LN's denigration of the "backward" south then mutated during the mid-1990s into opposition to immigration from "backward" countries. New, stricter immigration laws were implemented under Berlusconi's center-right governments between 2001 and 2006 and again from 2008 to 2011 (Cento-Bull 2010; Verbeek and Zaslove 2015; Zincone 2006).

Berlusconi also sought to demonize the left, and frequently attacked leftist politicians and judges. In return, the left demonized Berlusconi as the prototypical authoritarian, amoral politician propelled only by self-interest and greed. Berlusconi's negative image was reinforced by criticism raised in the international press and by deliberately unflattering comments from world leaders such as Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy.

In a similar vein, the M5S also polarized politics, and for years refused to form a coalition with any other political party. This intransigent stance

weakened democratic governability. After all, the M5S emerged from the 2013 election as the largest party, yet it held an insufficient number of seats to form a government without a coalition partner. This obstructionist strategy reflected its specific "anti-caste" stance and thus pitted the M5S against all other parties, deliberately pushing the Italian party system from a bipolar to a tripolar constellation: The center-right, the center-left, and M5S now confront each other. Uncertainty looms since the 2018 election smashed the center-left and led the LN and the M5S to form an exclusively populist coalition government, defying the bipolarism of the Second Republic.

Second, because the M5S cannot be aligned along a traditional left–right axis (Di Virgilio et al. 2015), its emergence has created a cross-cutting cleavage, mainly at the expense of the center-left Partito Democratico (PD), the successor of the DS. More than FI and even the LN, the M5S has succeeded in charging up public debate with moralistic discourse and thus exploiting the people versus elite distinction. The opportunity for these broadside attacks arose because, after roughly a decade of FI/LN governments, those two parties by the 2010s had come to resemble the political establishment (see Fella and Ruzza 2013). In an ironic twist, old populist Berlusconi now advertises himself as the moderate anti-populist who can save Italy from the M5S, much as he claims to have saved the country from communism in 1994.

On balance, the fluidity of populist movements and parties and the precariousness of the governments led by Berlusconi, whose FI was far from gaining a firm partisan majority, have limited the negative impact of populism on Italian democracy. The parliamentary system of government forces the chief executive to forge a majority support coalition, which is not easy to do in Italy's multi-party system. Berlusconi never managed to overcome the significant tensions between FI, the LN, and the neo-fascists. As a result, populist efforts that could have done serious, lasting damage to liberal democracy, especially initiatives for constitutional reform, did not prove politically feasible (Fella and Ruzza 2013: 41–42, 48). The continuing divisions of Italy's party system thus precluded a march toward illiberalism, and the creation of a competitive authoritarian regime like the one that Hungary's Viktor Orbán managed to achieve based on the parliamentary majorities won by his own party, as Deegan-Krause explains in Chapter 2. While a parliamentary system of government has fewer institutional veto points than US-style presidentialism, its frequent coexistence with multi-party systems creates a number of partisan veto

players, which impose important restrictions on the personalistic leadership of populist chief executives.[4]

Overall, none of Italy's populist parties and leaders has managed to establish political hegemony nor to transform the country's institutional framework. Thus, the basic parameters of liberal democracy have remained unscathed. The main problems that populism has caused have emerged from its anti-institutional and anti-immigrant bent, as indicated by Berlusconi's relentless attacks on the judiciary and the strong anti-immigrant rhetoric of the LN. Moreover, the machinations of personalistic leadership and the fluctuating fate of populist movements have prevented the consolidation of the party system and have thus kept the door open for yet another round of populist actors to appear on the political scene. In sum, populism has proved strong enough to claim a prominent place on Italy's political stage, yet has remained too weak to overpower or undermine Italian democracy.

Dutch-Style Populism: Three Waves

Phase 1: The List Pim Fortuyn and the Origins of Dutch Populism

In 2002 the List Pim Fortuyn became the first populist party in the Netherlands to achieve electoral success at the national level. Arguably, however, the potential for populism had existed long before the emergence of populist parties: already by the 1990s Dutch citizens had grown increasingly frustrated with the dominant political parties, while themes that populists would later pick up, such as opposition to immigration and frustrations with government performance, had become increasingly salient for voters (Rydgren 2004). Indeed, the first populist movements, the so-called livable movements, arose at the local level in the mid-1990s (Kaal 2011). Small radical-right parties that focused on migration, such

