2. Populist Political Communication. Toward a Model of Its Causes,Forms, and Effects

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Introduction
In his famous book, *Social science concepts: A systematic analysis* (1984), Giovanni Sartori (1984) is hard on his fellow scholars in the social sciences. Bemoaning a lack of conceptual clarity and a widespread collective ambiguity of social science concepts, he diagnoses a "state of chaos" in most social science disciplines and calls for concept reconstruction as "a highly needed therapy" (pp. 41–42). Although Sartori did not explicitly refer to populism in the context of these remarks, it seems fair to say that they apply to this concept. Populism surely ranks among the most popular and, at the same time, most contested concepts in the social sciences. Numerous articles and chapters have been written about how populism should best be defined and which elements "really" constitute populism. However, there is still no consensus about what the term should describe. Of course, it can be argued that it is usual for social science concepts to be contested and that alternative conceptualizations and definitions provide scholars with the opportunity to select the specific version of a concept that suits them and their research interests best. Nonetheless, problems like collective conceptual ambiguity, lack of precision, and the widespread use of different terms for describing the same phenomena (*synonymy*) or of the same term for describing different phenomena (*homonymy*) can have negative consequences. Most importantly, such inconsistencies hamper scientific discourse and communication between science and society. Further, they endanger the comparability of findings and, as a consequence, impede the accumulation and integration of research results, theory building, and the thorough explanation of the social phenomena at hand.

The main purpose of this volume is certainly not to add yet another definition to the literature on populism. But given the above-mentioned situation, we will now take a brief look at some definitions of, and elements related to, populism to arrive at a working definition that is well suited to research on political communication. This step demonstrates our disagreement with scholars who have argued for completely discarding populism as a social science concept or category. We are aware, however, of the problems associated with the academic usage of the term "populism"; it is often used as a swearword by politicians, journalists, and citizens to accuse others of cheap propaganda with emotional arguments, of presenting simple solutions to complex problems (*simplification*), and of floating with the tide of public opinion (*opportunism*) or to compromise parties and politicians by associating them with actors on the fringes of the political spectrum (*extremism, radicalism*).

In this chapter, we will first argue that one way of looking at populism is to conceptualize it as a form of political communication characterized by some crucial key elements. We will then discuss those key elements and distinguish several types of populist political communication resulting from combinations of those key elements. Finally, we will suggest a preliminary

model of populist political communication that distinguishes different levels of analysis and that identifies various key components that should be taken into account during the analysis of populist communication. This model should be regarded as a first step toward more elaborate models—which can be developed on the basis of the reviews presented in this book—and toward additional research to be carried out in the future.

Populism as a Form of Political Communication
In the numerous accounts on populism, it has been conceptualized as a communication style (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), as a "thin" ideology (e.g., Mudde, 2004), as a discourse practice (e.g., De Cleen, 2012; Laclau, 2005), and as a mental map "through which individuals analyse and comprehend political reality" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, pp. 498–499). Basically, we agree with scholars who, following Freeden (1996), conceive of populism as a set of ideas, or as a "thin"-centered ideology. This approach means that populism is a general, abstract concept about politics and society that is open to a diverse set of more concrete political ideas and programs, depending on both national and historical contexts. Moreover, we agree with several scholars who stress the crucial role of communication when empirically investigating populism and when defining it. We therefore hold the view that populism is mostly reflected in the oral, written, and visual communication of individual politicians, parties, social movements, or any other actor that steps into the public sphere (including the media and citizens). This perspective is apparent in the work by Jagers & Walgrave (2007, p. 322), who regard populism as "a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people and pretends to speak in their name … It is a master frame, a way to wrap up all kinds of issues." Along the same lines, Rooduijn (2014, p. 3) sees populism more as "a characteristic of a specific message rather than a characteristic of an actor sending that message."

