

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Typologies of Populism: a Hypothesis Based on
Hyperpolitics Methodology**

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ABSTRACT

The article proposes an ideological typification of the populisms emerged in North America and Western Europe since 2008, articulating the relationship between populism and ideology through a combination of the Ideational approach and the Discursive-Performative approach. Using the analytic tool of the matrix in the version elaborated by Hyperpolitics, this typification is constructed through a work on some political concepts and the connection between them. The cross-tabulation is useful in order to highlight the presence of three main typologies of populisms: the productive populism, the nationalist populism, and the citizen populism; the paper also highlights how the ideological mix between authoritarianism and regulation can be seen as a possible evolution of Western populisms.

KEYWORDS: Populism; Ideology; Hyperpolitics; Democracy; Capitalism

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Populism is a research topic which has progressively attracted the interest in political studies during the last two decades. These studies have gradually contributed to make the concept of populism no longer related only to past historical experiences, turning it into an analytical tool useful to understand present politics (and in some cases to act within it). As well as for other concepts having a wide diffusion, the concept of populism has been exposed to the phenomenon of concept stretching (Sartori 1970), thus, becoming vulnerable to the risk of losing denotative power.

In order to avoid this danger, scholars who study populism pursue two complementary paths. The first one consists in dealing directly with the definitional question. Benjamin Moffitt has identified three leading approaches to this question (Moffitt 2020): the Ideational approach, which defines populism as an ideology having some distinctive characteristics, such as the importance attributed to the opposition between people and elites; the Strategic approach, which is based on an idea of populism as a political practice in which charismatic leaderships have an important role; the Discursive-Performative Approach, which conceives populism as a discursive practice aimed to fix meanings and identities in political struggle.

The second path pursued by scholars is to investigate the varieties of populism: it involves the study of similarities and differences between different case studies classifiable under the label of populism, and therefore in creating and naming different typologies. This article aims to be part of these studies and suggests an ideological typification of populisms arisen after the 2008 crisis in North America and Western Europe. The process of typological construction is realized through a work concerning the relation between political concepts, guided by the *Hyperpolitics* methodology.

1. Hyperpolitics and its methodology

The methodology used in this article is adopted from *Hyperpolitics* (Calise & Lowy 2010). Before explaining its guidelines, it is necessary to illustrate what *Hyperpolitics* is. As its subtitle indicates, it is an 'Interactive Dictionary of Political Science Concepts' edited in 2010 by Mauro Calise and Theodore J. Lowy; it is also an

online platform (www.hyperpolitics.net) that allows political science scholars to use its methodology. *Hyperpolitics* was followed in 2016 by '*Concetti chiave. Capire la Scienza Politica*' ('Key Concept. Understanding Political Science') edited by Mauro Calise, Theodore J. Lowi and Fortunato Musella (Calise et al. 2016). Adopting the same methodology, *Concetti chiave* proposes a study on a different group of concepts in addition to those analysed in *Hyperpolitics*. Differently from the traditional Political Science dictionaries, which propose an in-depth study of each single concept, *Hyperpolitics* and *Concetti chiave* have a different aim, that is to clarify the meanings and implications of political concepts by relating them through a methodology based on the use of the matrix – an analytic tool widely used in social sciences to which *Hyperpolitics* adds some specific features – and of a common vocabulary.

The *Hyperpolitics* matrix logic is based on some syntactic rules and its main purpose is to 'create comparability through categorization by cross-tabulating two variables' and thus 'produce four interrelated property spaces'. Through a graphical interface the use of this methodology is represented by a concept placed at the centre of the matrix (the concept at the core of the inquiry) and by two axes at the ends of which are placed two other concepts; the axes identify the two variables and represent the analytical dimensions which the central concept is related to. Thus, the four property spaces created by this cross-tabulation represent four sub-types of the central concept and are represented by two further concepts, one placed at the centre of each quadrant and one at its periphery (in the outer corner). Matrices have often been used in the social sciences as tools for quantitative research, but *Hyperpolitics* presents a qualitative approach to their use, because it develops 'property spaces containing not data but concepts that contribute to the definition of the selected concept' (Calise & Lowi 2010, p. 14).