[4] Interestingly, to counteract the impact of populism on party fragmentation, Italian presidents have increasingly used their – formally limited – discretionary powers to promote stable government, as Giorgio Napolitano did in 2011, and Sergio Mattarella did in 2018. On the first occasion, when the international markets attacked the Italian economy and put pressure on the ruling Berlusconi government, President Napolitano used his institutional prerogatives to appoint former EU commissioner Mario Monti as senator for life. In this way, with one stroke of his pen, he created a credible alternative to Silvio Berlusconi without having to call new elections. Seven years later President Mattarella threatened to use his discretionary powers to dissolve parliament and call new elections in order to force parties to reach agreement on a coalition government, and, later, to prevent the appointment of Euroskeptic Paolo Savona as treasury minister.

as Centrum Democraten (CD), also emerged in the 1990s and even won seats in parliament, but they were not populist (see Muis 2015).

The LPF won an unprecedented 26 seats in the 2002 parliamentary election,[5] after its flamboyant, charismatic leader Pim Fortuyn was assassinated by an ecological extremist a few days before the vote. The party joined the newly formed coalition between Christian Democrats (Christen-Democratisch Appèl: CDA) and right-wing liberals (VVD). But this coalition proved highly unstable. A new election followed in early 2003, which resulted in the LPF, hampered by a lack of leadership, losing 18 of its 26 seats. Thereafter, the orphaned party continued to suffer from defections, until it was dissolved in 2008 (see Otjes 2011).

The rise of the LPF reflected the state of flux in Dutch society and politics after the end of the Cold War (Thomassen, Aarts, and van der Kolk 2000). The disappearance of the Soviet Union as an ideological and political enemy left traditional parties bereft of a dominant theme; and the rise of post-materialist values strengthened non-traditional parties, such as the left-liberal D66 and the green party GroenLinks. Whereas, during the Cold War, Dutch politics had been dominated by Christian Democratic parties in multi-party coalitions (similar to the DC in Italy), the new era suddenly made it legitimate and feasible to form a coalition government without the CDA. Indeed, the period from 1994 to 2002 witnessed the reign of a secular, so-called purple coalition comprising the VVD, D66 and the social democratic Party of Labor (Partij van de Arbeid: PvdA). For many voters, this new coalition, which was hailed as a beacon of the new left *à la* Tony Blair, Bill Clinton, and Gerhard Schröder, raised hopes for major changes in Dutch society.

But the purple coalition ran up against populist undercurrents that had become visible in the 1994 election. In that contest, the CDA unexpectedly lost in its southern heartland, due to the meteoric rise of a party that appealed to elderly citizens with the scary claim that governmental promises of guaranteed pensions might not be kept. Furthermore, during the 1990s perceptions of the dangers of globalization spread, and European integration came to be seen less as a safeguard against globalization than as a threat to Dutch society, especially after the Schengen Treaty, which envisaged the free movement of people within the European Union. Moreover, citizens feared the privatization of governmental services and expressed dissatisfaction with the seeming malfunctioning of government and with occasional problems in the judicial system.

[5] The Dutch second chamber has 150 seats in total.

In addition, a sizeable number of Dutch felt endangered by the move toward a multicultural society. After all, labor migrants, who had been seen as temporary inhabitants, were becoming permanent residents, accompanied by their whole families. Unexpectedly, the purple coalition also seemed to continue the objectionable practices of previous power holders, sharing the spoils of office by appointing their followers to numerous positions in the government, the public administration, and newly privatized agencies. Yet established politicians did not foresee an impending tsunami of electoral volatility; it would take Pim Fortuyn to catalyze these developments (Mair 2008).

Fortuyn based his populist appeals on an eloquent juxtaposition of the corrupt elite versus the pure people. The LPF leader explicitly placed himself in the tradition of the short-lived Dutch Republic of 1795–1806, which had rested on the sovereignty of the people and the ideals of the French Revolution, as expressed in a very progressive constitution and the call for referenda. Fortuyn rejected the constitutional monarchy in place since 1848 as well as the political parties that had evolved under these institutional parameters. He sought to give voice to the people who felt overrun by politicians, bureaucrats, the European Union, and possibly the global economy. Fortuyn borrowed from many other ideologies, thus making it very difficult to classify him on a left–right scale. Although conservative in his skepticism about immigration and European integration, he was progressive in terms of civil rights, and close to Christian democratic ideas in wanting to protect the welfare state, which was under fire from neoliberalism (Akkerman 2005).

