

presents a stark contrast when it moves from the opposition to take on the quite different role of the regime. In opposition, populism appears as a protest movement and makes clear the limits that governing elites have in representing important segments of society, but it also claims that it represents society as a whole. As a regime, populism sees no limits on its claims to popular sovereignty, identifying the votes of electoral majorities who support the regime with the structural, transcendental desires of the people and the nation. As the opposition, populism often contributes to an understanding of the frustrations but also to the outing of the long-held prejudices of large elements of the population. As a regime, populism claims the full representation of an entire people and often translates this into the idea of full delegation of power to the leader. In this context, the leader claims to know what the people truly want better than they do.

Unlike fascists, populists most often play the democratic game and will eventually cede power after losing an election. That's because populism, though similar to fascism in conflating itself with the nation and the people, links these totalizing claims of popular national representation to electoral decisions. In other words, populism projects a plebiscitary understanding of politics and rejects the fascist form of dictatorship.

Populism is an authoritarian form of democracy. Defined historically, it thrives in contexts of real or imagined political crises, wherein populism offers itself as antipolitics. It claims to do the work of politics while keeping itself free from the political process. Democracy in this sense simultaneously increases the political participation of real or imagined majorities while it excludes, and limits the rights of, political, sexual, ethnic, and religious minorities. As noted above, populism conceives the people as One—namely, as a single entity consisting of leader, followers,

and nation. This trinity of popular sovereignty is rooted in fascism but is confirmed by votes. Populism stands against liberalism, but for electoral politics. Therefore, we can better understand populism if we think of it as an original historical reformulation of fascism that first came to power after 1945. Populism's homogenizing view of the people conceives of political opponents as the antipeople. Opponents become enemies: nemeses who, consciously or unconsciously, stand for the oligarchical elites and for a variety of illegitimate outsiders. Populism defends an illuminated nationalist leader who speaks and decides for the people. It downplays the separation of powers, the independence and legitimacy of a free press, and the rule of law. In populism, democracy is challenged but not destroyed.

As I finish this book, a new populism has taken the world's reins. Once again, the electoral success of a narcissistic leader has come with offending, and downplaying the value of, others. Intolerance and discrimination have opened the way for a definition of the people that relies simultaneously on inclusion and exclusion. As in the past, this new, recharged populism challenges democracy from within, but history teaches us that democratic institutions and a strong civil society can forcefully challenge populists in power. In short, we can learn from historical instances of resistance.

When modern populism emerged, the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges stated that, having been thrown out of Berlin, fascism had migrated to Buenos Aires. The regimes of Germany and Argentina advanced oppression, servitude, and cruelty, but it was even "more abominable that they promote[d] idiocy." Even if he problematically conflated fascism (a dictatorship) and populism (an authoritarian electoral form of democracy), Borges acutely revealed why and how they both endorsed stupidity and

the absence of historical thinking. They ignored lived experiences and affirmed crass mythologies. If in his elitism he was not able to recognize why the new populism was an inclusive choice for people who felt unrepresented, Borges still clearly noted its defining “sad” monotony. Diversity was replaced with imperatives and symbols. In this early analysis of populists in history, Borges stressed how their leaders turned politics into lies. Reality became melodrama. They twisted everything into fictions “which can’t be believed and were believed.” Like Borges, we need to remember that fascism and populism must be faced with empirical truths, or, as he put it, we need to distinguish between “legend and reality.” In times like this, the past reminds us that fascism and populism are themselves subject to the forces of history.⁷

New York, May 2, 2017