However, this perspective does not deny that political actors, the media, and citizens have ideologies, motives, goals, and attitudes that provide the starting point and lay the roundwork for the communicative acts in which populist elements can be empirically detected. For example, Hawkins, Riding, and Mudde (2012) use the same terms to describe populism that communication scholars might use to describe a *cognitive frame* affecting communicative behaviour. The authors argue that populism is "a way of seeing the world that is linked to different kinds of languages" (2012, p. 7). Also, Kriesi (2014, p. 363) argues that as "an expression of the populist ideology, populist communication strategies may be used to identify the populist ideology empirically." In fact, recent research has started to probe whether populist ideology may be found not only among political actors but also among citizens, by investigating populism as an individual attitude that can be measured using survey methods (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2015; Rooduijn, 2014). From a political communication point of view, populism might thus be best understood as a set of features or elements of communicative messages that have their roots in—or resonate with—the goals, motives, and attitudes of political actors, the media, or citizens. From this perspective, political communication research on populism would seek to determine the reasons why different kinds of actors use populist messages, what kind of communication channels those actors use, what populist messages are, why recipients respond to them, and the effects of populist messages on the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of society.

But what additional characteristics should a working definition of populist political communication have? First, populist political communication should be restricted neither to the left nor to the right of the political spectrum, which is in line with arguments put forward by many populism researchers (e.g., Canovan, 1999; Roodujin, 2014: Taggart, 2004). Second,

a working definition that is too complex and tries to incorporate too many factors will certainly be a poor starting point for a book that aims to cover various nations and numerous political parties across Europe. Instead, we will be looking for a straightforward working definition that is simple but sufficiently comprehensive to identify the core features of populist political communication.

In fact, numerous definitions of populism exist in the vast literature on this issue, but scholars appear to be converging on at least some elements of populism, although they are sometimes termed differently and are derived from different theoretical backgrounds. In our view, the communicative construction of "the people"—appeals to the people, talking about the people, putting the people and their opinions first in political decisions, or symbolically and rhetorically uniting with the people by talking about "we" and "us"—constitutes the undisputed core of populist communication. Two other oft-mentioned key characteristics are *anti-elitism*—apparent in attacks on, or in criticism of, various kinds of elites, institutions, the establishment, or "the system"—and the *exclusion of out-groups*, which may become apparent in positions toward certain policy issues or in verbal attacks on those groups that are not regarded as a legitimate part of the "real" people.

Several other features that some authors believe to be part of populism we do not regard as essential, including *charismatic leaders* (e.g., Canovan, 1999); the *narrative of crisis and threat* serving as the starting point for populist demands (Moffit & Tormey, 2014, pp. 391–392; Taggart, 2004, pp. 275–276); a tabloid-like style made manifest through certain *rhetorical features*, such as colloquial, emotional language, harshness in attacking opponents and simplicity and directness (Canovan, 1999, pp. 5–6; Moffit & Tormey, 2014, 391–392). We believe that these characteristics can become obstacles when an analysis of populism and its effects is supposed to include a variety of different actors (e.g., individual politicians, parties, media, and citizens), a variety of different channels of communication (e.g., speeches, party manifestos, press releases, media news items and commentaries, online-communication by citizens), or a variety of personal rhetorical styles. We will therefore concentrate on references to the people, anti-elitism, and anti–out-group messages as key elements of populist political communication and discuss them in more detail below.

Based on their empirical analysis of a Belgium election campaign, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) use these three elements to distinguish four different kinds of populism, or populist communication. *Empty populism* means that references to the people are the only element present. References to the people combined with the exclusion of out-groups results in *exclusionary populism*. References to the people combined with attacks on elites is called *anti-elitist populism*, and a combination of all three elements is called *complete populism*. Figure 2.1 illustrates this typology. The construction of these four types of populism is helpful, underscoring that individual features of populism are likely to be found empirically in specific combinations. These combinations match various types of populism distinguished in the literature. For example, empty populism is regarded as typical for otherwise established, non-populist actors that use references to the people as a communication strategy to attract and mobilize voters. Empty populism is similar to *mainstream populism* (Mair, 2002, pp. 92–94). *Anti-elitist populism* is considered to be closer to left-wing populism, because it does not typically engage in the exclusion of minorities. On the other hand, *excluding* and *complete populism* seem to be typical of right-wing populism. In fact, it can be argued that the *combination* of certain communicative elements may largely account for the specific attraction and effects of populist communication; for instance, it may be assumed that the effects of references to the people are boosted when they are combined with criticism of elites