The LPF's participation in government ensured that policies on public security, immigration, and asylum were toughened. More importantly, the party's representation in parliament and its inclusion in the ruling coalition legitimized its role in Dutch politics and ensured that policy issues that had not previously been part of the political agenda became recognized as topics for regular debate and deliberation. Most fundamentally, the rise of the LPF made it clear that the Dutch political landscape had drastically changed in the 1990s and that dissatisfied citizens were an electoral force to be reckoned with. In this sense the LPF paved the way for Geert Wilders' Partij voor de Vrijheid. The widely appealing charisma of Pim Fortuyn, a quality often associated with populist leadership, thus helped to effect a substantial, lasting transformation of Dutch politics.

The LPF captured an undercurrent in the electorate that political elites had ignored until a charismatic maverick and outsider appeared on the scene (Pellikaan, de Lange, and van der Meer 2007). The new party's

success showed that even a seemingly profound renovation of the political system, namely the end of Christian Democratic dominance in 1994, was not sufficient for stopping a populist surge. The LPF's meteoric ascent also confirmed that in a more volatile party system, as in the Netherlands after the Cold War, a new movement could appeal to large numbers of voters and mobilize them behind a cause or politician. Obviously, a crucial permissive cause was that the Dutch electoral system rested on proportional representation, which did not discourage discontented citizens from voting for a novel, untested party.

Phase 2: The Rise of Geert Wilders and the Party for Freedom

Geert Wilders' rise to political prominence and influence occurred in the context of three developments, namely internal struggles within the VVD, the general disquiet among Dutch politicians regarding the LPF's success, and the post-9/11 world of generalized anxiety. The attacks of September 11, 2001, changed the general mood in Dutch society: Islam-inspired terrorism was seen as a serious threat. Consequently, many voters took a critical position toward new immigrants, especially from countries with many Muslims, yet also toward migrants already living in the Netherlands. Simultaneously, the European Union was discussing the potential entry of Turkey, which for segments of the electorate exacerbated fears of Muslim influx.

Moreover, the unexpected success of Fortuyn and his LPF had brought home to establishment politicians the risks of electoral volatility and had highlighted popular aversion to the political and administrative elite living in the "The Hague cheese box," the popular Dutch metaphor for what in the United States is known as "inside the Beltway." In the early 2000s European integration had become a bone of contention, partly as a result of the scandals surrounding the European Commission led by Jacques Santer.

Finally, the internal struggle within the VVD contributed to Wilders' emergence. This party had been rather leaderless since the game-changing elections of 2002. Wilders, a VVD MP since 1998, had frequently refused to toe the party line, especially regarding Turkey's entry into the European Union. In a 2004 manifesto, he urged the VVD to take a more radical right position. In response, the party expelled him. Wilders became a one-man band in the Dutch parliament. When after the Islam-inspired assassination of filmmaker Theo van Gogh, in autumn 2004, Wilders received serious death threats, he entered a complicated life of full-time police protection. Wilders thus donned, involuntarily yet ostentatiously, the cloak

of victim. He then tried to turn himself into a hero by asking for a full halt to immigration and for the surveillance of Islamic institutions. The Islam-inspired terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) added fuel to Wilders' populist fire (Vossen 2017).

When Wilders proved a crucial mobilizer of the "No" vote in the 2005 referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty, it became clear that he was able to capture support from a wide array of voters. In 2005 this brash leader founded the PVV, which entered parliament with nine seats in 2006 and grew to 24 seats in 2010. With the electoral success of populism, the 2000s clearly marked an important change in the Dutch multiparty system. It became increasingly difficult to govern, because support for the three main traditional parties had declined dramatically.

Like the LPF, the PVV does not unambiguously fit its usual label as a radical right party. Clearly, the PVV embraces a strong anti-Islamic and anti-immigration orientation, and is fiercely Euroskeptic, but it is also increasingly protective of the welfare state, has positioned itself as a strong defender of individual rights, especially of women and the LGTB community, and taps into such post-material values as animal rights. Most importantly, the PVV claims to defend the pure Dutch people against the assault of external threats, especially Islam, migrants, the European Union, and globalization (Vossen 2011).

The rise of the PVV sparked lively debates within the Dutch party system. Although there was no *cordon sanitaire* against the populist newcomer, as there was in Belgium against the *Vlaams Belang*, most parties professed that they wanted to prevent the PVV from governing. There also was considerable societal mobilization against the PVV. For instance, Wilders was accused of xenophobia, leading to a series of trials in which he was charged with discrimination. Nevertheless, thanks to its electoral strength and its entry into parliament, the PVV has had considerable influence on the position of Dutch parties on issues such as immigration and European integration. With the PVV riding high in the polls, Wilders effectively forced mainstream parties to move closer to his positions, even during the recent 2017 general election (van Klingeren, Zaslove, and Verbeek 2017).