Hyperpolitics uses a common vocabulary, including about one hundred keywords to promote a cumulative and systematic knowledge based on political concepts. This vocabulary is the result of a selection made by the scholars who

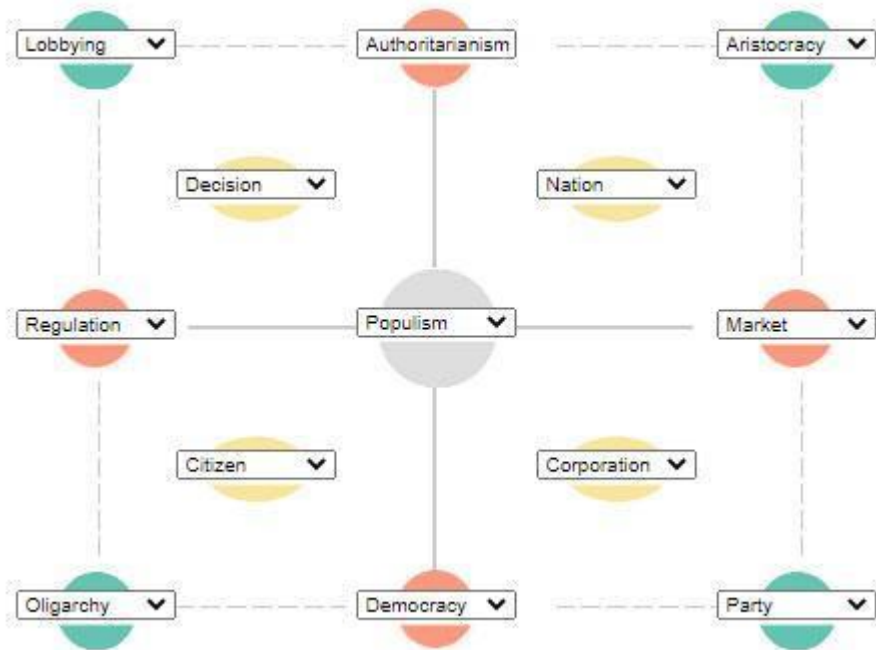
developed the *Hyperpolitics* project on the most frequent entries present in ten North American and European Political Science dictionaries¹.

Hyperpolitics and its methodology are based on the idea that political concepts are open universes, constantly liable to new interpretations. Hence, it is possible to develop different matrices of the same concept by crossing different variables, responding to different research questions, and creating different subtypes. For instance, Annalisa Criscitiello created a matrix of populism which, compared to the present matrix, proposes a different reference context (not circumscribed to the years following the 2008 crisis and to North America and Western Europe) and considers different variables: one related to the phase of populism - of propaganda or government – and another related to its approach - individualist or communitarian - to polity (Criscitiello 2016).

An article adopting the *Hyperpolitics* methodology has a simple structure: it is opened by the graphical interface in which the concepts are organized into the matrix logical space; this interface is followed by (2.1) an introduction in which the minimum definition of the central concept adopted is proposed, (2.2) a paragraph dedicated to the axes explaining which variables they represent, (2.3–2.6) four paragraphs each dedicated to a quadrant and, finally, (3) a brief conclusion.

¹ For the comprehensive list of analysed dictionaries, keywords selected, and selection criteria see Calise & Lowi, 2010, pp. 20-24.

2. The matrix



Source: the graphical interface is generated through Hyperpolitics online platform (www.hyperpolitics.net).

2.1. Introduction

The publication in 2005 of ‘On Populist Reason’ by the Argentine philosopher Ernesto Laclau - who since the Seventies had already begun to elaborate a populist theory together with Chantal Mouffe – is undoubtedly a watershed in the debate about populism. Laclau defines populism as a ‘political logic’ related to the ‘institution of the social’ (Laclau 2005, p. 117), i.e. a way of constructing the unity and the identity of a political community. This logic is characterized by the presence of ‘three structural dimensions’ (Laclau 2005, p. 77): a) the unification through an equivalential chain of a plurality of unsatisfied demands that arose within society, having as a common feature the denial of satisfaction by political power; b) the formation of an antagonistic frontier dividing society into two fields, on the one hand power and on the other hand the people (the way this articulation of unsatisfied demands proclaims itself); c) the consolidation of this chain which – from a vague

feeling of solidarity – becomes popular identity. This consolidation is characterized by its being more than the sum of the links that compose it and by the hegemonic role played by a single link within it. In this third structural moment a ‘symbolic framework’ is constructed, acquiring autonomy with respect to the demands from which it emerged. Laclau states that ‘whenever we have this combination of structural moments, whatever the ideological or social contents of the political movement in question, we have populism of one sort or another’ (Laclau 2005, pp. 117–8); the populist political logic is therefore, according to Laclau, unrelated to a specific ideological content, but it is producer of extremely varied ideologies.