and out-groups. By concentrating on four types of populism, however, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) exclude several other potential combinations of their elements of populism. Most importantly (because they are looking for populism, not non-populism), they do not take into account the possibility that a message may include anti-elitism and anti–out-group elements but not appeals to the people. At least when comparing allegedly populist and non-populist messages or when trying to systematically disentangle the effects of these three elements of populism, their presence or absence should be systematically taken into account.
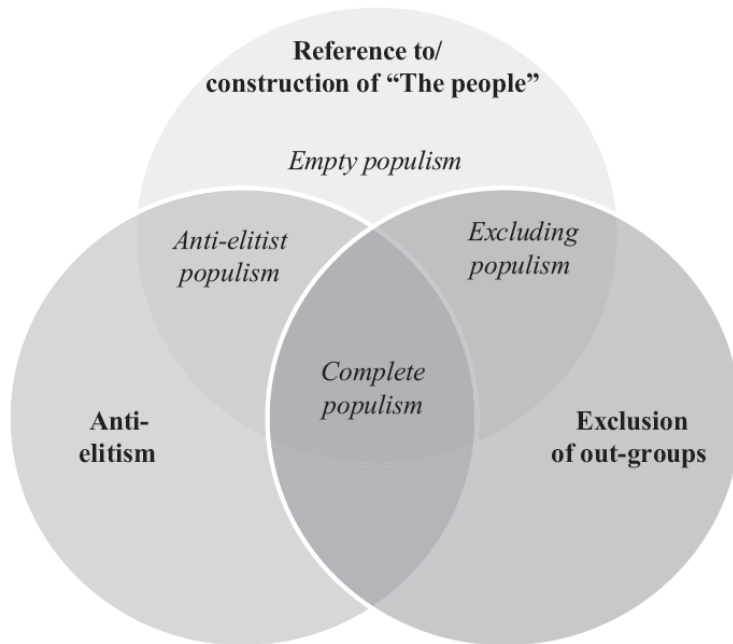

Figure 2.1 Elements and types of populism. Adapted from Jagers and Walgrave (2006, pp. 334–336).

Elements of Populist Communication: The People
All definitions of populism agree that the communicative, discursive construction of an aggregate-level in-group or appeals and references to such a group lie at the very core of populism. This in-group is often called "the people," but other labels are possible, too, giving populist messages a more nationalist (e.g., "the Greek people," "Germans," or "the French"), ethnic, regional, or even religious connotation. But what exactly is meant by "the people"? And can such an unspecific term be at the core of a social science concept? In fact, some authors suggest abandoning "the people" as the core of populism because of the term's inherent vagueness and substituting it with other concepts, such as "the heartland" (Taggart, 2004). However, others regard the often unclear, ambiguous, and unspecific meaning of "the people" and similar terms as one of the key characteristics of populist communication, and argue that this very vagueness is an important reason for the success of populist messages. They hold that because "the people" is open for interpretation, it can serve as an "empty signifier" (Laclau, 2005; also see Mény & Surel, 2002), which allows diverse audiences to unite under a common label despite differing demands or values. In fact, as research on campaign communication has shown, this kind of "(strategic) ambiguity" can be a powerful tactic in political communication, and understanding the use of "the people" and equivalent,

fuzzy terms as a deliberate decision on the part of communicators is more than adequate against this background (e.g., Meirowitz, 2005).