Phase 3: A New Twist in Dutch Populism? The Forum voor Democratie

The 2017 contest did not bring Wilders the electoral breakthrough that observers had expected, however. One reason for his disappointing result was the backlash from Donald Trump's triumph in the United

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States, which had deterrent effects in Western Europe and hurt the political fortunes of right-wing populists across the region, including the Netherlands. Interestingly, however, the stifling of Wilders' advance opened up space for the rise of another populist leader.

Since 2017 Thierry Baudet's Forum voor Democratie has emerged as a new contender for the populist vote, drawing support away from Wilders' party and mobilizing previous non-voters as well. The FvD entered parliament with two seats in the 2017 elections, but recent polls would give it approximately 15 seats. Several factors help explain Baudet's rise. First, there is some fatigue with Wilders' PVV, especially after its problematic, not very constructive participation in the government from 2010 to 2012, which made this populist leader look unfit to govern. Second, the fact that Wilders has never established a party organization has hindered his chances of competing in municipal and provincial elections. This made the PVV vulnerable to a competitor that aims partly for the same electorate, yet is capable of building a party organization and can employ social media for this purpose. Third, Baudet resembles what one might call the "Fortuyn syndrome": he conveys the impression of an eloquent intellectual, as a legal philosopher opposing the supranational character of the European Court of Human Rights, an artist who writes novels and plays the piano, and a romantic young revolutionary with a sense of humor. The key to his success may lie in the mobilization of young and more highly educated voters as well as in his diligence in building a party organization, which may prove a valuable vehicle in the provincial contests of 2019.

The Effect of Three Waves of Populism on Dutch Democracy

We now turn to our criteria in order to assess the impact of populism on Dutch democracy. First, we address the positive effect, focusing on the question of mobilization, on giving voice to those who feel excluded, and on the influence that these inclusionary efforts have on policy and eventually political legitimization. Dutch populism emerged in a context of complaints about various issues: the state's diminishing responsiveness in health care, pensions, and education and the bureaucracy's treatment of the citizenry; increased tensions about how to integrate immigrants in the Netherlands; and debates over European integration. Together these complaints reflected a sense of exclusion among a sizeable part of the Dutch population, which felt that establishment politicians had not represented their concerns and fears.

Pim Fortuyn's eloquence catalyzed a movement in the 1990s that sought to give voice to the average citizen against the ruling elite. The genuine enthusiasm for Fortuyn during his life and the unprecedented public display of grief after his assassination demonstrate how he captured the hopes of people who felt marginalized and who sought new forms of representation. The LPF's electoral success in 2002 left mainstream parties bewildered. While some establishment politicians campaigned hard against the new outsider party, others sought to accommodate populist voters by tightening migration and integration policies and by allowing a special referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005. All the same, these adjustments proved insufficient to curb the populist wave.

To the contrary, Geert Wilders capitalized on the unexpectedly strong anti-EU sentiment in the 2005 referendum and vociferously insisted on the undesirability of a future entry by "Islamic Turkey" into the European Union. The Dutch rejection of the treaty helped convince this aspiring populist that there was room for a new party. Indeed, the initial success of the LPF and the subsequent success of the PVV testify to the existence of a reservoir of frustrated, discontented voters, representing 15 to 20 percent of the electorate, who are motivated by a mix of left- and right-wing issues and who see the mainstream parties as out of touch with their concerns, or even as illegitimate.

In the 2010s the influence of the PVV has helped to make immigration policies increasingly restrictive (see van Klingeren, Zaslove, and Verbeek 2017) and has induced Dutch governments to take an ever more critical stance toward Brussels. Moreover, the strength of populism has prompted political parties of all stripes to contemplate the need to involve citizens more actively in party politics and in the policy process, leading to the adoption of new democratic instruments, such as the consultative referendum, citizen juries in municipalities, and several mechanisms of citizen consultation by various governmental actors. Paradoxically, this pro-democratic expansion of citizen involvement has not dissipated the populist vote but has, instead, served as a platform for further populist mobilization, thus paving the way for the third wave of populism, the Forum voor Democratie.