The relation between populism and ideology is the focus of the *Ideational approach*, according to which some positive contents of a movement's ideology qualify it as populist. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser propose the following definition: ‘we define populism as a thin-centered ideology, that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic fields, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people’ (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2017, pp. 5–6). This thin-centered character makes populist ideologies opposed to ‘thick-centered’ or ‘full’ ideologies (such as socialism, liberalism, fascism, etc.): while the latter are characterized by an extended morphology that makes them complex worldviews, thin-centered ideologies such as populism have a narrower morphology (summarized in the short Kaltwasser and Mudde's quote). In order to acquire a wider morphology, thin ideologies like populism need to aggregate ideological contents originating from different ideological traditions.

The combination of these two approaches in defining populism and its relationship with ideology allows us to set some coordinates. Starting from there, is possible to build different typifications. The Ideational approach, by highlighting the inclination of populism to build complex ideological profiles from a few ideological contents, provides an important basis for the ideological comparative analysis of populisms. The Discursive-Performative approach allows to question the historical genesis of populist movements and to provide the context for the matrix; Chantal

Mouffe has defined ‘populist moment’ as a kind of conjuncture which occurs when, ‘under the pressure of political or socioeconomic transformations, the dominant hegemony is being destabilized by the multiplication of unsatisfied demands’, identifying in the crisis of 2008 the beginning of a populist moment that ‘signals the crisis of the neoliberal hegemonic formation’ (Mouffe 2018). Therefore, this matrix will examine the ideological typologies of populism originating in the temporal frame of the populist moment in North America and Western Europe, a geopolitical area in which - because of social, economic, and political similarities - neoliberal hegemony and its crisis developed similar forms and meanings.

2.2. *The Axes*

The vertical axis represents a political variable through a classic political dichotomy: democracy and authoritarianism. The concept of democracy has ancient origins, but here it is preliminarily used referring to the liberal democracies that arose in Modern times within the framework of Nation-States. The rise of a democratic regime is not an irreversible process: as Charles Tilly points out, ‘democratization is a dynamic process that always remains incomplete and perpetually runs the risk of reversal’ (Tilly 2005, p. XI). Starting from a notion of democracy that is not limited to the importance of electoral participation but precisely enhances this dynamic aspect of it, Colin Crouch highlights that it ‘thrives when there are major opportunities for the mass of ordinary people actively to participate’, or rather to define the priorities of public life also ‘through discussion and autonomous organizations’ (Crouch 2004, p. 2). It is because of this broad and demanding conception that Crouch argues that democracies are in a state of crisis that began in the 1970s due to the progressive concentration of power in small economic elites. He named this condition post-democracy, which is marked by formal continuity and by the substantial weakening of democracies. In the aftermath of the 2008 crisis – which called on politics to make important decisions – the choice between the defence (or reinforcement) of weakened democratic systems and the adoption of authoritarian styles or solutions has become a fundamental ground of ideological conflict.

Authoritarianism - which also has ancient origins - after the 2008 crisis took on a peculiar form in some Western political factions and actors that, as Luciano Gallino has pointed out, promised ‘law and order, i.e. job security, combating foreigners because they are considered culturally different and competing in the workplace’, as well as ‘stimulating the economy by means of rapid implementation of decrees and exceptional laws, rather than relying on the slow and complicated mechanisms of democracy’ (Gallino 2011, p. 310²).

The horizontal axis expresses instead an economic variable and is summarized by the concepts of market and regulation. The market and its competitive logic conquered an axiological primacy in the economic policies of Western countries with the rise of neoliberalism; in the two decades following 1989, only a few and marginal political actors proposed a critique of capitalism, which has indeed become an ideological taboo. The crisis of 2008, showing in a very impressive way the contradictions and risks of contemporary capitalism, has broken this taboo conferring again public legitimacy to the critique of capitalism (Piketty 2020, p. 34). The concepts of market and regulation thus represent in this matrix two stances adopted by political actors in this renewed debate. In order to clarify the use, we propose, and to avoid misunderstandings, a brief digression is necessary. The absence of regulation – which through the doctrine of *laissez-faire* was a central aspect of classical liberalism – gradually became anti-historical during the twentieth century as a consequence of the enlargement of the market and the developing of more complex production processes (Mirowski 2009). Neoliberalism, for example, stems precisely from the awareness that the market order is not spontaneous and that it needs the active role of the State to be protected, not the absence of regulation but a pro-market and pro-economic actors’ regulation. The market-regulation dichotomy in this matrix is therefore not understood as a synonym for the absence or presence of regulation, but as two different models of regulation: the first (market) which – while combining with other instances – reaffirms the axiological primacy of the market and capitalism, and the second (regulation) which instead - according to a more classical meaning of