But what exactly does an "appeal" or a "reference" to the people mean? Empirical studies have used several ways to identify such appeals and references. The simplest method is to look for the literal usage of "the people" and other, similar terms like "citizens," "our country," "our society" (e.g., Rooduijn, 2014), or "the common man" and "the man on the street" (e.g., Bos & Brants, 2014). Unfortunately, those studies usually do not report the frequency of the individual terms or document whether the first person plural form ("we," "us") is used. We also do not know whether audience reactions are similar to the various terms. In their study, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) used keywords to measure references to the people but distinguished between direct (e.g., "the people," "the voter") and indirect references (e.g., "public opinion," "democracy"). In addition, they were aware that some references encompassed the population as a whole whereas others included specific segments of the population. However, they do not report in detail what kind of references they found. Finally, a more elaborate and restrictive approach is applied by Cranmer (2011). She counts references to the people as indicators of populism only when politicians explicitly present themselves as advocates of the people (as a whole) or of specific social groups (*advocacy*), when they stress the importance of being responsive to the people (*accountability*), and when they use the alleged will of the people in order to legitimize their political stand, plans, or actions (*legitimization*). Most empirical studies do not restrict their measurement of populism to the term "people," not even to terms addressing the population as a whole. Moreover, they do not look for who might actually be meant by "the people" in the context of the specific message.

Literature interprets and provides suggestions on how, in what context, and with what associations and implications such references and appeals to the people are used. One basic notion is that such references implicitly or explicitly refer to an idealized vision of the community at some point in the past—the "heartland" or the "good old days" (e.g., Taggart, 2004, pp. 274). More specifically, populist messages may vary depending on the things that have changed for the worse since "the good old days" and may accordingly apply different conceptions of "the people," which are implicitly or explicitly expressed. These partly overlapping conceptions can be political ("the people as sovereign"), economic ("the people as class"), nationalist ("peoples as nations"), and cultural ("the ordinary people"; e.g., Canovan, 1999, pp. 4–5; Mény & Surel, 2002).

Thus, when populists refer to "the people," they might explicitly address an in-group or evoke associations that implicitly define it. "The people as sovereign" is based on the notion that the people are the ultimate democratic sovereign but that their interests and values are nonetheless not properly taken into account by the elites. This understanding is related to a general criticism of the functioning of representative democracy and its institutions but does not define "the people" beyond excluding the ruling elites (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). "People as class" implies underprivileged citizens who differ from the elites mainly with respect to their economic situation, formal education, and access to power. Appealing to the interests of the underprivileged implies a critique of socio-economic injustice and elites that are much better off than the rest of the population.

The third category is "our people" (Canovan, 1999, p. 5) or "people as nations and ethnic groups" (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Here, the people are understood in ethnic or nationalist terms, making ethnicity and belonging to the native population the criterion that

decides who belongs to "the people" and who does not (Mény & Surel, 2002; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). And finally, "the people" may also have a more cultural underpinning, in which "the ordinary, common people" are defined not so much on the basis of formal citizenship or ethnicity but rather on the basis of traditional norms and values, and a traditional religion (e.g., Laclau, 2005). An example is contrasting a cosmopolitan, libertarian, city-based elite to traditional rural dwellers. These various meanings of "the people" help distinguish, among others, between socio-economic, agrarian, and xenophobic populism (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

The centrality of "the people" in populism has several implications for the populist perspective on politics and democracy. First of all, several scholars argue that populists overemphasize the importance of the people's sovereignty as a pillar of liberal democracy. As a result, they lose sight of the liberal components of modern democracies that are equally important, including the rule of law, human rights, the protection of minorities, and the division of power. It is argued that populism can therefore be regarded as *democratic illiberalism* for two reasons: First, populism considers "the people" to be the majority, to be always right, and that the people's will should immediately be translated into politics, even at the cost of restrictions that liberal democracies have imposed on themselves to prevent the dangers of a pure rule of the majority (*majoritarianism*; Pappas, 2014). Interestingly, some scholars argue that populism is valuable and important to representative democracies because it alerts elites to problems of representation, thereby strengthening the "democratic" pillar or—as Canovan (1999) puts it—the redemptive side of liberal democracies. Others, however, strongly advocate the view that populism is inherently dangerous and should even be regarded as an enemy of modern liberal democracies because it disregards their liberal elements, has a tendency toward authoritarianism, and might push non-populist political competitors in the same direction, seriously endangering the very existence of democracy (for an overview and a strong, affirmative position on this issue, see Abts & Rummens, 2007).