On the negative side, Dutch populism, much as in Italy, has polarized politics, turned conflicts into moralistic battles, and contributed to the rise of new social cleavages, especially over national identity. Wilders' success in elections and in setting the parliamentary agenda has exacerbated

divisions in Dutch society. Political discourse has become confrontational, such that an opponent is often vilified as an enemy. Populist leaders attack what they perceive to be the left-leaning cultural and political elites and condemn their policies regarding immigration and integration as excessively lenient. In response, mainstream parties denounce the populists as xenophobic outsiders who are unfit to govern. Wilders' performance elicited both societal support and opposition, eventually leading to two trials on charges of discrimination, one initiated by the judiciary and the other one by massive complaints from individual citizens (see van Noorloos 2014).

Although the verbal confrontation has continued, recently the mainstream parties have adopted many themes from populist parties, especially on immigration and the European Union, pulling the center of gravity toward the right. Nevertheless, the PVV emerged from the 2017 election as the second largest party, suggesting that absorbing populist themes does not eradicate the deeper frustration of many citizens with the political elite. As a consequence, the political landscape has become increasingly fragmented, with 13 parties in a 150-seat parliament, making the formation of governing coalitions ever more difficult.

Yet, while the rise of populism and the recurrence of populist movements have reduced political civility in the Netherlands and have led to a less liberal orientation in policy-making, these developments have not inflicted any damage on the institutional framework of Dutch democracy. Instead, the increasing fragmentation of the party system has kept the clout of populist forces limited and has prevented them from taking over the government. The electoral system of proportional representation used in the Netherlands has multiplied the number of partisan veto players and thus forestalled any serious risks to liberal democracy that could, in principle, emerge from the country's parliamentary system of government. Since no single party can control the executive branch, it is impossible for populist forces to concentrate power and undermine liberal safeguards, as they have succeeded in doing in some East European countries such as Hungary (see Chapter 2, by Deegan-Krause). Moreover, the strength of Dutch institutions and the attachment of the public to them make it unlikely that any infringement of the parameters of liberal democracy would succeed even if populist movements managed to gain a parliamentary majority. Thus, despite the surprising upsurge and persistence of populist mobilization in the Netherlands, a progressive and cosmopolitan country, political pluralism and democratic competitiveness are not at risk.

Conclusions: Lessons for the United States under President Trump

What do the Italian and Dutch experiences with populism suggest for the contemporary United States? One immediate finding concerns the depth of discontent that currently pervades the advanced democracies and that opens the door for populist movements to flourish. After all, the early successes of the Italian LN and the Dutch LPF point to the importance of hitherto neglected undercurrents in the electorate. Evidently, alternations in power between mainstream parties do not necessarily alleviate the feelings of neglect and marginalization among large portions of the electorate: The formation of a government coalition without the Christian Democrats in the Netherlands, or a swing between center-left and center-right coalitions led by the Italian DC, do not reliably produce a sense of genuine change. In a similar vein, a change of partisan colors in the US presidency or Congress may not be seen as genuine renovation.

Instead, there are opportunities for new parties to arise when widespread popular dissatisfaction prevails about the lack of policy change on salient issues, and when ambitious new leaders pose as genuine outsiders and representatives of the true people. In the Netherlands this insurgent role fell to Pim Fortuyn, and in Italy first to the Northern League's Umberto Bossi and then to Silvio Berlusconi. In fact, one does not even have to be a true outsider to spearhead successful populist challenges to the political establishment: Geert Wilders had long been part of the mainstream VVD.

These trends, which have affected many advanced democracies for some time and which have spurred a wave of populism in recent years, came to the fore in the United States with the presidential election of 2016. This remarkable contest laid bare widespread dissatisfaction with the effects of globalization among numerous voters in pivotal states. Outsiders in their own peculiar ways, both Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump successfully tapped into those sentiments. Indeed, during the primary season they succeeded in mobilizing new classes of Democratic and Republican voters. Hillary Clinton, the consummate insider, failed to recognize the undercurrents of frustration and discontent that were upending electoral politics, especially in the Rust Belt states.

Yet, while current conditions allow populist outsiders to rise, only some of them achieve sustained political success. On this issue, our analysis of the Netherlands and Italy suggests the importance of party organization. Fortuyn and Baudet in the Netherlands and Bossi, Berlusconi,

and Grillo in Italy understood that continued success required the foundation of a party. Fortuyn's party fell apart quickly after his death, but the Italian populists went to great lengths in constructing organizations. Few of them followed the model of traditional party organizations, however: while the LN eventually took such a route, Berlusconi adopted a highly personalized form of party leadership, and Grillo combined personalization with direct input from party members through his use of new media.