² Translated by the author.

the concept itself - denies and openly criticises this primacy, proposing an idea of society not dominated by the logic of the market and capitalism (where not directly an overcoming of the latter). If we accept the idea that the stance about capitalism is still today decisive in qualifying left and right, this dichotomy is partially superimposable on the left-right dichotomy. However, as will emerge from the matrix, especially from the lower right quadrant, in post-1989 Western politics the similarities between these two dichotomies, although not overcome, are very problematic.

2.3. *Lower right quadrant*

At the heart of this typology of populism, emerging from the intersection of the concepts of democracy and market, there is the idea that the most recent transformations in capitalism - its global dimension, the importance of technological changes, etc. - are an opportunity for Western societies. This populism does not question the axiological priority of market and competition; even if it criticizes capitalism, this criticism is limited to the excesses of financialization. It is the populism of productive people: entrepreneurs, traders, social innovators, non-unionized workers worried about the future of the company where they work, young people wishing to actively insert themselves in the labour market (the reference to the concept of corporation is to be understood in this sense). Its enemy are the political elites produced by the party system who, failing in modernization of economic systems and political institutions, have wasted many opportunities for their countries. By promoting the open society model, this typology of populism treats diversity - cultural, ethnic, gender, religious, etc. - as a factor useful to the modernization and development of society.

The two most important cases of productive populism are the ones of Emmanuel Macron and his *La République En Marche* party and Matteo Renzi's political experience prior to his defeat, following the 2017-constitutional referendum he promoted. In the first case, the polemic against the party system took on a technocratic character, with the experts presenting themselves as the only

representatives of the productive people (Diamanti & Lazar 2018 p. 105; Perottino & Guasti, 2020). In the second case, instead, there was a mix between this character and the generational one, identifying the younger generation as a group excluded from a gerontocratic system and as the most in harmony with the modernization processes (Bickerton & Invernizzi Accetti 2014, pp. 26–7; Castaldo & Verzichelli 2020, p. 490). Both leaders have emblematically evoked Silicon Valley as a social and productive model to aim for. Although in the Western world productive populism had a genesis in the conservative area alongside Berlusconi (Castaldo & Verzichelli 2020), whilst in Eastern Europe it continues to be in that political field (Bušíková & Guasti 2019), in the Western populist moment it is placed within or beside the progressive area, taking on the character of a populist variant of Blair's Third Way. Indeed, Renzi's and Macron's economic policies exhibit similarities to those adopted by the the former Labour leader's governments (Bordignon 2014, p. 8; Rathgeb & Wolkenstein 2017).

Productive populism - especially in its technocratic component - is marked by some claims conflicting with liberal-democratic principles: mistrust of party democracy and political pluralism, strong decision-making attitude (Caramani 2017, pp. 60–1). Nevertheless, productive populism declares itself extraneous to authoritarian impulses and the only possible bulwark against them: it rejects the label of populist and attributes it to extremist parties and movements (Bordignon 2014). The productive people are not interested in political earthquakes: they only demand to be allowed to peacefully employ their productivity in economic life.

2.4. Upper right quadrant

In this quadrant is placed the most studied form of populism in Western populist moment. Sometimes the same label of populism – by way of «a reified association» (Stravrakakis et al. 2017, p. 421) and without further clarifications - is used as a synonym of this specific typology. Definitions starting from a higher awareness of this specificity can be different: right-wing (Pelinka 2013), radical right-wing (Mudde 2019), authoritarian (Norris & Inglehart 2019) or nationalist (Eatwell & Goowin 2018) populism. In this matrix, however, we prefer the last definition

because it allows us to thematize this typology of populism in relation to both axes and to qualify it without the need to place it in the multifaceted right-wing political family. Nationalist populism is widespread in Western world: almost in every country there is at least one party that can be ascribed to this family. Main cases are Donald Trump leadership, Brexit Referendum and following transformations of the Conservative Party, Marine Le Pen's *Front National* and Matteo Salvini's *Lega*.