The second argument why populism can be regarded as illiberal is its rejection of intermediaries and institutions as well as the political discourse fostered by them. From populism's perspective, parties, representatives, and complicated processes of opinion formation are unnecessary because the general will of the people is naturally apparent at any time. Direct, immediate relations between political leaders and the people, acclamation, or even just a political leader who recognizes the peoples' will are seen as sufficient bases for representation and decision making (e.g., Abts & Rummens, 2007; Canovan, 2005, pp. 115). On these grounds, representative democracy is criticized by populists because it prevents common sense and the *volonté général* to be directly translated into political decisions (e.g., Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Schmitt, 1988; Taggart, 2004, p. 273).

The construction of "the people," "us," and "the citizens" implies homogeneity. "The people" are either seen or constructed as a monolithic block, a unity that has common values and interests and that therefore is able to have a common will (e.g., Canovan 1999; Kriesi, 2014). From this concept follows the critique that populism is inherently *anti-pluralist*. It does not acknowledge the existence of legitimate differences among those who belong to "the people" and therefore often has fundamental problems with compromise and with cultural, religious, sexual, or other kinds of diversity (e.g., Pappas, 2014). The refusal to accept differences is related to what political theorist Carl Schmitt (1988) described as the substantial identity of all citizens in his favored version of democracy, which is one that has a specific idea of not only who belongs to the homogenous political body but also who does not (e.g., Abts & Rummens, 2007).

Finally, when looking at populism from a political communication perspective, another aspect seems crucial. Laclau (2005) and Moffit and Tormey (2014) argue that populist discourses or styles do not simply appeal to a "people" and represent a will that exists before it is represented in communication. Rather, by appealing to "the people," populists "are attempting to bring a subject called 'the people' into being: they produce what they claim to present." (Moffit & Tormey, 2014, pp. 389). In other words, populist communication tries to create a new social identity among citizens or to prime certain aspects of their social identity in order to unite them and generate a sense of belonging to an imagined community charged with positive emotions. In doing so, the construct of "the people" fills the "empty locus of power" in modern democracies, which are characterized by a power that is not permanently held by a ruler but only temporarily by elected officials (Lefort, 1988, pp. 224–235). "The people" can therefore also be viewed as a substitute for a fixed and permanent point of reference and identification that is hard to find in the ongoing and never-ending political struggles of democratic decision making (Abts & Rummens, 2007).

Elements of Populist Communication: The Others (Elites and Out-Groups)
Our discussion of the concept of "the people" shows that communicatively constructing or priming a specific sense of social identity seems to be at the very heart of populism. This point is an important one, because it may at least partly explain the seemingly nebulous nature of the concept and its "thin" ideological basis. Obviously, more than other ideologies, populism essentially fulfils the needs for social integration and community building of its followers (Freeden, 1996, p. 16), who may be feeling especially alienated, excluded, insecure, and uncertain about the future (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2015). In that sense, populism is especially closely related to the basic human need for belonging and acceptance (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Leary & Cox, 2007, p. 31). If that is true, the openness of populism to any kind of add-on ideology across the political spectrum is now questionable:
If the need to belong and social identity are crucial, then political substance becomes secondary.

In addition, concepts and ideas related to social identity might also help to disentangle the connections between the various elements of populist communication. For example, we know from research into social identity that individuals are always part of various social categories and therefore have multiple social identities—for example, with respect to gender, age, income, race, education, nationality, and values. Communicative messages can prime each of these aspects of social identity, varying their influence on information processing, opinion formation, and behavior, and activating notions of the in- and out-groups (Abelson, Dasgupta, & Banaji, 1998). Moreover, social identity can be generated only by social comparison. Becoming aware of or strengthening a certain facet of one's social identity thus always implies comparisons with other individuals or groups. These comparisons go in two directions: On the one hand, individuals look for similarities with others who are perceived as members of their own in-group. On the other hand, people look beyond their in-group; they define its borders and out-groups are constructed. Particularly in the case of strong identification with an in-group (*group cohesiveness*), a result may be *in-group favoritism* and *out-group discrimination* (Turner, Brown, & Tajfel, 1979). Moreover, out-groups are typically perceived as uniform (*out-group homogeneity effect*). The stronger this perception, the more negative the assessment of the out-group, and the more likely it is to be a victim of discrimination (Abelson et al., 1998).