In the United States, Donald Trump eventually decided to run on the Republican ticket, though he had previously considered going it alone. This decision to don the Republican cloak testifies to our point that party organization is important for winning elections, even for populists. Interestingly, given the substantial increase in turnout at Republican primaries and caucuses, Trump's candidacy seems to have had a mobilizing effect on previously excluded voters. The extent to which the billionaire tycoon really represents the interests and needs of these citizens, especially their socioeconomic frustrations and demands, remains a complicated question, however.

As outsider politicians have forcefully pushed previously suppressed issues onto the political agenda, the populist waves in Italy and the Netherlands have resulted in clear polarization and fierce moralistic conflict. This sharpening of political divergences had different effects on the two countries' party systems. In Italy it produced a fragmented bipolar system, which has in recent years faced an additional challenge from Grillo's M5S. In the Netherlands the aggravation of conflict led to the continued bleeding of mainstream parties, so that coalition building has become very difficult. Obviously, the problems that the rise of populism causes for government formation are of crucial relevance in Italy and the Netherlands, which, like most of Western Europe, feature parliamentary democracies.

Yet, while populist movements in Italy and the Netherlands have violated democratic norms with their confrontational tactics, they have not seriously undermined democratic institutions. Populist leaders in these two nations, in contrast to their counterparts in Eastern Europe and Latin America, have not been able to concentrate power, overhaul their countries' institutional parameters, or eviscerate the opposition. Berlusconi's attacks on the judiciary, the parliament, and the media, for example, did not prevent these institutions from contributing to his downfall. This interesting finding suggests that populist leaders in developed democracies, such as the United States, face much more serious

institutional constraints and resistance from civil society than those in developing democracies.

The polarization and intensification of conflict promoted by populist leadership have also affected the United States, but they have had different repercussions in the country's presidential system of government. During the 2016 election season, Trump, Clinton, and Sanders campaigned in highly moralistic terms. This fervor was fueled on the left side of the spectrum by minority rights issues, especially "Black lives matter" and women's rights, and on the right side by Tea Party issues, such as state rights, gun ownership, and fundamentalist Christianity. Moreover, the battle between Clinton and Trump was cast in terms of individual decency. As a consequence, the 2016 election was not the normal kind of competition for the moderate Republican and moderate Democratic voter, but a fierce battle between deeply antagonistic groupings, decided only by the arithmetic of the Electoral College. As president, Trump has continued this game of polarization with his broadside attacks, lambasting and belittling foreign and domestic enemies and displaying an ostentatious reluctance to act as a president for all Americans.

Yet, while in a parliamentary system, as in Europe, a chief executive supported by a majority party could push his populist goals with little restraint, the checks and balances of the presidential system in the United States make life much harder for President Trump. As a result, his policy success has remained limited, due to reluctance among his co-partisans in Congress and to widespread resistance in the judiciary. Any move toward an institutional overhaul designed to pursue the populist goal of power concentration would have particularly low chances of success. The main damage that the new US president has done to liberal democracy has therefore been confined to the promotion of illiberal values and the erosion of norms of democratic civility. As in Italy and Netherlands, this debasement of the public discourse has had a mixed impact, drawing strident responses from some sectors and efforts to "take the high road" by others.

In sum, populism has so far not done serious damage to liberal democracy in Italy, the Netherlands, or the United States. Yet it is important to keep in mind that this novel form of politics has proved more than a temporary affliction. After all, Italy and the Netherlands have witnessed three waves of populism because the negative undercurrent of popular frustration with the incumbent elite is hard to control. Populist parties may be succeeded by new populist movements, even if mainstream parties move closer to the issue positions proclaimed by populist leaders.

Remarkably, in Italy the M5S managed to portray former outsiders, namely Berlusconi's FI and to a lesser extent the LN, as the new ruling elite – and to pose as the true populists. The ease with which new populist movements can arise suggests that it would be unwise to expect populist sentiments to disappear after the Trump presidency. The door that the billionaire tycoon has pushed open may give entry to recurring sets of populist movements.

After all, the root causes of the populist surge in the United States have not disappeared. The Democratic Party seems more focused on bashing Trump than on solving the problems that caused Clinton's failure to win the Rust Belt. The Republican Party still does not care that the Tea Party's strategies within its party organization are chasing away moderate Republican voters. Neither party, therefore, is pursuing a prudent strategy for the 2020 elections, but, instead, each persists with high-stakes confrontation. By maintaining fertile ground for the perpetuation or recurrence of populism, the two mainstream parties are inadvertently exposing liberal democracy in the United States to continued risks.