As highlighted by De Cleen (2017), populism and nationalism are based on two different ideas of antagonism. The former is based on a down/top antagonism between the people as underdog and the elites. The latter, instead, is based on an in/out antagonism between the people as nation and its outsiders. Nationalist populism proposes an idea where the people is intended as *down* and *in* and the enemy as *out* and *top*. The people, composed of the natives of a nation, is opposed both to the outsiders (the immigrants) as to foreign and national elites, such as the liberal-democratic or progressive ones, described as cultural aristocracy that 'in the name' of cosmopolitan values pursue anti-national interests. These two enemies are not disconnected among themselves: according to the narrative of nationalist populists (which often takes on conspiratorial connotations, see Eatwell & Goodwin 2018), elites promote pro-immigration policies in order to transform Western societies in a multicultural sense and to increase the availability of low-paid workers, who are in competition with native workers on employment and welfare grounds.

Central to this frame is the denunciation of 'national decline and destruction' that can be overturned by prioritizing 'the culture and interests of the nation' (Eatwell & Goodwin 2018). In contrast to productive populism, at the core of nationalist populism's ideology there is the idea that globalization is a threat for wealth of Western societies: amongst the people to whom it appeals, the presence of unskilled or low-skilled native workers is central. These groups perceive their social condition threatened by offshoring, processes of automation and growth of international competition, whereby the new economic powers (firstly China) are advantaged (Bornschiefer 2017). Nevertheless, this polemical approach to economic globalization is entirely alien to a form of capitalism critique. As Öniş and Kutlay suggest,

nationalist populists are both ‘selective anti-globalists’ and ‘selective globalists’ (Öniş & Kutlay 2020, p. 11): they are not autarchic and opposed to globalization *tout-court*, but supporter of an idea of globalization in which the Nation-state is protector and promoter of national capitalism, adopting an aggressive approach in international relations and foreign trade. Here is where its sovereigntist claim lies. The nationalist populism combines in fact an economic policy made of strengthening financial capitalism, anti-progressive fiscal policies, opposition to trade unions. Each of these factors is linked to a delegitimization of supranational organizations, agreements to reduce polluting emissions and to the adoption of protectionist policies (Öniş & Kutlay 2020, p. 4); where it does not propose a downsizing of welfare, it declines it in a nativist and exclusivist form (De Cleen 2017).

The authoritarian element of nationalist populism resides in what Mudde defined ‘the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements on authority are to be punished severely’ and ‘all ‘problems’ [...] can only be countered by a tough punitive approach and prevented by reintroducing ‘moral’ or ‘traditional’ education in schools’ (Mudde 2019). Norris and Inglehart identify three core components of this authoritarian character in the emphasis on (a) security and order, (b) preservation of cultural group conformity, and (c) loyalty to strong leadership tasked with protecting the community (see Norris & Inglehart 2019, p. 7). These missions legitimize the use of strong governance which, for the sake of restoring order and imposing the national interest in an unfriendly world, can conflict with democratic norms and practices.

2.5. Lower Left Quadrant

Differently from the types of populisms represented in the other quadrants - where the defining label is often attributed with denigrating intent by political opponents - the one represented in this quadrant is often inspired by populist theory in its Discursive-Performative approach (LaTuerka 2015; Mélenchon 2016). Chantal Mouffe in 2019 published ‘For a left populism’ (Mouffe 2019), a pamphlet which provides us a privileged way to qualify this typology of populism, although we must

be aware this is a manifesto and not only an analytical work, so it is necessary to place it alongside other studies.

Left populism confers a strong relevance to the present crisis of democracy, and indeed, post-democracy represents the main polemical reference point alongside neoliberalism. According to the narrative of left populists, the weakening of liberal-democratic political regimes and the growth of inequalities that Western countries have experienced in the last forty years have contributed to the establishment of an economic and political oligarchy. This oligarchy is composed of the exponents of financialized capitalism and of political class (conservative and progressive) that adopted, with various degrees, a neoliberal-inspired agenda. On the other hand, those who experienced a worsening of their social condition and were deprived of political representation live a condition that cannot be interpreted only as an intensification of capitalist exploitation because it concerns a broader horizon; this condition can be qualified as subordination (Mouffe 2019), subalternity (Damiani 2020) and marginality (Augustín 2020). In the construction of its people, left populism is symbolically inclusionary (Font et al., 2019): it includes all those who suffer forms of subordination, subalternity or marginality without determining ethnic or cultural boundaries and conceiving antagonism only in a top-down manner (Judis 2016, p. 15).