Against this background, it can be argued that the two other characteristics of populism mentioned above—anti-elitism and the exclusion of out-groups—are not just additional features of populism but instead integral parts already implicit in any construction and mention of "the people." As we have seen in our discussion about the different meanings of "the people," the term will almost always (at least implicitly) contrast with another social category or group. In this light, the different types of populism differ in two ways. Firstly, they differ in the explicitness of this social contrast. Thus, although in empty populism the standard for comparison is not explicitly mentioned, it will nevertheless be implicitly included and probably suggested by the communicative context in which the term "the people" is used. If this is true, audience members will have an intuitive idea of who is and who is not "the people" even if the message does not include explicit cues. Leaving open the exact meaning of "the people" can be a clever means of strategic ambiguity. Secondly, the different types of populism differ in their specific out-groups or institutions, which are distinguished from "the people." Some authors propose to differentiate populist messages that focus on *vertical comparisons* between "the people" and political, economic, or cultural elites, established institutions, "the system," or the "mainstream" from populist messages that focus on *horizontal comparisons* between "the people" and non-elite groups like ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities. Others point out that when we take into account the populist perspective on these comparisons, it might be more pertinent to refer to *upward-oriented* versus *downward-oriented* social comparisons, because out-groups are usually regarded as inferior to "the people."

Anti-elitism and exclusion of out-groups can therefore be regarded as functional equivalents that make explicit the standard to which "the people" are contrasted and that contribute to strengthening identification with the in-group. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that discussions of the concept of "the people," such as the one above, necessarily include descriptions of who or what does not belong to "the people." Basically, the groups, actors, or institutions that populists focus on are perceived by them as responsible for the perceived threats and problems, or, in a lot of cases, serve as scapegoats.

Toward a Heuristic Model for the Analysis of Populist Political Communication
In the remaining section of this chapter, we present a preliminary model of the causes, forms, and effects of populist political communication, which can be used as a heuristic for the national literature investigations in the coming chapters. This model sketches some of the key elements that have to be taken into account when trying to fully understand populist political communication across European countries. The four key elements are located on three levels of social analysis (Figure 2.2): (a) Structural and situational contexts on the macro-level, (b) parties, movements, and their representatives on the meso-level, (c) journalistic and social media on the meso-level, and (d) individual citizens on the micro-level.

Populist political communication can be understood as a process that is embedded in structural and situational macro-level factors. These contextual factors include, on the one hand, more stable features, such as historical experiences and collective memories, the political culture, and characteristics of the political and media systems. On the other hand, specific, realworld
situations related to, among others, the economy, migration, national security, and the makeup of the political market also exert their influence on (populist) political communication. To a greater or lesser degree, structural and situational contexts—if perceived or experienced—have a direct impact on citizens (See Figure 2.2; ①), on established or emerging political actors (②), and on the media (③). For example, citizens might experience changes in their

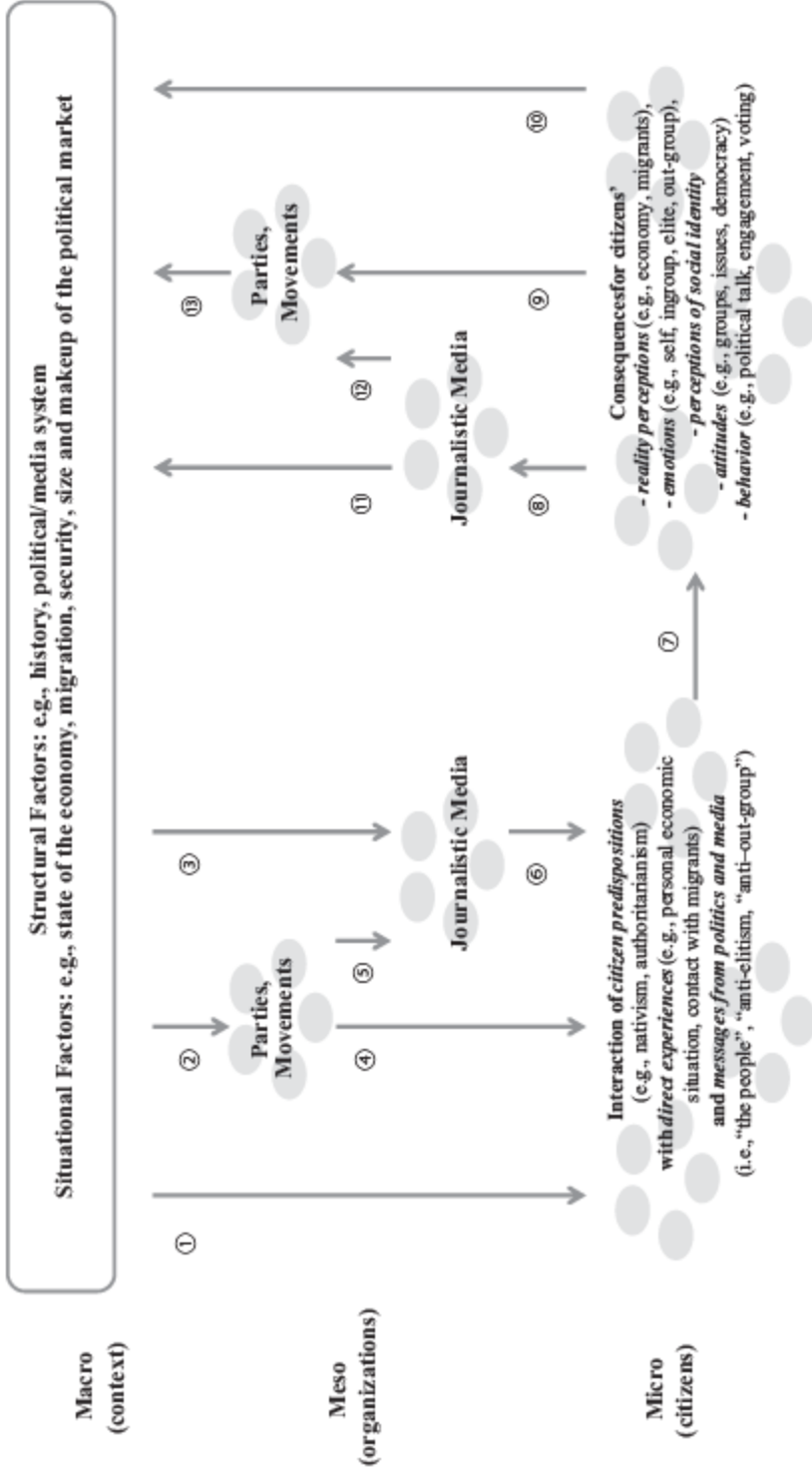# Towards a comparative model of populist political communication

Structural Factors: e.g., history, political/media system
Situational Factors: e.g., state of the economy, migration, security, size and makeup of the political market

Macro (context)

Meso (organizations)

Parties, Movements

Journalistic Media

Parties, Movements

Journalistic Media

Micro (citizens)

Interaction of *citizen predispositions* (e.g., nativism, authoritanism) with *direct experiences* (e.g., personal economic situation, contact with migrants) and *messages from politics and media* (i.e., "the people", "anti-elitism", "anti-out-group")

Consequences for citizens'
- *reality perceptions* (e.g., economy, migrants),
- *emotions* (e.g., self, ingroup, elite, out-group),
- *perceptions of social identity*
- *attitudes* (e.g., groups, issues, democracy)
- *behavior* (e.g., political talk, engagement, voting)

Figure 2.2 A heuristic model for the analysis of populist political communication.