The response of Left-Wing Populism to the crisis of democracy is not a rupture with liberal democracy but a radicalization of democratic values betrayed by the postdemocratic and neoliberal oligarchy. Therefore, Chantal Mouffe identifies in the democratic idea of citizenship a 'locus of construction of a 'people': for this reason, it is possible to define the left-wing populism a citizen populism. This project, as Mouffe highlights, 'necessarily includes an anti-capitalist dimension' (Mouffe, 2018) as many conditions of subordination, subalternity and marginality are the result of the neoliberal capitalist system and the axiological primacy assigned to the market competition.

Left populism considers transnational organizations (in the European case especially the European Union and its integration process) as neoliberal and

postdemocratic fortresses. The controversial relationship with sovereignty arises on this ground, regarding which differing positions coexist within Left Populism. A part which has become most prevailing with the intensification of the crisis has also adopted the perspective of the ‘democratic sovereigntism’ (Ferry 2006) which rejects the nationalistic component of sovereigntism and intends it, according to Damiani, as a necessary tool aimed to the ‘pursuit of social inclusion for all members of the same political community within the existing democratic system’ (Damiani 2020, p. 53); the presence of internationalism in the ideological horizon of all left-wing political forces, however, potentially collides with the democratic sovereigntism perspective and, together with the nationalist populism's monopolization of sovereigntist instances, generates distrust or critical approaches towards it.

The cases concerning Left populisms have passed through different trajectories. The most relevant cases are represented by *Syriza* and *La France Insoumise*, which became populist parties originated from classical radical left parties, *Podemos*, that is a native experience of the populist moment, while Jeremy Corbyn's former Labour leadership and Bernie Sanders' two Democratic primary campaigns brought out populist approaches and assertions within the traditional progressive parties of their countries.

2.6. Upper Left Quadrant

In the Western populist moment, no populist movements arose combining authoritarianism and critique of capitalism. Outside the geopolitical area considered in this matrix, there is no lack of experiences that may be ascribed to this quadrant: Norris and Inglehart place, for example, the experience of Chavez and Maduro (clearly anti-capitalist) among authoritarian populisms (Norris & Inglehart 2019, p. 245), but this matter is beyond the scope of this essay. This empirical empty space, however, is not devoid of useful suggestions about a possible evolution of populism in Western countries. Despite several factors suggest that such an evolution is hardly achievable, some uncertainties associated with economic and political issues of post-pandemic transition contribute to create a terrain in which political identities can

further transform themselves: this context could, in fact, foster the rising up of a people claiming a stronger decision-making approach to governments against the inertia of democracy and economic system, weakened by pandemic crisis and hostages of corporatist elites.

In the present and immediate future, the decisions, that governments will take to overcome the socio-economic crisis, caused by the spread of the pandemic, could sanction a new social contract that overcomes not only the problems that emerged with the Covid crisis but also those that emerged with the 2008 crisis and caused the populist moment to explode. The expectations that this occasion generates in public opinions that have been stressed by almost two years of pandemic are very high, and if they are disappointed, they could trigger a new and unprecedented populist wave. Unlike the other three quadrants, the scenario represented in the quadrant is only a hypothesis, and it is premature to claim how realistic it is.

3. Conclusion

The matrix shows that the ideological typification of populisms is a useful tool in order to analyse many of the changes emerged in Western political systems after the 2008 crisis. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that this kind of typification is not suitable for all populisms: the Italian *Movimento Cinque Stelle* - which Pirro defined 'polyvalent populism' (Pirro 2018) – is characterized by a multitude of instances and ideological orientations (especially regarding market and capitalism) and has experienced such different phases in its short history that it is not possible to classify it within a single quadrant.

Most of the above-mentioned populist experiences have known political defeats: above all, Donald Trump's defeat in the 2020 elections has created a nationalist populism lacking of a strategic reference point. The exceptional condition imposed by the post-pandemic transition also provides Western governments unprecedented possibilities for action, which could enable them to respond to the demands whose overload had triggered the populist moment's explosion. The

revitalization of the populist moment or its ultimate end depend today on the effectiveness of such responses.

Moreover, as time progresses, populist experiences are no longer a novelty within political systems. Above all, for populist movements and parties ruling their countries – and which need to shape and support their decisions on a public level - it is evident that the varied ideological elements they have used to extend the morphology of the populist thin ideology become increasingly relevant for their identities. However, considering populism as a mere temporary phase, at the end of which the previous situation will be restored, is a reductionist hypothesis: once again populisms have introduced in Western politics some antagonistic contents which had long been absent. In this perspective, for traditional progressive and conservative parties, it represents a call for ideological renewal, although the latter have demonstrated so far only in few cases their will and capacity to take advantage of this opportunity.

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