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personal financial situations as a result of an economic crisis; politicians and journalistic media will also become aware of such a development. Based on the structural context and their specific interests and political ideologies, political actors might then react with public statements, policy plans, or immediate action, which they might communicate directly to citizens (④), via both journalistic and social media (⑤). The media will cover the real-world developments and politicians' actions and statements, and may use populism's key elements in their messages (⑥). In fact, for citizens, media coverage is typically by far the most important source of information about real-world situations and politicians, with social media gaining in importance only recently. Based on direct and mediated experiences as well as personal predispositions, the populist or non-populist messages of politicians and the media might then produce certain outcomes (⑦), including reality perceptions regarding the state of the country (e.g., the future development of the economy), positive or negative emotions (e.g., toward one's self, "the people," the elite, or out-groups), relevant aspects of social identity (e.g., human, democrat, Christian, German), attitudes (e.g., regarding policy plans, the in-group, out-groups, the elites), and behavioral consequences (e.g., online and offline political talk, political offline and online engagement, voting).

These various reactions of citizens are not without consequence. Letters to editors and user comments will be perceived by the media (⑧). Political actors will be contacted by citizens, will read the news, and will receive the results of public opinion polls (⑨). And citizens might also affect contextual circumstances directly through political engagement (⑩). Change might also come through media coverage and citizen communication becoming public in social media (⑪). Typically, however, media coverage of real-world developments and citizen discourse in social media will more indirectly affect the real world via its influence on political actors (⑫), who can directly influence political developments and whose policies can (at best) change structural and situational circumstances (⑬).

From this heuristic model, many research questions can be deduced that have not been systematically asked and answered by prior research. For example, the model highlights the crucial role of journalistic media as intermediaries covering both political action and real-world developments. In addition, it alerts us to the necessity to look at the various sources of information that might have an impact on citizens' perceptions of social reality and to the various outcomes that populist political communication might produce. The reader may come up with many more questions based on this model.

Conclusion
This chapter looked at the phenomenon of populist political communication from a theoretical point of view to prepare the ground for the following chapters (Parts II–IV) that review specific countries. In line with other scholars in the field, we argued that communicative processes are crucial to understanding the successes and failures of populist political actors and populist messages across European countries. Although we find a great variety of definitions and definitional criteria in the literature on populism, consensus seems to be growing that references to, or the communicative construction of, "the people" should be regarded as the key component of populist messages, with anti-elitism and anti–out-group stances serving as optional additional elements. These elements can be combined in various ways, resulting in different types of populism. Including more criteria in our definition of populism could prevent us from focusing on and explaining the essence of populist communication. In addition, it would endanger our goal of including in our analysis a variety of countries, political actors and parties, and communication channels. Constructing an in-group of "the people" or appealing to citizens' identity as part of "the people" lies at the heart

of populist political communication. Since "the people" is a notoriously vague term, it can have different kinds of connotations and thus different kinds of meanings, which are either explicitly apparent in populist messages or constructed during the process of reception by audiences (e.g., the people as sovereign, as a class, as an ethnic group, as a nation, as ordinary people). Furthermore, populism can be regarded as illiberal because its representatives support the pure rule of the majority, oppose intermediaries and open political discourse, and favor the idea of a homogeneous society. Against this backdrop, questions of social identity seem to be crucial roots of populism. Moreover, the additional elements mentioned above— anti-elite and anti–out-group messages—can be regarded as functional equivalents that define the standard to which "the people" ("we") are contrasted, strengthen individual identification with the in-group, foster in-group favoritism, and contribute to self-enhancement, reducing self-uncertainty. Finally, we developed and briefly discussed a heuristic, multi-level model that identifies various processes and relationships in populist political communication. It can be seen as the first step in a research program that identifies blind spots but also maps out the areas that we know a lot about.

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